American literature

For other uses, see American literature (disambiguation).

American literature is the literature written or produced in the area of the United States and its preceding colonies. For more specific discussions of poetry and theater, see Poetry of the United States and Theater in the United States. During its early history, America was a series of British colonies on the eastern coast of the present-day United States. Therefore, its literary tradition begins as linked to the broader tradition of English literature. However, unique American characteristics and the breadth of its production usually now cause it to be considered a separate path and tradition.

The New England colonies were the center of early American literature. The revolutionary period contained political writings by Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine. In the post-war period, Thomas Jefferson's United States Declaration of Independence solidified his status as a key American writer. It was in the late 18th and early 19th centuries that the nation's first novels were published. With the War of 1812 and an increasing desire to produce uniquely American literature and culture, a number of key new literary figures emerged, perhaps most prominently Washington Irving and Edgar Allan Poe. In 1836, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) started a movement known as Transcendentalism. Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) wrote *Walden*, which urges resistance to the dictates of organized society. The political conflict surrounding abolitionism inspired the writings of William Lloyd Garrison and Harriet Beecher Stowe in her world-famous *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. These efforts were supported by the continuation of the slave narrative autobiography, of which the best known example from this period was Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864) is notable for his masterpiece, *The Scarlet Letter*, a novel about adultery. Hawthorne influenced Herman Melville (1819–1891) who is notable for the books *Moby-Dick* and *Billy Budd*. America's two greatest 19th-century poets were Walt Whitman (1819–1892) and Emily Dickinson (1830–1886). American poetry reached a peak in the early-to-mid-20th century, with such noted writers as Wallace Stevens, T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, Ezra Pound, Hart Crane, and E. E. Cummings. Mark Twain (the pen name used by Samuel Langhorne Clemens, 1835–1910) was the first major American writer to be born away from the East Coast. Henry James (1843–1916) was notable for novels like *The Turn of the Screw*. At the beginning of the 20th century, American novelists included Edith Wharton (1862–1937), Stephen Crane (1871–1900), Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945), and Jack London (1876–1916). Experimentation in style and form is seen in the works of Gertrude Stein (1874–1946).

American writers expressed disillusionment following WW I. The stories and novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940) capture the mood of the 1920s, and John Dos Passos wrote about the war. Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) became notable for *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*; in 1954, he won the Nobel Prize in Literature. William Faulkner (1897–1962) is notable for novels like *The Sound and the Fury*. American drama attained international status only in the 1920s and 1930s, with the works of Eugene O'Neill, who won four Pulitzer Prizes and the Nobel Prize. In the middle of the 20th century, American drama was dominated by the work of playwrights Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, as well as by the maturation of the American musical.

Depression era writers included John Steinbeck (1902–1968), notable for his novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. Henry Miller assumed a unique place in American Literature in the 1930s when his semi-autobiographical novels were banned from the US. From the end of World War II up until, roughly, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw the publication of some of the most popular works in American history such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. America's involvement in World War II influenced the creation of works such as Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961) and Kurt Vonnegut Jr.'s *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). John Updike was notable for his novel *Rabbit, Run* (1960). Philip Roth explores Jewish identity in American society. From the early 1970s to the present day the most important literary movement has been postmodernism and the flowering of literature by ethnic minority writers.

1 Colonial literature

Owing to the large immigration to Boston in the 1630s, the high articulation of Puritan cultural ideals, and the early establishment of a college and a printing press in Cambridge, the New England colonies have often been regarded as the center of early American literature. However, the first European settlements in North America had been founded elsewhere many years earlier. Towns older than Boston include the Spanish settlements at Saint Au-

gustine and Santa Fe, the Dutch settlements at Albany and New Amsterdam, as well as the English colony of Jamestown in present-day Virginia. During the colonial period, the printing press was active in many areas, from Cambridge and Boston to New York, Philadelphia, and Annapolis.

The dominance of the English language was hardly inevitable.[1] The first item printed in Pennsylvania was in German and was the largest book printed in any of the colonies before the American Revolution.[1] Spanish and French had two of the strongest colonial literary traditions in the areas that now comprise the United States, and discussions of early American literature commonly include texts by Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and Samuel de Champlain alongside English language texts by Thomas Harriot and John Smith. Moreover, we are now aware of the wealth of oral literary traditions already existing on the continent among the numerous different Native American groups. Political events, however, would eventually make English the lingua franca for the colonies at large as well as the literary language of choice. For instance, when the English conquered New Amsterdam in 1664, they renamed it New York and changed the administrative language from Dutch to English.

From 1696 to 1700, only about 250 separate items were issued from the major printing presses in the American colonies. This is a small number compared to the output of the printers in London at the time. London printers published materials written by New England authors, so the body of American literature was larger than what was published in North America. However, printing was established in the American colonies before it was allowed in most of England. In England, restrictive laws had long confined printing to four locations, where the government could monitor what was published: London, York, Oxford, and Cambridge. Because of this, the colonies ventured into the modern world earlier than their provincial English counterparts.[1]

Back then, some of the American literature were pamphlets and writings extolling the benefits of the colonies to both a European and colonist audience. Captain John Smith could be considered the first American author with his works: *A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Noate as Hath Happened in Virginia...* (1608) and *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* (1624). Other writers of this manner included Daniel Denton, Thomas Ash, William Penn, George Percy, William Strachey, Daniel Coxe, Gabriel Thomas, and John Lawson.

1.1 Topics of early writing

The religious disputes that prompted settlement in America were also topics of early writing. A journal written by John Winthrop, *The History of New England*, discussed the religious foundations of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Edward Winslow also recorded a diary of the first years after the *Mayflower's* arrival. "A modell of Christian Charity" by John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts, was a Sermon preached on the *Arbella* (the flagship of the Winthrop Fleet) in 1630. This work outlined the ideal society he and his followers of separatists were about to build in an attempt to realize the "Puritan utopia". Other religiously influenced writers included Increase Mather and William Bradford, author of the journal published as a *History of Plymouth Plantation, 1620–47*. Others like Roger Williams and Nathaniel Ward more fiercely argued state and church separation. And still others, like Thomas Morton, cared little for the church; Morton's *The New English Canaan* mocked the religious settlers and declared that the Native Americans were actually better people than the British.[2]

Puritan poetry was highly religious in nature, and one of the earliest books of poetry published was the *Bay Psalm Book*, a set of translations of the biblical Psalms; however, the translators' intention was not to create great literature but to create hymns that could be used in worship.[2] Among lyric poets, the most important figures are Anne Bradstreet, who wrote personal poems about her family and homelife; pastor Edward Taylor, whose best poems, the *Preparatory Meditations*, were written to help him prepare for leading worship; and Michael Wigglesworth, whose best-selling poem, *The Day of Doom* (1660), describes the time of judgment. It was published in the same year that anti-Puritan Charles II was restored to the British throne. He followed it two years later with *God's Controversy With New England*. Nicholas Noyes was also known for his doggerel verse.

Other late writings described conflicts and interaction with the Indians, as seen in writings by Daniel Gookin, Alexander Whitaker, John Mason, Benjamin Church, and Mary Rowlandson. John Eliot translated the Bible into the Algonquin language.

Of the second generation of New England settlers, Cotton Mather stands out as a theologian and historian, who wrote the history of the colonies with a view to God's activity in their midst and to connecting the Puritan leaders with the great heroes of the Christian faith. His best-known works include the *Magnalia Christi Americana*, the *Wonders of the Invisible World* and *The Biblia Americana*.

Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield represented the Great Awakening, a religious revival in the early 18th century that asserted strict Calvinism. Other Puritan and religious writers include Thomas Hooker, Thomas Shepard, John Wise, and Samuel Willard. Less strict and serious writers included Samuel Sewall (who wrote a diary revealing the daily life of the late 17th century),[2] and Sarah Kemble Knight.

New England was not the only area in the colonies; southern literature is represented by the diary of William Byrd of Virginia, as well as by *The History of the Dividing Line*,

which detailed the expedition to survey the swamp between Virginia and North Carolina but which also comments on the different lifestyles of the Native Americans and the white settlers in the area.[2] In a similar book, *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West*, William Bartram described in great detail the Southern landscape and the Native American peoples whom he encountered; Bartram's book was very popular in Europe, being translated into German, French and Dutch.[2]

As the colonies moved towards their break with England, perhaps one of the most important discussions of American culture and identity came from the French immigrant J. Hector St. John de Crèvecœur, whose *Letters from an American Farmer* addresses the question "What is an American?" by moving between praise for the opportunities and peace offered in the new society and recognition that the solid life of the farmer must rest uneasily between the oppressive aspects of the urban life (with its luxuries built on slavery) and the lawless aspects of the frontier, where the lack of social structures leads to the loss of civilized living.[2]

This same period saw the birth of African American literature, through the poetry of Phillis Wheatley and, shortly after the Revolution, the slave narrative of Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*. This era also saw the birth of Native American literature, through the two published works of Samson Occom: *A Sermon Preached at the Execution of Moses Paul* and a popular hymnbook, *Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, "the first Indian best-seller".[3]

1.2 Revolutionary period

The revolutionary period also contained political writings, including those by colonists Samuel Adams, Josiah Quincy, John Dickinson, and Joseph Galloway, the last being a loyalist to the crown. Two key figures were Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine. Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac* and *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* are esteemed works with their wit and influence toward the formation of a budding American identity. Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* and *The American Crisis* writings are seen as playing a key role in influencing the political tone of the time.

During the revolution itself, poems and songs such as "Yankee Doodle" and "Nathan Hale" were popular. Major satirists included John Trumbull and Francis Hopkinson. Philip Morin Freneau also wrote poems about the war's course.

During the 18th century, writing shifted focus from the Puritanical ideals of Winthrop and Bradford to the power of the human mind and rational thought. The belief that human and natural occurrences were messages from God no longer fit with the new human centered world. Many intellectuals believed that the human mind could comprehend the universe through the laws of physics as described by Isaac Newton. One of these was Cotton Mather. The first book published in North America that promoted Newton and natural theology was Mather's *The Christian Philosopher* (1721). The enormous scientific, economic, social, and philosophical, changes of the 18th century, called the Enlightenment, impacted the authority of clergyman and scripture, making way for democratic principles. The increase in population helped account for the greater diversity of opinion in religious and political life as seen in the literature of this time. In 1670, the population of the colonies numbered approximately 111,000. Thirty years later it was more than 250,000. By 1760, it reached 1,600,000.[1] The growth of communities and therefore social life led people to become more interested in the progress of individuals and their shared experience on the colonies. These new ideals are accounted for in the widespread popularity of Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*.

2 Post-independence

In the post-war period, Thomas Jefferson's United States Declaration of Independence, his influence on the United States Constitution, his autobiography, the Notes on the State of Virginia, and his many letters solidify his spot as one of the most talented early American writers. The Federalist essays by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay presented a significant historical discussion of American government organization and republican values. Fisher Ames, James Otis, and Patrick Henry are also valued for their political writings and orations.

Much of the early literature of the new nation struggled to find a uniquely American voice in existing literary genre, and this tendency was also reflected in novels. European forms and styles were often transferred to new locales and critics often saw them as inferior.

3 First American novels

It was in the late 18th and early 19th centuries that the nation's first novels were published. These fictions were too lengthy to be printed as manuscript or public reading. Publishers took a chance on these works in hopes they would become steady sellers and need to be reprinted. This was a good bet as literacy rates soared in this period among both men and women. Among the first American novels are Thomas Attwood Digges' "Adventures of Alonso", published in London in 1775 and William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* published in 1791.[1] Brown's novel depicts a tragic love story between siblings who fell in love without knowing they were related. This epistolary novel belongs to the Sentimental novel tradition, as do the two following.

In the next decade important women writers also published novels. Susanna Rowson is best known for her novel, *Charlotte: A Tale of Truth*, published in London in 1791.[4] In 1794 the novel was reissued in Philadelphia under the title, *Charlotte Temple*. *Charlotte Temple* is a seduction tale, written in the third person, which warns against listening to the voice of love and counsels resistance. In addition to this best selling novel, she wrote nine novels, six theatrical works, two collections of poetry, six textbooks, and countless songs.[4] Reaching more than a million and a half readers over a century and a half, *Charlotte Temple* was the biggest seller of the 19th century before Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Although Rowson was extremely popular in her time and is often acknowledged in accounts of the development of the early American novel, *Charlotte Temple* is often criticized as a sentimental novel of seduction.

Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette: Or, the History of Eliza Wharton* was published in 1797 and was also extremely popular.[5] Told from Foster's point of view and based on the real life of Eliza Whitman, this epistolary novel is about a woman who is seduced and abandoned. Eliza is a "coquette" who is courted by two very different men: a clergyman who offers her the comfort and regularity of domestic life, and a noted libertine. She fails to choose between them and finds herself single when both men get married. She eventually yields to the artful libertine and gives birth to an illegitimate stillborn child at an inn. *The Coquette* is praised for its demonstration of this era's contradictory ideals of womanhood.[6]

Washington Irving and his friends at Sunnyside

Both *The Coquette* and *Charlotte Temple* are novels that treat the right of women to live as equals as the new democratic experiment. These novels are of the Sentimental genre, characterized by overindulgence in emotion, an invitation to listen to the voice of reason against misleading passions, as well as an optimistic overemphasis on the essential goodness of humanity. Sentimentalism is often thought to be a reaction against the Calvinistic belief in the depravity of human nature.[7] While many of these novels were popular, the economic infrastructure of the time did not allow these writers to make a living through their writing alone.[8]

Charles Brockden Brown is the earliest American novelist whose works are still commonly read. He published *Wieland* in 1798, and in 1799 published *Ormond*, *Edgar Huntly*, and *Arthur Mervyn*. These novels are of the Gothic genre.

