### Overview of American Literature

**Literary Movements** 

Fall 2016

### American individualism

- Also known as the self-made man
- Celebration of ambition and achievement
- Original colonists came for religious freedom
- Later colonists came looking to make their fortune with opportunities not available in class-based European societies.

### The American Dream

- Closely linked to American individualism
- The idea that anyone can become whatever he or she wants to become through hard work, determination, and perseverance

### Cultural diversity

- A society that welcomes legal immigrants of diverse backgrounds
  - The melting pot theory—Immigrants assimilate into our culture and become Americans
  - The salad bowl theory—immigrants retain their separate identities while making up part of the whole and adopt a hyphenated American name (Chinese-Americans, for example)

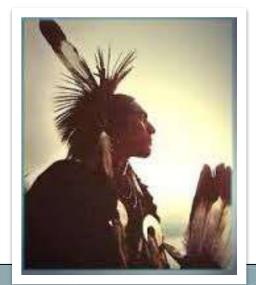
### Tolerance

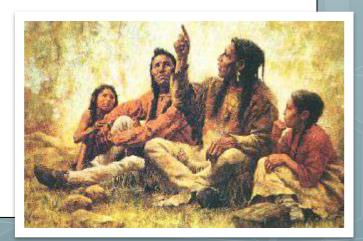
- Religious tolerance was one of the first principles in American life.
- More recent issues have included race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

### The Native American Period

(pre-1620)







# Native American Period (pre-1620)

- Oral tradition of song and stories
  - Original authors unknown
  - Written accounts come after colonization
  - Includes: creation stories, myths, totems
  - Archetypes: trickster and conjurer
- Focuses on:
  - The natural world as sacred
  - Importance of land and place

# Native American Period (pre-1620)

- Myth an anonymous oral story
  - Relies on the supernatural to explore a natural phenomenon, human behavior, or mystery
  - Explain why the world is the way it is/they help make sense of the world

# Native American Period (pre-1620)

- Notable Works:
  - "The Earth on the Turtle's Back"
  - "When Grizzlies Walked Upright"
  - "Grandmother Spider Steals the Sun"
  - "Creation by Women"





### The Colonial Period

(1620-1750)

### Historical Context

# Colonial Period (1620-1750)

- When colonists arrived in the new land, they created villages and towns and established new governments (while protesting the old ways in Europe)
  - French, Swedes, Dutch, German, Scots-Irish, Spanish, Africans (mostly slaves)
- Did not consider themselves "Americans" until mid-1700s
- Enormous displacement of Native-American civilizations

### Historical Context

# Colonial Period (1620-1750)

- Literature of the period was dominated by the **Puritans** and their religious influence
  - Emphasis on faith in one's daily life
    - Predestination- A person's fate is determined by God
    - Original Sin- All are corrupt and need a Savior
    - Puritan work ethic—belief in hard work and simple, no frills living
- Theocracy—government ruled by Bible/church





### Characteristics

# Colonial Period (1620-1750)

### **Types of Writing**

- Sermons
- Diaries
- Personal Narratives



### Writing Style

- Writing is Utilitarian
  - not professional writers
- Writing in instructive
- Puritan Plain Style
  - Simple and direct

# Colonial Period (1620-1750)

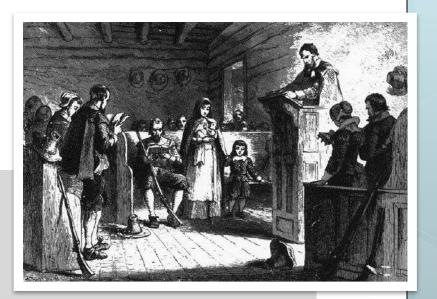
- Representative Authors:
  - William Bradford (journal)
  - Anne Bradstreet (poetry)
  - Jonathan Edwards (sermon)
  - Mary Rowlandson (captivity narrative)
  - Phillis Wheatley (poetry)
  - Olaudah Equiano (slave narrative)

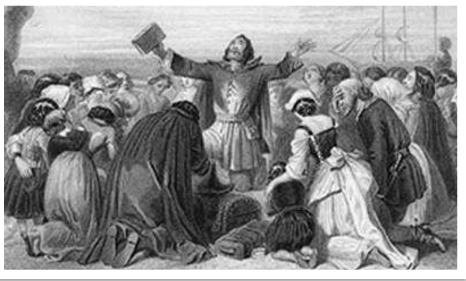
Though not written during Puritan times, *The Crucible* by Author Miller & *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne depict life during the time when Puritan theocracy prevailed.

