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American Literature

SEMESTER IV

ENGLISH

BLOCK 1

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SEMESTER 4
MA IN ENGLISH
COURSE 3: AMERICAN LITERATURE
BLOCK 1: HISTORY

DETAILED SYLLABUS

CONTENTS **Pages**

Unit 1 : Puritan Beginnings & Frontier Experience (Part I) **7-24**

Social Context, Intellectual Context, Major Writers (Anne Dudley Bradstreet, Edward Taylor, Cotton Mather, Michael Wigglesworth), Influences on Later Writers.

Unit 2 : Puritan Beginnings & Frontier Experience (Part II) **25-39**

Major Writers, (William Bradford, Thomas Godfrey, Jonathan Edwards, Benjamin Franklin, William Byrd II), Influences on Later Writers.

Unit 3 : Transcendentalism and American Modernism (Part I) **40-55**

Social Context, Intellectual Context, Major Writers (Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Mark Twain)

Unit 4 : Transcendentalism and American Modernism (Part II) **56-75**

Major Writers (Henry James, Thomas Stearns Eliot, Stephen Crane), Influence on Later Writers.

COURSE INTRODUCTION : [Adapted from M. H. Abram's *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (7th Edition) (Page 204-210)]

This course shall introduce us to American Literature as a whole. It is however difficult to locate the periods of American Literature on the basis of convenient historical segments. A number of recent historians, anthologists, and teachers of American literature simply divide their survey into dated sections. A tendency has been to recognise the importance of major wars in marking significant changes in literature. Subsequently, many literary historians refer to the Revolutionary War (1775-81), the Civil War (1861-65), World War I (1914-18), and World War II (1939-45). Such divisions make it convenient to distinguish periods and sub-periods in American literature.

1607-1775: This overall era, from the founding of the first settlement at Jamestown to the outbreak of the American Revolution, is often called the **Colonial Period.** Writings of this period were mostly religious, practical, or historical. Notable among the seventeenth-century writers were William Bradford, John Winthrop, and Cotton Mather. In the following century writers like Jonathan Edwards, Benjamin Franklin, Anne Bradstreet and so on proved their mastery as writers.

1765-1790: This period is sometimes distinguished as the **Revolutionary Age.** It was the time of Thomas Paine's influential revolutionary tracts; of Thomas Jefferson's "Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom," "Declaration of Independence", of *The Federalist Papers* in support of the Constitution, most notably those by Alexander Hamilton and James Madison.

1775-1828: The years in-between 1775-1828, is known as the **Early National Period** ending with the triumph of Jacksonian democracy in 1828. This signalled the emergence of a national imaginative literature, including the first American comedy (Royall Tyler's *The Contrast,* 1787), the earliest American novel (William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy,* 1789), and the establishment in 1815 of the first enduring American magazine, *The North American Review.* This period also saw the emergence of Washington Irving (essays and stories), Charles Brockden Brown (Gothic novel), James Fenimore Cooper, (the first major American novelist), William Cullen Bryant and Edgar Allan Poe who wrote poetry. In the year 1760 was published the first of a long series of **slave narratives** and autobiographies written by *African-American* slaves who had escaped or been freed.

1828-1865: This period is often identified as the **Romantic Period** in American literature. This period is sometimes known as the **American Renaissance. This is also the period of** outstanding writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Is also sometimes called the **Age of Transcendentalism,** after the philosophical and literary movement, centered on Emerson, that was dominant in New England. It was the age of Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Harriet Beecher Stowe and so on.

1865-1900: This period is often known as the **Realistic Period,** with reference to the novels by Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and Henry James and so on. Their works, though diverse, are often labeled "realistic" in contrast to the "romances" of their predecessors like Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville. Some realistic authors grounded their fiction in a regional milieu which reminds of Mark Twain's novels on the Mississippi River region. Besides, Walt Whitman continued writing poetry up to the last decade of the century, and was joined by Emily Dickinson who is now recognized as one of the most distinctive and eminent of American poets.