The first author to be able to support himself through the income generated by his publications alone was Washington Irving. He completed his first major book in 1809 entitled *A History of New-York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*.[9]

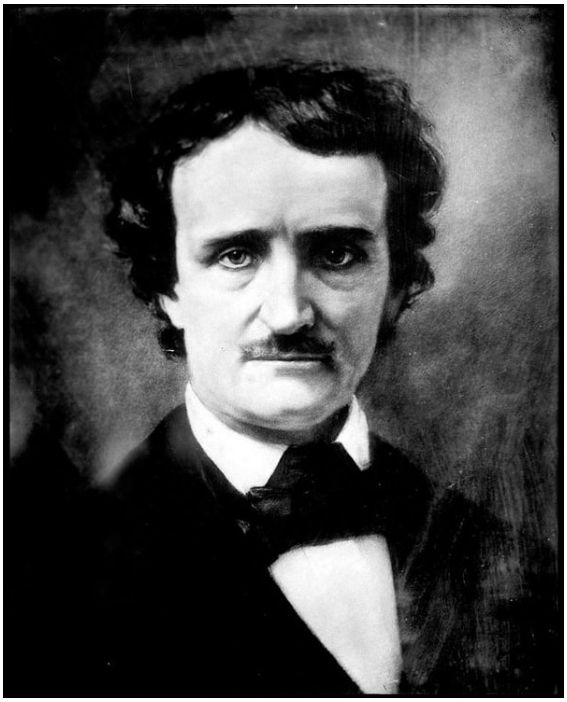
Of the picaresque genre, Hugh Henry Brackenridge published *Modern Chivalry* in 1792-1815; Tabitha Gilman Tenney wrote *Female Quixotism: Exhibited in the Romantic Opinions and Extravagant Adventure of Dorcasina Sheldon* in 1801; Royall Tyler wrote *The Algerine Captive* in 1797.[7]

Other notable authors include William Gilmore Simms, who wrote *Martin Faber* in 1833, *Guy Rivers* in 1834, and *The Yemassee* in 1835. Lydia Maria Child wrote *Hobomok* in 1824 and *The Rebels* in 1825. John Neal wrote *Logan, A Family History* in 1822, *Rachel Dyer* in 1828, and *The Down-Easters* in 1833. Catherine Maria Sedgwick wrote *A New England Tale* in 1822, *Redwood* in 1824, *Hope Leslie* in 1827, and *The Linwoods* in 1835. James Kirke Paulding wrote *The Lion of the West* in 1830, *The Dutchman's Fireside* in 1831, and *Westward Ho!* in 1832. Robert Montgomery Bird wrote *Calavar* in 1834 and *Nick of the Woods* in 1837. James Fenimore Cooper was also a notable author best known for his novel, *The Last of the Mohicans* written in 1826.[7] George Tucker produced in 1824 the first fiction of Virginia colonial life with *The Valley of Shenandoah*. He followed in 1827 with one of the country's first science fictions, *A Voyage to the Moon: With Some Account of the Manners and Customs, Science and Philosophy, of the People of Morosofia, and Other Lunarians.*

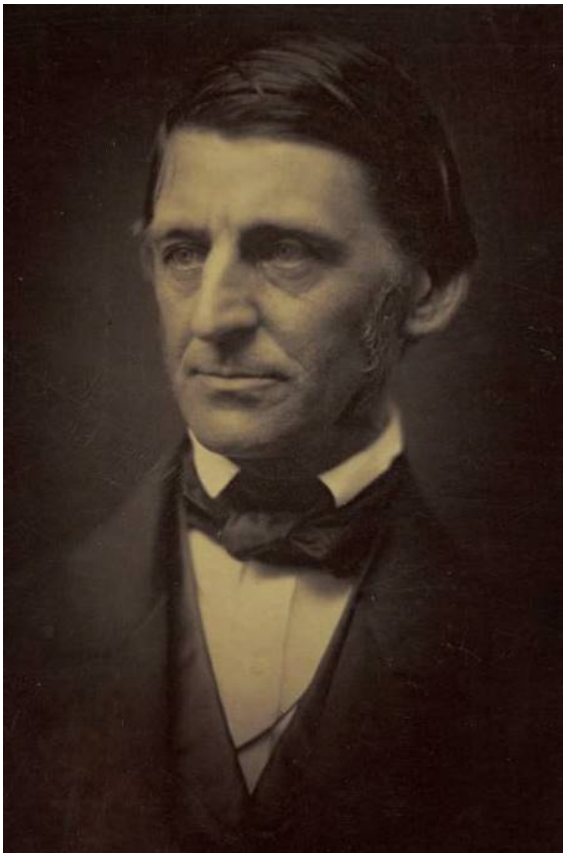
4 Unique American style

With the War of 1812 and an increasing desire to produce uniquely American literature and culture, a number of key new literary figures emerged, perhaps most prominently Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant, James Fenimore Cooper, and Edgar Allan Poe. Irving, often considered the first writer to develop a unique American style (although this has been debated) wrote humorous works in *Salmagundi* and the satire *A History of New York, by Diedrich Knickerbocker* (1809). Bryant wrote early romantic and nature-inspired poetry, which evolved away from their European origins.

In 1832, Poe began writing short stories – including "The Masque of the Red Death", "The Pit and the Pendulum", "The Fall of the House of Usher", and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" – that explore previously hidden levels of human psychology and push the boundaries of fiction



Edgar Allan Poe.



Ralph Waldo Emerson.

toward mystery and fantasy. Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* about Natty Bumppo (which includes *The Last of the Mohicans*) were popular both in the new country and abroad.

Humorous writers were also popular and included Seba Smith and Benjamin P. Shillaber in New England and Davy Crockett, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Johnson J. Hooper, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, and George Washington Harris writing about the American frontier.

The New England Brahmins were a group of writers connected to Harvard University and its seat in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The core included James Russell Lowell, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

In 1836, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), an ex-minister, published a startling nonfiction work called *Nature*, in which he claimed it was possible to dispense with organized religion and reach a lofty spiritual state by studying and responding to the natural world. His work influenced not only the writers who gathered around him, forming a movement known as Transcendentalism, but also the public, who heard him lecture.

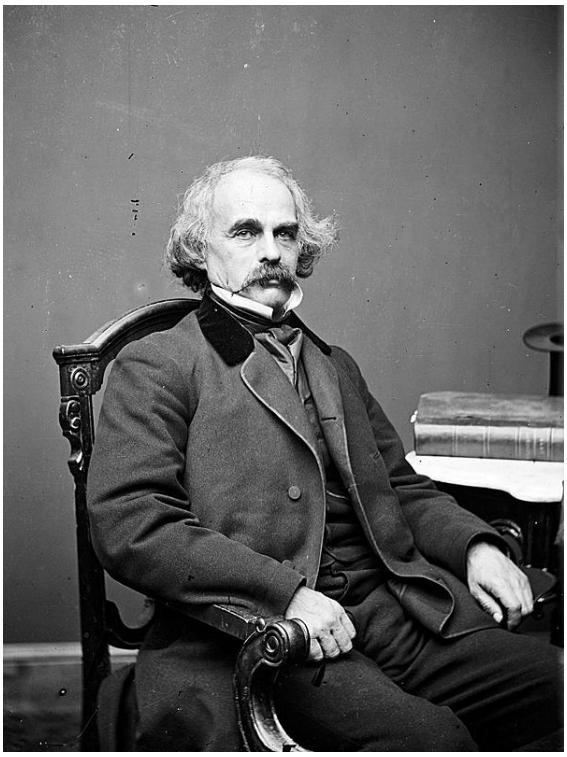
Emerson's most gifted fellow-thinker was perhaps Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), a resolute nonconformist. After living mostly by himself for two years in a cabin by a wooded pond, Thoreau wrote *Walden*, a book-length memoir that urges resistance to the meddlesome dictates of organized society. His radical writings express a deep-rooted tendency toward individualism in the American character. Other writers influenced by Transcendentalism were Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller, George Ripley, Orestes Brownson, and Jones Very.[10]

Just as one of the great works of the Revolutionary period was written by a Frenchman, so too was one of the great works about America from this generation, viz., Alexis de Tocqueville's two-volume *Democracy in America*, which (like the colonial explorers) described his travels through the young country, making observations about the relations between democracy, liberty, equality, individualism and community.