### Art

# Colonial Period (1620-1750)

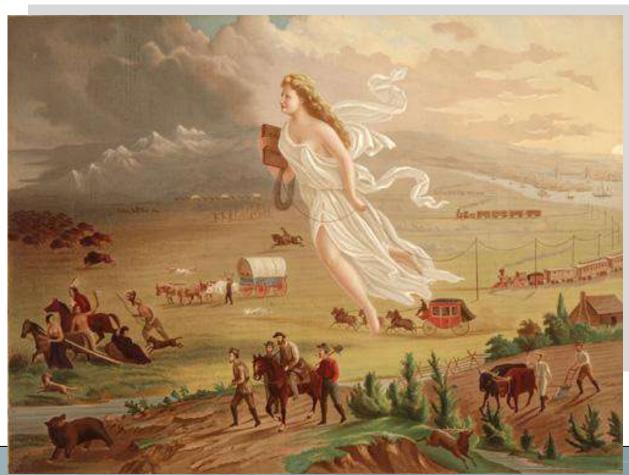






### Art

# Colonial Period (1620-1750)



American Progress
John Gast

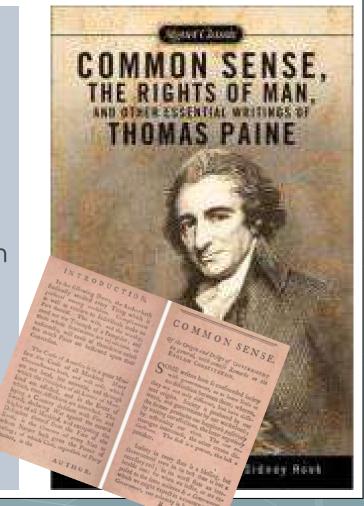


### Revolutionary Period

(1750-1815)

### **Historical Context**

- Occurred during/after the Revolutionary War
- Writers focused on explaining and justifying the American Revolution
- Writers pondered what it really means to be an American
- After the War of 1812 (when last British troops were removed from North America) there was an even greater focus on nationalism, patriotism, and American Identity

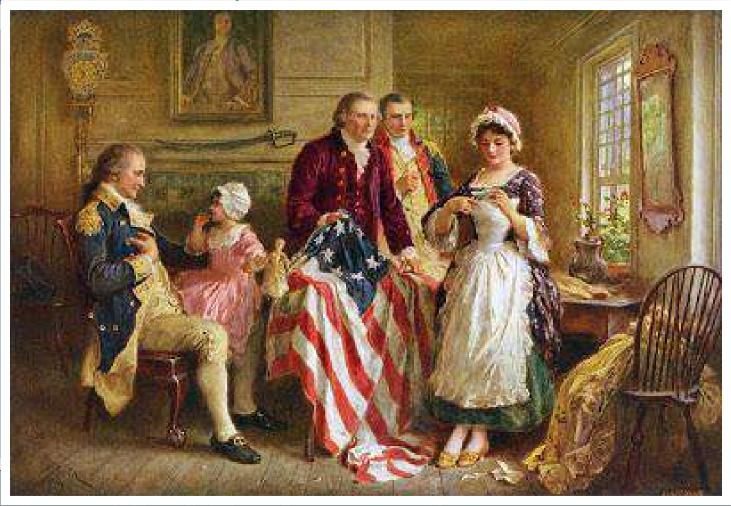


### Characteristics

- Emphasis on reason as opposed to faith alone; this was a reaction to the Puritan way of life
- Shift to a more print-based culture; literacy seen as a sign of status
- Instructive in values, highly ornate writing style; highly political and patriotic

- Representative authors:
  - Benjamin Franklin (biography, common sense aphorisms)
  - Patrick Henry (speech)
  - Thomas Paine (pamphlet)
  - Thomas Jefferson (political documents)
  - Abigail Adams (letters)

### Art



### Art



### Romanticism

(1800-1865)