1900-1914: This period is known as the **Naturalistic Period** in recognition of the powerful though sometimes crudely wrought novels by Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser, which typically represent characters who are joint victims of their instinctual drives and of external sociological forces.

1914-1939: The era between the two world wars, marked also by the trauma of the great economic depression beginning in 1929, was that of the emergence of what is still known as **modern literature.** Unlike most of the authors of that earlier period, the American modernists achieved widespread international recognition and influence. Among the notable poets were Edgar Lee Masters, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Robinson Jeffers, Marianne Moore, T. S. Eliot, and E. E. Cummings. They wrote in an unexampled variety of poetic modes. This was also the period in which America produced its first great dramatist in Eugene O'Neill.

1939 to the Present, or C**ontemporary period.** The contemporary literary scene in America is crowded and varied, and these lists could readily be expanded. We must await the passage of time to determine which writers now active will emerge as enduringly major figures in the *canon* of American literature.

Keeping this history of American Literature in mind, an attempt has been made in this course to discuss some of the important authors and their texts starting from the Colonial period to the Modern. Although it is practically impossible to discuss American Literature in just a few units, the 15 units are carefully chosen to encompass the history of American literature and some representative texts to the best possible extent.

This course is divided into three Blocks. **Block 1** deals with the History of American Literature; **Block 2** deals with American Poetry and Drama; and **Block 3** shall deal with American Fiction.

BLOCK 1: INTRODUCTION

In Block 1 of this course, the four units will specifically deal with literary history and each of the other remaining units in the other two Blocks shall deal with individual American authors and his/her work.

Units 1 & 2: These units shall help us to understand how the Puritan ideas helped in developing American literature in its early stage. The early settlers in America were responsible both for the early American establishments and for the growth of early American literature. Thus, the idea of Puritan literature is integrally connected with the colonial era in American social history. Because, the early settlers, had a profound impact on American life, culture and society. From this unit, we shall get to know that Puritanism so deeply influenced America that no real understanding of American culture and literature is now possible without a good understanding of Puritanism.

Unit 3 & 4: These units shall help us you to understand how America as a nation was born as the result of the evolution of a new, topical, clear prose style in literature. Moreover, this unit also intends to offer you a brief idea of the Romantic age from 1828—1865. The period between 1828 and 1865 is generally known as the Romantic age in American literature. The authors during this period revolted against the cult of reason and good sense and were inspired by the English Romantics. The age is also roughly referred to as the American Renaissance and the Age of Transcendentalism. Literature during this period portrayed the love of wild American nature, of the past and the Orient.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in “LET US KNOW” along with the text. We have kept “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We strongly advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the “FURTHER READING” which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know the world of literature and criticism is too big, we strongly advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you read the original texts of the authors prescribed as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 1: PURITAN BEGINNINGS & FRONTIER EXPERIENCE (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 The Social Context

1.4 The Intellectual Context

1.5 Major Writers

- 1.5.1 Anne Dudley Bradstreet (1612-1773)
- 1.5.2 Edward Taylor (1642-1729)
- 1.5.3 Cotton Mather (1663-1728)
- 1.5.4 Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705)

1.6 Let us Sum up

1.7 Further Reading

1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.9 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss how the Puritan thinking/theology/vision influenced early American literature
- interpret the subtleties of the early colonial period of American history
- identify the major American writers of the colonial period
- discuss the social atmosphere and the intellectual setting of the period