The political conflict surrounding abolitionism inspired the writings of William Lloyd Garrison and his paper *The Liberator*, along with poet John Greenleaf Whittier and Harriet Beecher Stowe in her world-famous *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. These efforts were supported by the continuation of the slave narrative autobiography, of which the best known examples from this period include Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

At the same time, Native American autobiography develops, most notably in William Apess's *A Son of the Forest* and George Copway's *The Life, History and Travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh*. Moreover, minority authors were beginning to publish fiction, as in William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter*, Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends*, Martin Delany's *Blake; or, The Huts of America* and Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig* as early

African American novels, and John Rollin Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta: The Celebrated California Bandit*, which is considered the first Native American novel but which also is an early story about Mexican American issues.



Nathaniel Hawthorne.

In 1837, the young Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864) collected some of his stories as *Twice-Told Tales*, a volume rich in symbolism and occult incidents. Hawthorne went on to write full-length "romances", quasi-allegorical novels that explore such themes as guilt, pride, and emotional repression in his native New England. His masterpiece, *The Scarlet Letter*, is the stark drama of a woman cast out of her community for committing adultery.

Hawthorne's fiction had a profound impact on his friend Herman Melville (1819–1891), who first made a name for himself by turning material from his seafaring days into exotic and sensational sea narrative novels. Inspired by Hawthorne's focus on allegories and dark psychology, Melville went on to write romances replete with philosophical speculation. In *Moby-Dick*, an adventurous whaling voyage becomes the vehicle for examining such themes as obsession, the nature of evil, and human struggle against the elements.

In another fine work, the short novel *Billy Budd*, Melville dramatizes the conflicting claims of duty and compassion on board a ship in time of war. His more profound books sold poorly, and he had been long forgotten by the time of his death. He was rediscovered in the early decades of the 20th century.

Anti-transcendental works from Melville, Hawthorne, and Poe all comprise the Dark Romanticism subgenre of literature popular during this time.

American dramatic literature, by contrast, remained dependent on European models, although many playwrights did attempt to apply these forms to American topics and themes, such as immigrants, westward expansion, temperance, etc. At the same time, American playwrights created several long-lasting American character types, especially the "Yankee", the "Negro" and the "Indian", exemplified by the characters of Jonathan, Sambo and Metamora. In addition, new dramatic forms were created in the Tom Shows, the showboat theater and the minstrel show. Among the best plays of the period are James Nelson Barker's *Superstition; or, the Fanatic Father*, Anna Cora Mowatt's *Fashion; or, Life in New York*, Nathaniel Bannister's *Putnam, the Iron Son of '76*, Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon; or, Life in Louisiana*, and Cornelius Mathews's *Witchcraft; or, the Martyrs of Salem*.

5 Early American poetry

Walt Whitman, 1856.

See also: American poetry

The Fireside Poets (also known as the Schoolroom or Household Poets) were some of America's first major poets domestically and internationally. They were known for their poems being easy to memorize due to their general adherence to poetic form (standard forms, regular

meter, and rhymed stanzas) and were often recited in the home (hence the name) as well as in school (such as "Paul Revere's Ride"), as well as working with distinctly American themes, including some political issues such as abolition. They included Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, William Cullen Bryant, John Greenleaf Whittier, James Russell Lowell, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.. Longfellow achieved the highest level of acclaim and is often considered the first internationally acclaimed American poet, being the first American poet given a bust in Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner.[11]

Walt Whitman(1819–1892) and Emily Dickinson (1830–1886), two of America's greatest 19th-century poets could hardly have been more different in temperament and style. Walt Whitman was a working man, a traveler, a self-appointed nurse during the American Civil War (1861–1865), and a poetic innovator. His magnum opus was *Leaves of Grass*, in which he uses a free-flowing verse and lines of irregular length to depict the all-inclusiveness of American democracy. Taking that motif one step further, the poet equates the vast range of American experience with himself without being egotistical. For example, in *Song of Myself*, the long, central poem in *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman writes: "These are really the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands, they are not original with me ..."

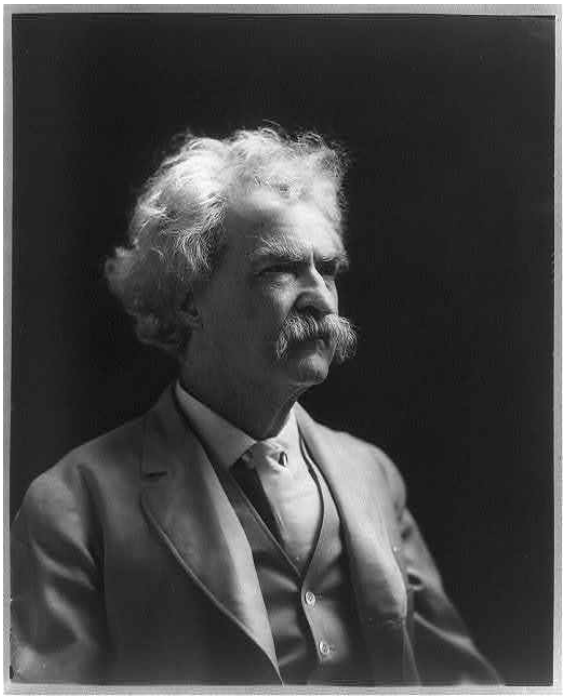
Whitman was also a poet of the body – "the body electric," as he called it. In *Studies in Classic American Literature*, the English novelist D. H. Lawrence wrote that Whitman "was the first to smash the old moral conception that the soul of man is something 'superior' and 'above' the flesh."

Emily Dickinson , on the other hand, lived the sheltered life of a genteel unmarried woman in small-town Amherst, Massachusetts. Within its formal structure, her poetry is ingenious, witty, exquisitely wrought, and psychologically penetrating. Her work was unconventional for its day, and little of it was published during her lifetime.

Many of her poems dwell on death, often with a mischievous twist. One, "Because I could not stop for Death", begins, "He kindly stopped for me." The opening of another Dickinson poem toys with her position as a woman in a male-dominated society and an unrecognized poet: "I'm nobody! Who are you? / Are you nobody too?"

American poetry arguably reached its peak in the early-to-mid-20th century, with such noted writers as Wallace Stevens and his *Harmonium* (1923) and *The Auroras of Autumn* (1950), T. S. Eliot and his *The Waste Land* (1922), Robert Frost and his *North of Boston* (1914) and *New Hampshire* (1923), Hart Crane and his *White Buildings* (1926) and the epic cycle, *The Bridge* (1930), Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and his epic poem about his New Jersey hometown, *Paterson*, Marianne Moore, E. E. Cummings, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Langston Hughes, in addition to many others.

6 Realism, Twain and James



Mark Twain, 1907.

Mark Twain (the pen name used by Samuel Langhorne Clemens, 1835–1910) was the first major American writer to be born away from the East Coast – in the border state of Missouri. His regional masterpieces were the memoir *Life on the Mississippi* and the novels *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Twain's style – influenced by journalism, wedded to the vernacular, direct and unadorned but also highly evocative and irreverently humorous – changed the way Americans write their language. His characters speak like real people and sound distinctively American, using local dialects, newly invented words, and regional accents.

Other writers interested in regional differences and dialect were George W. Cable, Thomas Nelson Page, Joel Chandler Harris, Mary Noailles Murfree (Charles Egbert Craddock), Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Henry Cuyler Bunner, and William Sydney Porter (O. Henry). A version of local color regionalism that focused on minority experiences can be seen in the works of Charles W. Chesnutt (African American), of María Ruiz de Burton, one of the earliest Mexican American novelists to write in English, and in the Yiddish-inflected works of Abraham Cahan.

William Dean Howells also represented the realist tradition through his novels, including *The Rise of Silas Lapham* and his work as editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*.