### Historical Context

## Romanticism (1800-1865)

- A reaction to the previous decades in which reason and rational thought dominated
- Period of invention, Manifest Destiny, abolition movement, and the "birth" of truly American Literature
- Growth of urban population in Northeast
- Growth of newspapers, lectures, debates
- Revolution in transportation and science
- Industrial revolution made "old ways" of doing things irrelevant

### Characteristics

# Romanticism (1800-1865)

- Writers celebrated:
  - Individualism
  - Nature
  - Imagination
  - Creativity
  - Emotions
- Types of writing:
  - Short Stories
  - Novels
  - Poetry

- Interest in fantasy and supernatural
- Writing can be interpreted two ways—surface and depth
- Good triumphs over evil
- Imagination over reason
- Intuition over fact

# Romanticism (1800-1865)

### **Early Romantics**

Authors began the tradition of creating imaginative literature that was distinctly American

- Washington Irving (folktales)
- William Cullen Bryant (poetry)
- James Fenimore
   Cooper (novels)

# Romanticism (1800-1865)

#### **Fireside Poets**

- The most popular poets of the time were read in the home by the fireside
- Poetry contained strong family values and patriotism
- Taught in elementary schools for memorization

#### **Poets**

- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
- Oliver Wendell Holmes
- James Russell Lowell
- John Greanleaf Whittier

# Romanticism (1800-1865)

#### **Transcendentalists**

- Hippies of the Romanticism
- Belief that man's nature is inherently good; "divine spark" or "inner light"
- Man and society are perfectible (utopia)
- Stress individualism, self-reliance, intuition

- Ralph Waldo Emerson (essays, poetry)
- Henry David Thoreau (essays)

# Romanticism (1800-1865)

#### **Dark Romantics**

- AKA—Gothic or Anti-Transcendentalism
- Man's nature is inherently evil
- Use of supernatural
- Strong use of symbolism
- Dark landscapes, depressed characters

#### **Poets**

- Nathaniel Hawthorne (novels, short stories)
- Herman Melville (novels, short stories, poetry)
- Edgar Allan Poe (short stories, poetry, literary criticism)

### Art

# Romanticism (1800-1865)



### Realism

(1850-1900)

### **Historical Context**

# Realism (1850-1900)

- The Realistic Period includes the Civil War, significant industrial inventions, and extensive westward expansion
- Rejection of Romantic view of life as too idealistic
- Writers write about real-life issues and complex events of the time rather than idealized people or places
- Objective narrator

### Characteristics

# Realism (1850-1900)

- Realistic authors convey the reality of life, however harsh
  - Characters reflect ordinary people in everyday life: determined yet flawed, struggling to overcome the difficulties of war, family, natural disasters, and human weaknesses
- Good doesn't always triumph over evil
- Nature is a powerful force beyond man's control
- Racism persisted beyond slavery—Reconstruction, Jim Crow, KKK, etc.

#### Characteristics/Authors

# Realism (1850-1900)

#### **Transitional Writers**

- Transition from Romanticism to Realism
- Express Transcendental ideas in poetry, with realistic detail
- Experimented with new poetic techniques such as free verse and slant rhyme

- Walt Whitman (poetry)
- Emily Dickinson (poetry)

#### Characteristics/Authors

# Realism (1850-1900)

#### **Civil War Writers**

- Primarily concerned with:
  - The war
  - Slavery
  - Women's suffrage (right to vote)

- Abraham Lincoln
- o Robert E. Lee
- Mary Chesnut
- Sojourner Truth
- Harriet Beecher Stowe
- Frederick Douglass

#### Characteristics/Authors

# Realism (1850-1900)

### Local Color Writers (Regionalists)

- Focused on a particular region of the country
  - Seeking to represent accurately the culture and beliefs of that area
- Emphasized:
  - Physical landscape
  - Habits
  - Occupations
  - Speech (dialect) of the area's people

- Mark Twain
   (Mississippi River valley)
- Kate Chopin (the South, particularly Louisiana)
- Willa Cather (the Midwest, particularly Nebraska)

## Naturalism

(1880 - 1940)

### **Historical Context**

# Naturalism (1880-1940)

- Realism turned to **Naturalism** when literary writers were exposed to the views of three scientific/political works
  - Charles Darwin—biological determinism
  - Sigmund Freud—psychological determinism
  - Karl Marx—socio-economic determinism

**Determinism**—the belief that humans cannot be held morally responsible for their actions due to circumstances beyond their control.