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of the course on American literature. In this unit, we shall try to know how the early American colonies were established based on the Puritans' involvement in early American establishments. Besides, we shall also get to know about the involvement of the early English

colonists in the growth of early American literature. Thus, the idea of Puritan literature is integrally connected to what we may call the colonial era in American social history. Christopher Columbus discovered the American continent in 1492, but the first English colony came up in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607, more than hundred years later. In 1620, the second group the 'Pilgrim Fathers' arrived by Mayflower and founded the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts. Later, a string of thirteen colonies came up along the Atlantic sea-board, which grew in complete isolation, without each other's knowledge. The early settlers, the Puritans, had a profound impact on American life, culture and society. They had the aim to purify the human mind and the English Church and Church worship to restore it to its earlier 'pure' state. They were completely against the elaborate rituals of the English Church, as they believed that the Holy Bible carried the exact words of the almighty and people must follow the Bible. Their philosophy of life turned out to be a dominant factor influencing American life, thought and literature. Puritanism so deeply influenced America that no real understanding of American culture and literature is now possible without a good understanding of Puritanism. Let us, in this unit, now discuss the role of Puritan ideas in developing American literature in its early stage of development with reference to the important American writers who emerged out of the social and intellectual contexts of the time.

1.3 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

When the early settlers reached the shore of America, they discovered virgin forests, unexplored land, and vast expanses of wilderness, and started believing that God had purposefully sent them to this blessed land. Contending that there is one God who rules the world, these Puritans believed that they were 'the selected few' chosen by the Almighty to establish a state based on the teaching of the Bible. The Puritans associated themselves with the ancient Jews and believed that just like the Jews in the Old Testament; they were persecuted for their religion. They also believed in one true God and in the notion that they were the chosen people to establish the New Jerusalem. Like Moses, the Puritan Fathers took the

charge of cleaning spiritual corruption by crossing the sea and establishing forms of governments in New England with new laws.

New England Puritans were archaic by choice, conviction and circumstances. Life was not easy for them. They worked hard to make a living and encountered both misfortunes and tragic failures. The native Indians also helped them through the severe natural situations. They struggled hard to survive. These people were highly optimistic. They offered themselves a sense of purpose, ideal beliefs, new theories regarding religion and governments to scrutinize those and voice them. These people infused in the early Americans a sense of duty towards their religion, nation and fellow men. They taught the idea of judging others not by their births but by their deeds, and thereby to be good always; to help them and to lead a life of Puritan values of self-denial, discipline, and hard work. The Puritans were Christians and opposed to the concept of hierarchy. Therefore, the laws in New England included the Biblical injunction against drunkenness, adultery, murder, and theft with an aim to regulate the religion and morality of the people. The 17th century Puritan colony of New England was not a dull one, but fully involved in profitable trades that led to a social life where consumption of alcohol was quite common. However, those educated also read religious as well as secular literature.

The settlers in America had their own reasons to exploit the rich resources of the virgin lands, meet their practical needs like shifting people to reduce the burden of resources on their own land, displace a troublesome population (those accused of religious persecution in Europe) to a 'distant land'. Also came with the early settlers slaves from Africa who were forced to work on cotton and sugar plantations. Before the early settlers touched the shores of North America, the tribal North Indians were the inhabitants of the land. They were nomadic but some led a settled life doing agriculture on vast pieces of land. These people accepted the Europeans who had settled among them, amidst occasional conflicts between the two groups.



LET US KNOW

The United States of America was born out of religious controversies; out of the desire to exploit the rich resources of the continent; out of the desire of the rulers to expand empires; out of the human yearning for land and adventure and to save shifting surplus populations. The process began with exploration and colonisation. Interestingly, records by explorers, traders, settlers, about their hopes, adventures, disasters and triumphs created a literature that was large, various and rich. Therefore, the story of American literature began long before the nation was born. Besides, the oral literature of Native Americans, of the earliest writers began with explorers like Captain John Smith who established Jamestown in 1607. He described his experiences in a book like *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England and the Summer Isles* (1624). Soon, New England saw the emergence of literatures, which were basically sermons, histories, autobiographies and poems. Then, started the great century of Puritan literature, which reflected life that it saw as an unremitting moral struggle.

For the Americans, the frontier would always be a liberal and mythical place. Even as the early settlers struggled against a harsh landscape to create new homes themselves, a variety of thinkers sought to present their frontier as a figurative place where pioneers could make themselves into whatever they wanted to be. Certain ideas associated with the frontier like self-reliance, individualism, regeneration, or democracy were designed to portray a young America as a place where one's future was absolutely a matter of what one was willing to make of it.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What were the initial reasons of the Settlers to arrive in America?

Q 2: What were the real intensions of the Puritans in colonising parts of America?

1.4 THE INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

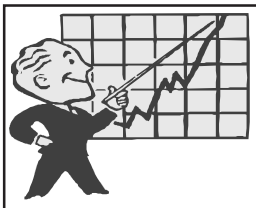
The history of American literature begins long before the present day nation was born. The Native Americans had oral literature of their own, and like many other literatures, they evolved from its humble origins that began with letters, sermons, diaries, notebooks, journals, travel books, etc. The literature of the early settlers in New England or the Colonial period is of great historic and literary significance. During this period, personal literature occupied a key position. The earliest writers were either interested in exploring spirituality or the land. Though they closely followed the English tradition, their literature depicting the dangerous adventures, hardships, sufferings into the building of a nation forms a significant chapter of American intellectual and literary history.

Puritanism had a profound effect in varying degrees on American social culture, political thinking and literature. As far as American literature is concerned, Puritanism permeated several aspects like American literature being the literary expression of the pure idealism of the Puritans; literature as the reflection of the Puritans' metaphysical mode of perception, which shaped the American literary symbolism; simplicity in the style of writing and so on. You will note that the Puritans were god-fearing people who wanted to live in a world of perfect order. The idea had an impact on the early American writers like Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman and others. The literature of this period, which mainly comprised sermons, diaries, biographies, religious poems, etc., centred on the glorification of the Lord. Two very common themes in early American writings of the Puritan period were idealism, which was both religious as well as political; and pragmatism, which was characterised by practicality and common purposes (of glorifying God).

Puritanism also contributed towards American literary symbolism. To the religious Puritans, the physical world depended on the spiritual. In the works of the early writers like William Bradford, Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards and Emerson, one discerns a deep spiritual involvement in their works, which later evolved into symbolism in the able hands of Hawthorne,

Melville and Poe. The early writing style in early American literature is characterised by simplicity. The writers had distaste for any kind of projection of sensual beauty. Thus, the writings of the early settlers were fresh, simple, plain and honest. Even the metaphors they used beautifully explained their views. Therefore, the form of the novel was absent as a genre, and non-fictional prose, especially biography, was the most popular form of literature. In a way, Puritan writings of the Colonial era reflected the nature, character and mental scope of the early American reading public who were well-educated with a good knowledge of religion.

Literary output of the early settlers in New England of the colonial period was scanty since they were busy in waging a relentless war against nature and the native tribes. Moreover, the explorer-cum-writers were English, who had left Europe a long time ago. They looked to the English for inspiration. Only after independence, the world of literature in America started taking a new turn.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: How did Puritanism leave a profound effect on American intellectual minds?

Q 4: How did the Puritan writers contribute to the emergence and growth of American literature?

1.5 MAJOR WRITERS

In this section, we will look at some of the important authors who contributed immensely to the development of American Literature in the Puritan period.

1.5.1 Anne Dudley Bradstreet (1612-1773)

Anne Dudley Bradstreet was the earliest of the Puritan New England poets (America's first published poet) and the first notable poet in America. Closely modelled on the works of English poets like Sydney and Spenser, her works deal with her own feelings and experiences, and her lyrics remained unsurpassed by any American

women writers for long 200 years until Emily Dickinson appeared in the literary scene. Her *The Tenth Muse Lately Spring Up in America* (1650) was the first published collection of poems composed by a settler in the English colonies. The book consists of four long poems known as "The Four Elements", "The Four Humours of Man", "The Four Ages of Man" and "The Four Seasons". These poems were imitative in structure and were composed in heroic couplets. The volume received considerable attention in London with its first publication, especially due to its composition, which was simple and easy to read. The four poems are a series of orations— the first by earth, air, fire and water; the second by choler, blood, melancholy and phlegm; the third by childhood, youth, middle age and old age and the last by Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter. Each demonstrates the poet's mastery over physiology, anatomy, astronomy, Greek metaphysics and the concepts of medieval and Renaissance cosmology. Likewise, *The Four Monarchies* (a long unfinished poem within *The Tenth Muse*) describing the four great monarchies of civilisation namely Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, Roman, shows the poet's command over history. She was the first woman to be recognised as an accomplished New England poet, and is still considered to be one of the most important early American poets.

Anne never attended school, yet received an excellent education from her father Thomas Dudley, a widely read man who was a steward to the Earl of Lincoln. Anne herself did extensive reading. Virgil, Plutarch, Homer, Seneca, Spenser, Sidney, Milton, Raleigh, Hobbes and the Bible were some of her favourite writers. Her father encouraged her to read. She was married to Simon Bradstreet and immigrated to New England. However, she was quite unhappy in exchanging the comfort of the aristocratic life for a New England wilderness and primitiveness. While the family reached at Massachusetts Bay Colony, distressed by sickness, suffering, inadequate food, Anne admitted that her "heart rose" to protest

against the land. But, throughout her whole life, Anne remained a devout Puritan.

Her simple poetry reflects the tension she experienced between flesh and spirit, between emotion and religion as a Puritan as well as a woman writer. Her struggle to win over the issues like the pleasures of sensory and familial experience as a woman and her commitment to religion and promises of heaven are significant aspects of her poetry, which grew intensely as she matured. She composed her earliest poem when she was 19, accounting her traditional concerns as a true Puritan—the transience of life and hope of salvation—and by abiding by God's will. The fight between her love of the world and the desire to attain an eternal life can be felt everywhere, including her lyrical *Contemplation*, which, according to many critics, is her best poem.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What distinguishes Bradstreet as an important poet of the early phase of American literature?

1.5.2 Edward Taylor (1642-1729)

He is considered to be the most important poet to have appeared during the 17th and 18th century America. However, his poems were not published until 1930s. Taylor was a conservative Puritan minister of the Congregational Church at Massachusetts. His poems are replete with imageries drawn from the farms and the countryside of both England and New England, occasionally appearing in the Leicestershire dialect in his colloquial poems (Leicestershire being his supposed birthplace). For a brief period, he was a schoolteacher but his deep faith as a Protestant, which formed during his childhood and strengthened during Cromwell's regime, forbade him from teaching. In 1668, he sailed for Massachusetts. The poet's earliest verses composed in England

show his everlasting love for the Protestant cause and his anti-Roman and anti-Anglican mindset. The seventy days of long journey to Boston added to his impressive list of imageries to be used in his later poems. His perceptive observation of natural phenomena, of birds and fishes in his poetry is extraordinary.

He entered Harvard as the college butler in charge of kitchen utensils. The next three years of his life were busy with recitations, disputations, lectures in Latin with daily morning and evening prayers at Harvard. He studied Greek, Hebrew, logic, metaphysics, rhetoric and astronomy. He composed poetry, especially elegies, focusing more on wit and wordplay than genuine feelings. In a debate at Harvard, defending in verse the value of English language against three ancient languages, namely, Hebrew, Greek and Latin, he displayed an interesting aspect of his personality—an astonishing verbal wit. After graduation in 1671 from Harvard, Taylor left the campus. He became minister to a small farming community in Westfield where he spent the rest of his life. He died in 1729, and was buried in Westfield. His tombstone is engraved with a face of an angel.

By 1682, Taylor had started composing his major poems. Poems like Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Bunyan's *The Holy War*, Wigglesworth's *The Day of Doom*, Lorenzo Scupoli's *The Spiritual Conflict* served as models for his poems. In justifying God's ways to man, Taylor used a homely, colloquial style. Taylor's poems deal with spiritual combat between the soul and Satan in allegorical ways. *God's Determinations Touching His Elect*, a dramatic allegory, displays his religious beliefs as a Calvinist in Predestination, Creation, Nativity, Original Sin and Redemption through God; the notion of segregating humanity into two groups—the damned and the elect and joys of divine salvation. Though the poem missed the universal appeal of *Paradise Lost*, it is the best long poem composed in 17th century America with various meters and styles unified by a single theme.

In 1682, Taylor composed his greatest work, *Preparatory Meditations before My Approach to the Lord's Supper*, a series of some two hundred poems not discovered until the 20th century. Today recognised as a major poetic achievement of colonial America, the poem provides an understanding of the religious as well as psychological history of the age. Some of the poems, though they have little poetic worth with dull diction and repetitive themes, resemble the themes dealt with by the English metaphysical poets. Taylor was highly influenced by the Anglican poet and Minister George Herbert. In his diction, Taylor successfully combined the colloquial with the cosmic like Donne. His occasional rhetorical style was derived from King James Version of the Bible. Though not at his best like Donne and Herbert in meditations, Taylor composed more than two hundred meditations dealing with love—divine love of Almighty for man; human love; man's love for Christ and the poet's love for the Almighty. However, there is a hidden tone of despair in his meditations—despair that emerges out of his concern for the sins of humankind as well as his own ones. He composed an untitled poem of some 20,000 lines, which was later named *A Metrical History of Christianity* by the publisher. The poem deals with the suffering and persecutions of Christians from the beginning to the 12th century.

Taylor continued composing poetry until his last days. In his final years, Taylor was ill and composed some moving poems. His elegies to his wife and Samuel Hooker are successful exercises in the genre.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Briefly comment on Edward Taylor's Poetry.

1.5.3 Cotton Mather (1663-1728)

The third in a distinguished family of American congregational ministers and authors, Cotton Mather lived all his life in Boston. He became one of the most celebrated of all New England puritans and the most remarkable authors in the whole range of American letters with over 400 works to his credit. He entered Harvard at 12, and having already mastered Latin and Greek, he devoted completely to studies and prayer. At 18, he got his Master's degree, conferred by his father, the president of the college. He preached his first sermon in his father's church in 1680. In 1685, he was formally ordained. His father Increase Mather was a leading divine whereas his grandfathers—Richard Mather and John Cotton were the colony's spiritual founders and thus Cotton Mather was the object of great expectations. Mather devoted his entire life to praying, preaching, writing books and pamphlets and publishing them. He came into political limelight in 1689, during America's Glorious Revolution when the Bostonians deposed the royal governor Sir Edmund Andros.



LET US KNOW

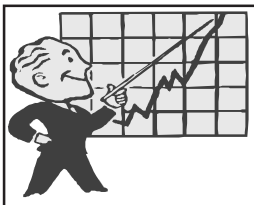
Mather combined a rare blend of mystical beliefs with modern scientific quest. While he believed in the existence of witchcraft, he also advocated small pox inoculation, a stand that earned him the antipathy of many of his neighbours. His reform efforts included pleas to educators to inspire students with rewards and not punishment. His interest in new medical theories distinguishes him from his contemporaries. His inoculation activities, which earned him membership in the Royal Society of London in 1713, made him the first American to be so honoured. He corresponded with notable scientists like Henry More, William Derham, John Roy, Thomas burnet, William Whiston, Sir Isaac Newton, Robert

Boyle and others. He fought against the united opposition of Boston's physicians during the epidemic of 1721 for the small pox vaccine. Mather represents the best of early Enlightenment thinkers in colonial America. However, his belief, similar to most of the educated men of his time about Devil and people giving away their souls for black powers of witchcraft, tarnished his reputation. His publication 'Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possession' (1689) witnessed public interest. He was firm in prosecuting accused witches.