Henry James (1843–1916) confronted the Old World-New World dilemma by writing directly about it. Although born in New York City, he spent most of his adult years in England. Many of his novels center on Americans who live in or travel to Europe. With its intricate, highly qualified sentences and dissection of emotional and psychological nuance, James's fiction can be daunting. Among his more accessible works are the novellas *Daisy Miller*, about an enchanting American girl in Europe, and *The Turn of the Screw*, an enigmatic ghost story.

Realism also influenced American drama of the period, in part through the works of Howells but also through the works of such Europeans as Ibsen and Zola. Although realism was most influential in terms of set design and staging—audiences loved the special effects offered up by the popular melodramas—and in the growth of local color plays, it also showed up in the more subdued, less romantic tone that reflected the effects of the Civil War and continued social turmoil on the American psyche.

The most ambitious attempt at bringing modern realism into the drama was James Herne's *Margaret Fleming*, which addressed issues of social determinism through realistic dialogue, psychological insight and symbolism; the play was not a success, as critics and audiences alike felt it dwelt too much on unseemly topics and included improper scenes, such as the main character nursing her husband's illegitimate child onstage.

Ernest Hemingway in World War I uniform.

7 Beginning of the 20th century

At the beginning of the 20th century, American novelists were expanding fiction's social spectrum to encompass both high and low life and sometimes connected to the naturalist school of realism. In her stories and novels, Edith Wharton (1862–1937) scrutinized the upper-class, Eastern-seaboard society in which she had grown up. One of her finest books, *The Age of Innocence*, centers on a man who chooses to marry a conventional, socially acceptable woman rather than a fascinating outsider.

At about the same time, Stephen Crane (1871–1900), best known for his Civil War novel *The Red Badge of Courage*, depicted the life of New York City prostitutes in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. And in *Sister Carrie*, Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945) portrayed a country girl who moves to Chicago and becomes a kept woman. Hamlin Garland and Frank Norris wrote about the problems of American farmers and other social issues from a naturalist perspective.

More directly political writings discussed social issues and power of corporations. Some like Edward Bellamy in *Looking Backward* outlined other possible political and social frameworks. Upton Sinclair, most famous for his muck-raking novel *The Jungle*, advocated socialism. Other political writers of the period included Edwin Markham, William Vaughn Moody. Journalistic critics, including Ida M. Tarbell and Lincoln Steffens were labeled The Muckrakers. Henry Brooks Adams' literate autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams* also depicted a stinging description of the education system and modern life.

Race was a common issue as well, as seen in the work of Pauline Hopkins, an African-American woman who published five influential works from 1900 to 1903 discussing racial and sexual inequalities. Similarly, Sui Sin Far wrote about Chinese-American experiences, Maria Cristina Mena wrote about Mexican-American experiences, and Zitkala-Sa wrote about Native American experiences.

7.1 1920s

The 1920s Brought in effervescence of American literature, both in the states and in Paris and London. Many writers had direct experience of the World War, and used it to frame their writings.[12]

Experimentation in style and form soon joined the new freedom in subject matter. In 1909, Gertrude Stein (1874–1946), by then an expatriate in Paris, published

Three Lives, an innovative work of fiction influenced by her familiarity with cubism, jazz, and other movements in contemporary art and music. Stein labeled a group of American literary notables who lived in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s as the "Lost Generation".

The poet Ezra Pound (1885–1972) was born in Idaho but spent much of his adult life in Europe. His work is complex, sometimes obscure, with multiple references to other art forms and to a vast range of literature, both Western and Eastern.[13] He influenced many other poets, notably T. S. Eliot (1888–1965), another expatriate. Eliot wrote spare, cerebral poetry, carried by a dense structure of symbols. In *The Waste Land*, he embodied a jaundiced vision of post–World War I society in fragmented, haunted images. Like Pound's, Eliot's poetry could be highly allusive, and some editions of *The Waste Land* come with footnotes supplied by the poet. In 1948, Eliot won the Nobel Prize in Literature.[14]

Stein, Pound and Eliot, along with Henry James before them, demonstrate the growth of an international perspective in American literature, and not simply because they spend long periods of time overseas. American writers had long looked to European models for inspiration, but whereas the literary breakthroughs of the mid-19th century came from finding distinctly American styles and themes, writers from this period were finding ways of contributing to a flourishing international literary scene, not as imitators but as equals. Something similar was happening back in the States, as Jewish writers (such as Abraham Cahan) used the English language to reach an international Jewish audience.

American writers also expressed the disillusionment following upon the war. The stories and novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940) capture the restless, pleasure-hungry, defiant mood of the 1920s. Fitzgerald's characteristic theme, expressed poignantly in *The Great Gatsby*, is the tendency of youth's golden dreams to dissolve in failure and disappointment. Fitzgerald also elucidates the collapse of some key American Ideals, such as liberty, social unity, good governance and peace, features which were severely threatened by the pressures of modern early 20th century society.[15] Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson also wrote novels with critical depictions of American life. John Dos Passos wrote about the war and also the U.S.A. trilogy which extended into the Depression.[16]

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) saw violence and death first-hand as an ambulance driver in World War I, and the carnage persuaded him that abstract language was mostly empty and misleading. He cut out unnecessary words from his writing, simplified the sentence structure, and concentrated on concrete objects and actions. He adhered to a moral code that emphasized grace under pressure, and his protagonists were strong, silent men who often dealt awkwardly with women. *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms* are generally considered his best

F. Scott Fitzgerald, photographed by Carl van Vechten, 1937.

novels; in 1954, he won the Nobel Prize in Literature.[17]

William Faulkner (1897–1962) won the Nobel Prize in 1949: . Faulkner encompassed an enormous range of humanity in Yoknapatawpha County, a Mississippian region of his own invention. He recorded his characters' seemingly unedited ramblings in order to represent their inner states, a technique called "stream of consciousness". (In fact, these passages are carefully crafted, and their seemingly chaotic structure conceals multiple layers of meaning.) He also jumbled time sequences to show how the past – especially the slave-holding era of the Deep South – endures in the present. Among his great works are *Absalom, Absalom!*, *As I Lay Dying*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Light in August*.[18]

8 The rise of American drama

See also: Theater of the United States

Although the United States' theatrical tradition can be traced back to the arrival of Lewis Hallam's troupe in the mid-18th century and was very active in the 19th century, as seen by the popularity of minstrel shows and of adaptations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, American drama attained international status only in the 1920s and 1930s, with the works of Eugene O'Neill, who won four Pulitzer Prizes and the Nobel Prize.

In the middle of the 20th century, American drama was dominated by the work of playwrights Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, as well as by the maturation of the American musical, which had found a way to integrate script, music and dance in such works as *Oklahoma!* and *West Side Story*. Later American playwrights of importance include Edward Albee, Sam Shepard, David Mamet, August Wilson and Tony Kushner.

9 Depression-era literature

Depression era literature was blunt and direct in its social criticism. John Steinbeck (1902–1968) was born in Salinas, California, where he set many of his stories. His style was simple and evocative, winning him the favor of the readers but not of the critics. Steinbeck often wrote about poor, working-class people and their struggle to lead a decent and honest life. *The Grapes of Wrath*, considered his masterpiece, is a strong, socially-oriented novel that tells the story of the Joads, a poor family from Oklahoma and their journey to California in search of a better life.

Other popular novels include *Tortilla Flat*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Cannery Row*, and *East of Eden*. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1962. Steinbeck's contemporary, Nathanael West's two most famous short novels, *Miss Lonelyhearts,* which plumbs the life of its eponymous antihero, a reluctant (and, to comic effect, male) advice columnist, and the effects the tragic letters exert on it, and *The Day of the Locust*, which introduces a cast of Hollywood stereotypes and explores the ironies of the movies, have come to be avowed classics of American literature.

In non-fiction, James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* observes and depicts the lives of three struggling tenant-farming families in Alabama in 1936. Combining factual reportage with passages of literary complexity and poetic beauty, Agee presented a complete picture, an accurate, minutely detailed report of what he had seen coupled with insight into his feelings about the experience and the difficulties of capturing it for a broad audience. In doing so, he created an enduring portrait of a nearly invisible segment of the American population.

Henry Miller assumed a unique place in American Literature in the 1930s when his semi-autobiographical novels, written and published in Paris, were banned from the US. Although his major works, including *Tropic of Cancer* and *Black Spring*, would not be free of the label of obscenity until 1962, their themes and stylistic innovations had already exerted a major influence on succeeding generations of American writers, and paved the way for sexually frank 1960s novels by John Updike, Philip Roth, Gore Vidal, John Rechy and William Styron.

10 Post–World War II

10.1 The postwar novel

Norman Mailer, photographed by Carl Van Vechten, 1948.

The period in time from the end of World War II up until, roughly, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw the publication of some of the most popular works in American history such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. The last few of the more realistic modernists along with the wildly Romantic beatniks largely dominated the period, while the direct respondents to America's involvement in World War II contributed in their notable influence.

Though born in Canada, Chicago-raised Saul Bellow would become one of the most influential novelists in America in the decades directly following World War II. In works like *The Adventures of Augie March* and *Herzog*, Bellow painted vivid portraits of the American city and the distinctive characters that peopled it. Bellow went on to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1976.

From J.D. Salinger's *Nine Stories* and *The Catcher in the Rye* to Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, the perceived madness of the state of affairs in America was brought to the forefront of the nation's literary expression. Immigrant authors such as Vladimir Nabokov, with *Lolita*, forged on with the theme, and, at almost the same time, the beatniks took a concerted step away from their Lost Generation predecessors, developing a style and tone of their own by drawing on Eastern theology and experimenting with recreational drugs.

The poetry and fiction of the "Beat Generation", largely born of a circle of intellects formed in New York City around Columbia University and established more officially some time later in San Francisco, came of age. The term *Beat* referred, all at the same time, to the countercultural rhythm of the Jazz scene, to a sense of rebellion regarding the conservative stress of post-war society, and to an interest in new forms of spiritual experience through drugs, alcohol, philosophy, and religion, and specifically through Zen Buddhism.

Allen Ginsberg set the tone of the movement in his poem *Howl*, a Whitmanesque work that began: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness..." Among the most representative achievements of the Beats in the novel are Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), the chronicle of a soul-searching travel through the continent, and William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959), a more experimental work structured as a series of vignettes relating, among other things, the narrator's travels and experiments with hard drugs.

Regarding the war novel specifically, there was a literary explosion in America during the post–World War II era. Some of the best known of the works produced included Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961) and Kurt Vonnegut Jr.'s *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). *The Moviegoer* (1962), by Southern author Walker Percy, winner of the National Book Award, was his attempt at exploring "the dislocation of man in the modern age."[19]

John Updike

In contrast, John Updike approached American life from a more reflective but no less subversive perspective. His 1960 novel *Rabbit, Run,* the first of four chronicling the rising and falling fortunes of Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom over the course of four decades against the backdrop of the major events of the second half of the 20th century, broke new ground on its release in its characterization and detail of the American middle class and frank discussion of taboo topics such as adultery. Notable among Updike's characteristic innovations was his use of present-tense narration, his rich, stylized language, and his attention to sensual detail. His work is also deeply imbued with Christian themes. The two final installments of the Rabbit series, *Rabbit is Rich* (1981) and *Rabbit at Rest* (1990), were both awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Other notable works include the Henry Bech novels (1970–98), *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984), *Roger's Version* (1986) and *In the Beauty of the Lilies* (1996), which literary critic Michiko Kakutani called "arguably his finest."[20]

Frequently linked with Updike is the novelist Philip Roth. Roth vigorously explores Jewish identity in American society, especially in the postwar era and the early 21st century. Frequently set in Newark, New Jersey, Roth's work is known to be highly autobiographical, and many of Roth's main characters, most famously the Jewish novelist Nathan Zuckerman, are thought to be alter egos of Roth. With these techniques, and armed with his articulate and fast-paced style, Roth explores the distinction between reality and fiction in literature while provocatively examining American culture. His most famous work includes the Zuckerman novels, the controversial *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), and *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959). Among the most decorated American writers of his generation, he has won every major American literary award, including the Pulitzer Prize for his major novel *American Pastoral* (1997).

In the realm of African-American literature, Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel *Invisible Man* was instantly recognized as among the most powerful and important works of the immediate post-war years. The story of a black Underground Man in the urban north, the novel laid bare the often repressed racial tension that still prevailed while also succeeding as an existential character study. Richard Wright was catapulted to fame by the publication in subsequent years of his now widely studied short story, "The Man Who Was Almost a Man" (1939), and his controversial second novel, *Native Son* (1940), and his legacy was cemented by the 1945 publication of *Black Boy*, a work in which Wright drew on his childhood and mostly autodidactic education in the segregated South, fictionalizing and exaggerating some elements as he saw fit. Because of its polemical themes and Wright's involvement with the Communist Party, the novel's final part, "American Hunger," was not published until 1977.

Perhaps the most ambitious and challenging post-war American novelist was William Gaddis, whose uncompromising, satiric, and gargantuan novels, such as *The Recognitions* (1955) and *J R* (1975) are presented largely in terms of unattributed dialog that requires almost unexampled reader participation. Gaddis's primary themes include forgery, capitalism, religious zealotry, and the legal system, constituting a sustained polyphonic critique of the chaos and chicanery of modern American life.

Gaddis's work, though largely ignored for years, anticipated and influenced the development of such ambitious "postmodern" fiction writers as Thomas Pynchon, Joseph McElroy, and Don DeLillo. Another neglected and challenging postwar American novelist, albeit one who wrote much shorter works, was John Hawkes, whose often surreal, visionary fiction addresses themes of violence and eroticism and experiments audaciously with narrative voice and style. Among his most important works is the short nightmarish novel *The Lime Twig* (1961).

10.2 Short fiction and poetry

In the postwar period, the art of the short story again flourished. Among its most respected practitioners was Flannery O'Connor (b. March 25, 1925 in Georgia – d. August 3, 1964 in Georgia), who renewed the fascination of such giants as Faulkner and Twain with the American south, developing a distinctive Southern gothic esthetic wherein characters acted at one level as people and at another as symbols. A devout Catholic, O'Connor often imbued her stories, among them the widely studied "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and "Everything That Rises Must Converge", and two novels, *Wise Blood* (1952); *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), with deeply religious themes, focusing particularly on the search for truth and religious skepticism against the backdrop of the nuclear age. Other important practitioners of the form include Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, John Cheever, Raymond Carver, Tobias Wolff, and the more experimental Donald Barthelme.

Among the most respected of the postwar American poets are John Ashbery, the key figure of the surrealistic New York School of poetry, and his celebrated *Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror* (Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, 1976); Elizabeth Bishop and her *North & South* (Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, 1956) and "Geography III" (National Book Award, 1970); Richard Wilbur and his *Things of This World,* winner of both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for Poetry in 1957; John Berryman and his *The Dream Songs*, (Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, 1964, National Book Award, 1968); A.R. Ammons, whose *Collected Poems 1951-1971* won a National Book Award in 1973 and whose long poem *Garbage* earned him another in 1993; Theodore Roethke and his *The Waking* (Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, 1954); James Merrill and his epic poem of communication with the dead, *The Changing Light at Sandover* (Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, 1977); Louise Glück for her *The Wild Iris* (Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, 1993); W.S. Merwin for his *The Carrier of Ladders* (Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, 1971) and *The Shadow of Sirius* (Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, 2009); Mark Strand for *Blizzard of One* (Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, 1999); Robert Hass for his *Time and Materials,* which won both the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award for Poetry in 2008 and 2007 respectively; and Rita Dove for her *Thomas and Beulah* (Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, 1987).

In addition, in this same period the confessional, whose origin is often traced to the publication in 1959 of Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*,[21] and beat schools of poetry enjoyed popular and academic success, producing such widely anthologized voices as Allen Ginsberg, Charles Bukowski, Gary Snyder, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath, among many others.

11 Contemporary American literature

Though its exact parameters remain debatable, from the early 1970s to the present day the most salient literary movement has been postmodernism. Thomas Pynchon, a seminal practitioner of the form, drew in his work on modernist fixtures such as temporal distortion, unreliable narrators, and internal monologue and coupled them with distinctly postmodern techniques such as metafiction, ideogrammatic characterization, unrealistic names (Oedipa Maas, Benny Profane, etc.), absurdist plot elements and hyperbolic humor, deliberate use of anachronisms and archaisms, a strong focus on postcolonial themes, and a subversive commingling of high and low culture. In 1973, he published *Gravity's Rainbow*, a leading work in this genre, which won the National Book Award and was unanimously nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction that year. His other major works include his debut, *V.* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Mason & Dixon* (1997), and *Against the Day* (2006).

Toni Morrison, the most recent American recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, writing in a distinctive lyrical prose style, published her controversial debut novel, *The Bluest Eye*, to widespread critical acclaim in 1970. Coming on the heels of the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1965, the novel, widely studied in American schools, includes an elaborate description of incestuous rape and explores the conventions of beauty established by a historically racist society, painting a portrait of a self-immolating black family in search of beauty in whiteness. Since then, Morrison has experimented with lyric fantasy, as in her two best-known later works, *Song of Solomon* (1977) and *Beloved* (1987), for which she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction; along these lines, critic Harold Bloom has drawn favorable comparisons to Virginia Woolf,[22] and the Nobel committee to "Faulkner and to the Latin American tradition [of magical realism]."[23] *Beloved* was chosen in a 2006 survey conducted by the *New York Times* as the most important work of fiction of the last 25 years.[24]

Writing in a lyrical, flowing style that eschews excessive use of the comma and semicolon, recalling William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway in equal measure, Cormac McCarthy's body of work seizes on the literary traditions of several regions of the United States

and spans multiple genres. He writes in the Southern Gothic aesthetic in his distinctly Faulknerian 1965 debut, *The Orchard Keeper*, and *Suttree* (1979); in the Epic Western tradition, with grotesquely drawn characters and symbolic narrative turns reminiscent of Melville, in *Blood Meridian* (1985), which Harold Bloom styled "the greatest single book since Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*," calling the character of Judge Holden "short of Moby Dick, the most monstrous apparition in all of American literature";[25] in a much more pastoral tone in his celebrated Border Trilogy (1992–98) of *bildungsromans*, including *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), winner of the National Book Award; and in the post-apocalyptic genre in the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Road* (2007). His novels are noted for achieving both commercial and critical success, several of his works having been adapted to film.

Don DeLillo, who rose to literary prominence with the publication of his 1985 novel, *White Noise*, a work broaching the subjects of death and consumerism and doubling as a piece of comic social criticism, began his writing career in 1971 with *Americana*. He is listed by Harold Bloom as being among the preeminent contemporary American writers, in the company of such figures as Philip Roth, Cormac McCarthy, and Thomas Pynchon.[26] His 1997 novel *Underworld*, a gargantuan work chronicling American life through and immediately after the Cold War and examining with equal depth subjects as various as baseball and nuclear weapons, is generally agreed upon to be his masterpiece and was the runner-up in a survey asking writers to identify the most important work of fiction of the last 25 years.[24] Among his other important novels are *Libra* (1988), *Mao II* (1991) and *Falling Man* (2007).

Jonathan Franzen at the 2008 Brooklyn Book Festival.

Seizing on the distinctly postmodern techniques of digression, narrative fragmentation and elaborate symbolism, and strongly influenced by the works of Thomas Pynchon, David Foster Wallace began his writing career with *The Broom of the System*, published to moderate acclaim in 1987. His second novel, *Infinite Jest* (1997), a futuristic portrait of America and a playful critique of the media-saturated nature of American life, has been consistently ranked among the most important works of the 20th century,[27] and his final novel, unfinished at the time of his death, The Pale King (2011), has garnered much praise and attention. In addition to his novels, he also authored three acclaimed short story collections: *Girl with Curious Hair* (1989), *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (1999) and *Oblivion: Stories* (2004).

Jonathan Franzen, Wallace's friend and contemporary, rose to prominence after the 2001 publication of his National Book Award-winning third novel, *The Corrections*. He began his writing career in 1988 with the well-received *The Twenty-Seventh City*, a novel centering on his native St. Louis, but did not gain national attention until the publication of his essay, "Perchance to Dream," in Harper's Magazine, discussing the cultural role of the writer in the new millennium through the prism of his own frustrations. *The Corrections*, a tragicomedy about the disintegrating Lambert family, has been called "the literary phenomenon of [its] decade"[28] and was ranked as one of the greatest novels of the past century.[27] In 2010, he published *Freedom* to great critical acclaim.[28][29][30]

Other notable writers at the turn of the century include Michael Chabon, whose Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (2000) tells the story of two friends, Joe Kavalier and Sam Clay, as they rise through the ranks of the comics industry in its heyday; Denis Johnson, whose 2007 novel *Tree of Smoke* about falsified intelligence during Vietnam both won the National Book Award and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and was called by critic Michiko Kakutani "one of the classic works of literature produced by [the Vietnam War]";[31] and Louise Erdrich, whose 2008 novel *The Plague of Doves*, a distinctly Faulknerian, polyphonic examination of the tribal experience set against the backdrop of murder in the fictional town of Pluto, North Dakota, was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, and her 2012 novel *The Round House*, which builds on the same themes, was awarded the 2012 National Book Award.[32]

12 Minority literatures

One of the key developments in late-20th-century American literature was the rise to prominence of literature written by and about ethnic minorities beyond African Americans and Jewish Americans, who had already established their literary inheritances. This development

came alongside the growth of the Civil Rights movements and its corollary, the Ethnic Pride movement, which led to the creation of Ethnic Studies programs in most major universities. These programs helped establish the new ethnic literature as worthy objects of academic study, alongside such other new areas of literary study as women's literature, gay and lesbian literature, working-class literature, postcolonial literature, and the rise of literary theory as a key component of academic literary study.

After being relegated to cookbooks and autobiographies for most of the 20th century, Asian American literature achieved widespread notice through Maxine Hong Kingston's fictional memoir, *The Woman Warrior* (1976), and her novels *China Men* (1980) and *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*. Chinese-American author Ha Jin in 1999 won the National Book Award for his second novel, *Waiting*, about a Chinese soldier in the Revolutionary Army who has to wait 18 years to divorce his wife for another woman, all the while having to worry about persecution for his protracted affair, and twice won the PEN/Faulkner Award, in 2000 for *Waiting* and in 2005 for *War Trash*.

Indian-American author Jhumpa Lahiri won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for her debut collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), and went on to write a well-received novel, *The Namesake* (2003), which was shortly adapted to film in 2007. In her second collection of stories, *Unaccustomed Earth*, released to widespread commercial and critical success, Lahiri shifts focus and treats the experiences of the second and third generation.

Other notable Asian-American (but not immigrant) novelists include Amy Tan, best known for her novel, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), tracing the lives of four immigrant families brought together by the game of Mahjong, and Korean American novelist Chang-Rae Lee, who has published *Native Speaker*, *A Gesture Life,* and *Aloft.* Such poets as Marilyn Chin and Li-Young Lee, Kimiko Hahn and Janice Mirikitani have also achieved prominence, as has playwright David Henry Hwang. Equally important has been the effort to recover earlier Asian American authors, started by Frank Chin and his colleagues; this effort has brought Sui Sin Far, Toshio Mori, Carlos Bulosan, John Okada, Hisaye Yamamoto and others to prominence.

Latina/o literature also became important during this period, starting with acclaimed novels by Tomás Rivera (*...y no se lo tragó la tierra*) and Rudolfo Anaya (*Bless Me, Ultima*), and the emergence of Chicano theater with Luis Valdez and *Teatro Campesino*. Latina writing became important thanks to authors such as Sandra Cisneros, an icon of an emerging Chicano literature whose 1984 bildungsroman *The House on Mango Street* is taught in schools across the United States, Denise Chavez's *The Last of the Menu Girls* and Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.

Dominican-American author Junot Díaz, received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for his 2007 novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which tells the story of an overweight Dominican boy growing up as a social outcast in Paterson, New Jersey. Another Dominican author, Julia Alvarez, is well known for *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* and *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Cuban American author Oscar Hijuelos won a Pulitzer for *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, and Cristina García received acclaim for *Dreaming in Cuban.*

Celebrated Puerto Rican novelists who write in English and Spanish include Giannina Braschi, author of the Spanglish classic Yo-Yo Boing! and Rosario Ferré, best known for "Eccentric Neighborhoods"[33][34] Puerto Rico has also produced important playwrights such as René Marqués, Luis Rafael Sánchez, and José Rivera and New York based poets such as Julia de Burgos, Giannina Braschi and Pedro Pietri, as well as various members of the Nuyorican Poets Café.[34]

Spurred by the success of N. Scott Momaday's Pulitzer Prize–winning *House Made of Dawn*, Native American literature showed explosive growth during this period, known as the Native American Renaissance, through such novelists as Leslie Marmon Silko (e.g., *Ceremony*), Gerald Vizenor (e.g., *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles* and numerous essays on Native American literature), Louise Erdrich (*Love Medicine* and several other novels that use a recurring set of characters and locations in the manner of William Faulkner), James Welch (e.g., *Winter in the Blood*), Sherman Alexie (e.g., *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*), and poets Simon Ortiz and Joy Harjo. The success of these authors has brought renewed attention to earlier generations, including Zitkala-Sa, John Joseph Mathews, D'Arcy McNickle and Mourning Dove.

More recently, Arab American literature, largely unnoticed since the New York Pen League of the 1920s, has become more prominent through the work of Diana Abu-Jaber, whose novels include *Arabian Jazz* and *Crescent* and the memoir *The Language of Baklava*. Other important authors include Etel Adnan, Rabih Alameddine and poet Naomi Shihab Nye.

13 Nobel Prize in Literature winners (American authors)

Further information: Nobel Prize in Literature

- 1930: Sinclair Lewis (novelist)
- 1936: Eugene O'Neill (playwright)
- 1938: Pearl S. Buck (biographer and novelist)
- 1948: T. S. Eliot (poet and playwright)
- 1949: William Faulkner (novelist)

- 1954: Ernest Hemingway (novelist)
- 1962: John Steinbeck (novelist)
- 1976: Saul Bellow (novelist)
- 1978: Isaac Bashevis Singer (novelist, wrote in Yiddish)
- 1987: Joseph Brodsky (poet and essayist, wrote in English and Russian)
- 1993: Toni Morrison (novelist)

14 American literary awards

See also: Category:American literary awards

- American Academy of Arts and Letters
- Pulitzer Prize (Fiction, Drama and Poetry, as well as various non-fiction and journalist categories)
- National Book Award (Fiction, Non-Fiction, Poetry and Young-Adult Fiction)
- American Book Awards
- PEN literary awards (multiple awards)
- United States Poet Laureate
- Bollingen Prize
- Pushcart Prize
- O. Henry Award

15 Literary theory and criticism

See also: Category:American literary critics

- Edgar Allan Poe: Dark Romanticism, Short-Story Theory
- T. S. Eliot: Modernism
- Harold Bloom: Aestheticism
- Susan Sontag: *Against Interpretation*, *On Photography*
- John Updike: Literary realism/modernism and aestheticist critic
- M. H. Abrams: *The Mirror and the Lamp* (study of Romanticism)
- F. O. Matthiessen: originated the concept "American Renaissance"
- Perry Miller: Puritan studies
- Henry Nash Smith: founder of the "Myth and Symbol School" of American criticism
- Leo Marx: *The Machine in the Garden* (study of technology and culture)
- Leslie Fiedler: *Love and Death in the American Novel*
- Stanley Fish: Pragmatism
- Henry Louis Gates: African American literary theory
- Gerald Vizenor: Native American literary theory
- William Dean Howells: Literary realism
- Stephen Greenblatt: New Historicism
- Geoffrey Hartman: Yale school of deconstruction
- John Crowe Ransom: New Criticism
- Cleanth Brooks: New Criticism
- Kenneth Burke: Rhetoric studies
- Elaine Showalter: Feminist criticism
- Sandra M. Gilbert: Feminist criticism
- Susan Gubar: Feminist criticism
- J. Hillis Miller: Deconstruction
- Edward Said: Postcolonial criticism
- Jonathan Culler: Critical theory, deconstruction
- Judith Butler: Post-structuralist feminism
- Gloria E. Anzaldúa: Latina literary theory
- Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: Queer theory
- Fredric Jameson: Marxist criticism

16 See also

- American Literature (academic discipline)
- Short story
- *Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature*
- Highlighter

16.1 Additional genres

- Detective fiction
- Horror fiction
- Nature writing
- Romance novel
- Science fiction and fantasy
- Western fiction

16.2 Regional and minority focuses in American literature

- Literature of New England
- Chicago literature
- Southern literature
- Literature in Hawaii
- Texas literature
- New Orleans in fiction
- Boston in fiction
- LGBT literature
- Deaf American literature
- American Catholic literature
- American literature in Spanish

Ethnic minority literature articles and lists

- Armenian American literature
- African American literature
  - List of African American writers
- Jewish American literature
  - List of Jewish American writers
- List of Arab American writers
- List of writers from peoples indigenous to the Americas
  - Native American Renaissance
- Asian American literature
  - Chinese American literature
  - Korean American writers
  - List of Asian American writers
- Hispanic American writers
  - Chicano literature
  - Chicano poetry
  - Puerto Rican literature
  - List of Puerto Rican writers
  - List of Cuban American writers
  - List of Mexican American writers

17 Notes and references

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19 External links

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