### Characteristics

# Naturalism (1880-1940)

- Focused on grim reality
- Observed characters like scientists observe lab animals
- Viewed nature and the universe as indifferent, even hostile, to man
  - Universe is godless, cold, and indifferent

- Life is meaningless
- Fate=Chance (no free will)
- Characters are helpless victims—trapped by nature, the environment, or their own heritage

## Important Authors

# Naturalism (1880-1940)

- Jack London (novels, short stories)
- Stephen Crane

   (novels, short stories, poetry)

- Edwin ArlingtonRobinson (poetry)
- Ambrose Bierce (short stories)

## Modernism

(1900-1950)

### **Historical Context**

# Modernism (1900-1950)

- Writers affected by:
  - World War I, World War II, fear of communism, beginning of the Cold War
  - Roaring 20s, the Great Depression, commercialism
  - Increased population from immigration
  - Lingering racial tensions
  - Technological changes
  - Fear of eroding traditions

#### Characteristics

# Modernism (1900-1950)

- Modern writers are known for:
  - Themes of alienation and disconnectedness
  - Frequent use of irony and understatement
  - Experimentation with new literary techniques in fiction and poetry
    - Stream of consciousness
    - Interior dialogue
    - Fragments
  - Creating a unique style
  - Rise of ethnic female writers

# Modernism (1900-1950)

#### The Lost Generation

- A group of writers who chose to live in Paris after WWI
- Themes of alienation and change
- Confronted people's fears, despair, and disillusionment

#### **Writers**

- T.S. Eliot (poetry)
- F. Scott Fitzgerald (fiction)
- Ernest Hemingway (fiction)

# Modernism (1900-1950)

#### Harlem Renaissance

- Flourishing of African-American authors
- Included music and art
- Two goals:
  - Write about African-American experience
  - Create literature by African-Americans that could rival anything created by anyone else

#### **Writers**

- Langston Hughes (poetry)
- Zora Neale Hurston (fiction)
- Claude McKay (poetru)

# Modernism (1900-1950)

#### Southern Renaissance

 Follow in the footsteps of earlier local color writers, in that they focus on the South

#### **Writers**

- Margaret Mitchell
- William Faulkner
- Flannery O'Connor

Modernism (1900-1950)

**Traditional Poets** 

**Carl Sandburg** 

**Robert Frost** 

Experimental Poets
e.e. cummings

**Modern dramatists** 

**Arthur Miller** 

**Tennessee Williams** 

## Postmodernism

(1950-present)

### **Historical Context**

# Postmodernism (1950-present)

- unprecedented prosperity
- global conflict
  - Korean War, Vietnam War, the end of the Cold War, the rise of terrorism, Gulf War, 9/11, Iraqi War. War in Afganistan
- social protest
  - the civil rights movement, the women's rights movement, the gay rights movement

- mass culture and consumerism; media saturation
- rise of technology and space exploration
- the digital revolution

### Characteristics

# Postmodernism (1950-present)

- Eclectic—a collection of a little bit of everything
- Create traditional works without traditional structure
- Address social issues related to gender/race/youthful rebellion

- Questions traditional values
- Often critical and ironic
- No heroes/anti-heroes are common
- Detached, unemotional
- Individuals are isolated

### **Popular Authors**

# Postmodernism (1950-present)

#### The Beat Poets

- Pre-hippies, highly intellectual, exuberant language and behavior
  - Jack Kerouac
  - William S. Burroughs
  - Allen Ginsberg

#### **Confessional Poets**

- Used anguish of their own lives to reveal hidden despair
  - Sylvia Plath
  - Anne Sexton
  - Robert Lowell

### Popular Authors

# Postmodernism (1950-present)

#### **American Authors**

- J.D. Salinger
- James Thurber
- John Updike
- Truman Capote
- Stephen King
- Joyce Carol Oates

#### **Multicultural Literature**

- Jewish
  - Elie Wiesel
- African-American
  - Ralph Ellison, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker
- Latino-American
  - Julia Alvarez, Sandra Cisneros
- Asian-American
  - Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston