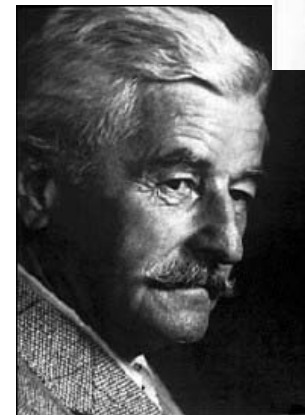
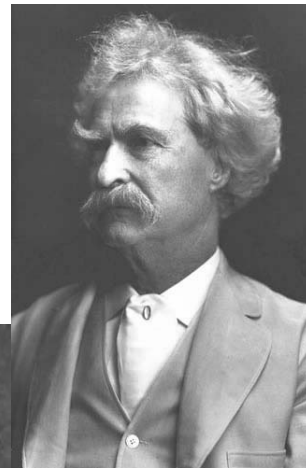
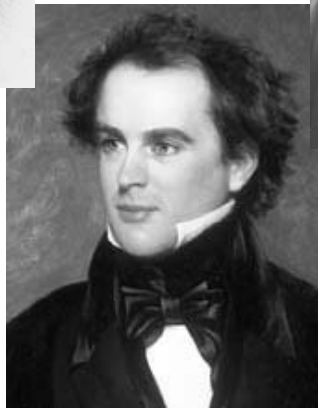


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Periods of American Literature



1. Major Periods of American Literature

Pre-Colonial Period -ca. 1620
Colonial Period ca. 1620 - 1800
The American Renaissance ca. 1800 - 1865
Realism and Naturalism ca. 1865 - 1914
Modernism ca. 1914 - 1945
Contemporary Literature ca. since 1945

2. The Pre-Colonial Period (- ca. 1620)

- Settlement about 28,000 years ago (from Southern Asia via South Sea islands)
- Another wave of migration about 14,000 years ago (via the Bering Strait)
- 1492: -- 18 mio. people in North America; 5 mio. of them in what is now the United States
 - 300 cultural groups in North America, 200 languages spoken
 - no cultural/linguistic homogeneity, shifting alliances and enmities

Central Aspects of Native American Thought and Cultural Practice

1. The power of words
2. The significance of dreams
3. Personality (of all elements of creation)
4. Dualism
5. Father Sky and Mother Earth
6. The four world quarters
7. Syncretic religion
8. Hierarchy (spirit world - humans - animals - plants - physical geography - natural elements)
9. Goal of harmony
10. Anonymity (literary text is the cultural property of the whole tribe)

Sample of Pre-Columbian American Literature:

“Song of Creation”

I have made the sun!
I have made the sun!
Hurling it high
In the four directions
To the east I threw it
To run its appointed course.

I have made the moon!
I have made the moon!
Hurling it high
In the four directions
To the east I threw it
To run its appointed course.

Pima Indians (Pre-Columbian)



Pre-Colonial Period (– ~ 1620)

Charac- teristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• oral literature: song-poems, tales, legends, tales, ritual drama; spoken texts accompanied by dance or performance;• texts passed on from one generation to the next for purposes of historiography, education, celebration
Cultural Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• literature as a communal text (audience response; no individual authorship);• assumption of harmony and correspondence in the universe
Historical Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• much linguistic and cultural diversity;• rivalries and wars between different tribes
Authors and Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• songs, poems and tales recorded in the 19th and 20th century and translated into English (available in numerous anthologies)

3. The Colonial Period (- ca. 1620)

Charac- teristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• religious and historical writing; sermons; journals and accounts of life in the New World (e.g. "captivity narratives");• political writing, especially in the 1770s;• autobiography (starting with Benjamin Franklin);• first American novels in the late 18th century
Cultural Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 17th century: Puritanism in New England; colonial inferiority complex toward England; contrast: popular culture and lack of literacy in the Southern colonies;• 18th century: birth of the "American Dream" ("from rags to riches"); search for a national identity; decline of Puritanism
Historical Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1607: founding of Jamestown, Virginia;• 1620: Mayflower → Plymouth Plantation, Massachusetts;• 1630: Massachusetts Bay Colony• 1730s: "Great Awakening" (religious revival movement)• 1776: Declaration of Independence
Authors and Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• John Winthrop (sermon "A Model of Christian Charity")• Ann Bradstreet (poetry)• Phillis Wheatley (first African-American poet)• Benjamin Franklin (autobiography, essays)• Royall Tyler, <i>The Contrast</i> (1790, first American play)• Charles Brockden Brown (early novel)

John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity” (1630)

The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us as His own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, so that we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when He shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, "the lord make it like that of NEW ENGLAND." For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.

Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography* (1771 ff.)

Having emerged from the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world, and having gone so far through life with a considerable share of felicity, the conducting means I made use of, which with the blessing of God so well succeeded, my posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own situations, and therefore fit to be imitated.

That felicity, when I reflected on it, has induced me sometimes to say, that were it offered to my choice, I should have no objection to a repetition of the same life from its beginning, only asking the advantages authors have in a second edition to correct some faults of the first.

4. The American Renaissance (~ 1800 - 1865)

Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• influence of English romanticism, but search for truly American topics and settings;• celebration of American landscapes and values; short story and novel are most important;• essay established as an American genre
Cultural Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• struggle for cultural independence from Europe;• desire to define a national identity of the U.S. and to establish a national culture;• Transcendentalism: romantic philosophy and mode of writing that values intuition as a guide to what lies underneath the surfaces

The American Renaissance (~ 1800 - 1865)

Historical Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• massive immigration & diversification;• westward expansion / “Frontier”;• slavery, abolitionist movement;• 1861-65: Civil War
Authors and Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• William Cullen Bryant (romantic poetry);• Washington Irving (short stories);• James Fenimore Cooper, <i>Leatherstocking</i> novels;• Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau (Transcendentalism);• Edgar Allan Poe (poetry, short stories);• Nathaniel Hawthorne, <i>The Scarlet Letter</i>;• Herman Melville, <i>Moby Dick</i>;• Walt Whitman (free verse, democratic, national poet);• Emily Dickinson (unconventional poetry)

Edgar Allan Poe, “The Raven” (1845)

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels named Lenore—
Nameless here for evermore.

5. Realism and Naturalism

(~ 1865 - 1914)

Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Am. lit. dominated by the novel;• realism: represent average Americans truthfully (W.D. Howells)• starting in the 1870s: local color writing (e.g. Mark Twain);• psychological explorations in fiction: → Henry James's use of "free indirect style" (<i>erlebte Rede</i>)• pessimism towards the end of the century
Cultural Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• realism: present the lives of ordinary Americans truthfully• end of the century: in the wake of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution → naturalism: pessimistic, dark realism that depicts life as a struggle;• on stage: melodrama

Realism and Naturalism (~ 1865-1914)

<p>Historical Context</p>	<p>South: devastation after the Civil War,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• struggle with Southern heritage and race division; <p>North: growing industrialization and urbanization;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• mass immigration;• westward expansion (completed in the 1890s);• discussion of the position of African Americans
<p>Authors and Works</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Samuel Clemens [Mark Twain], <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>• William Dean Howells (realist fiction);• Henry James (fiction; psychological realism);• Kate Chopin (woman-centered fiction);• Stephen Crane (naturalist fiction);• Theodore Dreiser (naturalist fiction);• Booker T. Washington (African American)• W.E.B. DuBois (African American)

Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884)

The widow she cried over me, and called me a poor lost lamb, and she called me a lot of other names, too, but she never meant no harm by it. She put me in them new clothes again, and I couldn't do nothing but sweat and sweat, and feel all cramped up. Well, then, the old thing commenced again. The widow rung a bell for supper, and you had to come to time. When you got to the table you couldn't go right to eating, but you had to wait for the widow to tuck down her head and grumble a little over the victuals, though there warn't really anything the matter with them, — that is, nothing only everything was cooked by itself. In a barrel of odds and ends it is different; things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around, and the things go better.

After supper she got out her book and learned me about Moses and the Bulrushers, and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by and by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn't care no more about him, because I don't take no stock in dead people.

Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat" (1897)

At last, from the top of each wave the men in the tossing boat could see land. Even as the lighthouse was an upright shadow on the sky, this land seemed but a long black shadow on the sea. It certainly was thinner than paper. "We must be about opposite New Smyrna," said the cook, who had coasted this shore often in schooners.

"Captain, by the way, I believe they abandoned that life-saving station there about a year ago."

"Did they?" said the captain.

The wind slowly died away. The cook and the correspondent were not now obliged to slave in order to hold high the oar. But the waves continued their old impetuous swooping at the dingey, and the little craft, no longer under way, struggled woundily over them.

6. Modernism (~ 1865 - 1914)

Charac- teristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Away from fixed concepts, statements, figures or perceptions;• pessimism and uncertainty;• no longer a belief in absolute truths;• importance of perspective and limits of knowledge;• processual quality of everything rather than stasis and stability;• stream-of-consciousness;• questioning of tradition.
Cultural Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• After World War I: pessimism, sense of alienation and vulnerability;• Modern physics (Albert Einstein: theory of relativity; Werner Heisenberg etc.: quantum physics): absolute positions become questionable• Following Sigmund Freud: explorations of the unconscious, of drives and motivations; complexity of the human mind and of thought processes;• emphasis on perspective and on fragmentation;• Growing importance of film; cubism in art;• 1920s: Harlem Renaissance; expatriates in Paris and London

Modernism (~ 1914 - 1945)

Historical Context	1914-1919: World War I; anti-immigrant sentiment; 1929: Depression; 1930s: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• widespread poverty;• rise of socialist and communist movements (“Red Thirties”);• social reform programs in the “New Deal;”• uncertainty of the inter-war period
Authors and Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• John Dos Passos (fiction; importance of perspective);• F. Scott Fitzgerald, <i>The Great Gatsby</i>;• William Faulkner (Southern fiction);• Ernest Hemingway (international fiction);• Langston Hughes (poet of the Harlem Renaissance);• Zora Neale Hurston (Harlem Renaissance fiction);• Eugene O'Neill (psychological drama);• Modernist poetry: T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, e.e. cummings

William Faulkner, *Absalom,* *Absalom!* (1936)

Then hearing would reconcile and he would seem to listen to two separate Quentins now—the Quentin Compson preparing for Harvard in the South, the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts, listening, having to listen, to one of the ghosts which had refused to lie still even longer than most had, telling him about old ghost-times; and the Quentin Compson who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost, but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since, he was born and bred in the deep South the same as she was—two separate Quentins now talking to one another in the long silence of notpeople, in notlanguage, like this: *It seems that this demon—his name was Sutpen—(Colonel Sutpen)—Colonel Sutpen. Who came out of nowhere...*

7. Contemporary Literature (~ since 1945)

Charac- teristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diversity of styles: realism, surrealism, postmodernism, parody, etc.• "Beat Poetry" and "Confessional Poetry;"• Postmodernism: self-reflexivity; the world is treated as a text, total lack of certainty/fixedness; everything is constructed; widening concept of what can be considered "literature"; rise of popular culture;• literary self-assertion of women and (ethnic) minorities;• literature as social and political critique.
Cultural Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shock of World War II;• 1950s: Conservatism and McCarthyism;• constant change and fast progression;• instability of identity and culture;• globalization;• post-colonialism;• growing skepticism;• uses of virtual reality.

Contemporary Literature (~ since 1945)

Historical Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cold War;• Civil Rights Movement;• Vietnam War; Watergate;• conservative presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush;• "Information Age," "Information Overload;"• advent of the internet;• "War on Terrorism" after September 11, 2001.
Authors and Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lorraine Hansberry (African-American drama);• August Wilson (African-American drama);• mainstream drama: Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, A. Miller;• gay theater: Tony Kushner;• postmodernism: John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, Donald Barthelme;• Beat Literature: Allen Ginsberg (poetry), Jack Kerouac (fiction);• Jewish American Fiction: Philip Roth,• suburban fiction: John Updike;• Fiction by ethnic minority writers: Toni Morrison, Louise Erdrich, Maxine Hong Kingston, Sandra Cisneros;• African-American poetry: Gwendolyn Brooks;• Confessional Poetry: Robert Lowell

Philip Roth, *The Human Stain* (2000)

Did he get, from his decision, the adventure he was after, or was the decision in itself, the adventure? Was it the misleading that provided his pleasure, the carrying off of the stunt that he liked best, the traveling through life incognito, or had he simply been closing the door to a past, to people, to a whole race that he wanted nothing intimate or official to do with? Was it the social obstruction that he wished to sidestep? Was he merely being another American and, in the great frontier tradition, accepting the democratic invitation to throw your origins overboard if to do so contributes to the pursuit of happiness? Or was it more than that? Or less?