His contribution to Colonial American literature is enormous, which deals with various contemporary debates—religious, historical, biographical, political and scientific. His magnum opus *Magnalia Christi Americana* or *The Ecclesiastical History of New England* (1702), is an epic church history from the founding of New England to his time, written after the sensational Salem Witchcraft case that weakened the Church. The book was a timely warning against too much authority of the Church by a staunch defender of Puritan orthodoxy and conscience. Many readers found an extended ecclesiastical history of New England (popular in its earlier days) difficult to accept later, which commemorated the author's constant interpellation of judgements and comments. His *Manuductio ad Ministerium* (1726) was a handbook for young graduates about to enter the ministry— on doing good, on college love affairs, on poetry, music and style.

The humanitarianism of Cotton Mather is best found in his ambitious twenty year work on Biblical learning which was only interrupted by his death—*Bonifacius* or *Essays to Do Good* (1710). The book is not a mere collection of pious utterances but provides a set of instructions on humanitarian acts, and introduces ideas that are far ahead of his age—the schoolmaster rewarding rather than punishing students to teach, the physician studying psychology of the patient to understand the probable cause of illness, etc. He

established societies for communities and urged people to improve the community. Benjamin Franklin acknowledged the profound influence the *Essays to do Good* had upon him. Mather's *Christian Philosopher* (1721) is a philosophical, scientific attempt to recognize God in the wonders of the earth and the universe beyond. His representative work *The Wonders of the Invisible World*' (1693) is New England's official defence of the court's procedures. His autobiography *Paterna* throws light on his nature but *The Diary of Cotton Mather* (Volume I, II and III) provide the best insight into the man. His Diary is a Puritan document par excellence focussing on him as a tool of divine guidance in the world. His Diary reveals his 'down to earth' nature; a modest man, a doting son, a loving father, an affectionate husband and a caring pastor. His *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) and *Journey into Northern Pennsylvania and the State of New York* (1801) served as major contributions to the European interpretation of American society. During his time, **Mather's** essay 'What is an American' was considered one of the most influential single reports on America ever written.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Write in short about Mather's significance in the context of American literature?

1.5.4 Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705)

One of the most popular of early New England poets, a diarist and sermon writer, Michael Wigglesworth was born in England, probably in Yorkshire in 1631 to Edward and Esther Wigglesworth who made the voyage to Charlestown in 1638 seeking religious freedom in the Colonies and later settled in New Haven Connecticut. Michael had a very strict Puritan parentage. He came to America with his parents at the age of seven, lived in New Haven until he entered Harvard from where he graduated in 1651 and remained a

tutor for three years, counting among his students John Eliot and Increase Mather. While at Harvard, Wigglesworth had a profound religious experience, which led him to leave medicine and peruse divinity. He moved to Malden Church, Massachusetts in 1654 and began preaching, but not formally ordained till two years later in 1656. Meanwhile his father passed away and the son paid a warm tribute to his father's self-sacrificing and pious trust and life-long devotion to service to the ministry in his autobiography. Wigglesworth, a man of small stature, seemed to have inherited a feeble constitution, which delayed his ordination and frequently interrupted his ministry.

Wigglesworth's first work *The Day of Doom* deservedly remains his best known and most widely read work. With its first publication in 1662, the book attained phenomenal success among the readers of the time and for the next century; it held a secure place in Puritan household. Cast in familiar, jingling ballad meter, *The Day of Doom* is a collection of poems on the themes of salvation and damnation with an aim to remind the New Englanders the doctrine of righteousness. Addressing the readers poetically, the prayers are composed in simple verse to make his points easy to remember. However, throughout this collection, it is basically a Puritan doctrine that he elaborates. By modern standards, the poem might seem harsh but readers have to keep in mind that it was the period of newly expanding theology among Puritan Americans. To many critics today, Wigglesworth was a morbid fanatic but the poetry collection holds its place not for any poetic merit but for its discourse on Puritan psychology and doctrine.

His next major work, *Meat out of the Eater*, a less popular work among modern readers, proves Wigglesworth to be a poet of greater breadth and skill with its variety of tone and style. Poems in this volume are personal in focus, revealing the poet's experiences with sin and suffering. But what attracts modern critics much is his 'Diary' written between 1653 and 1657 focussing his inner struggles,

while handling ministry, his marriage, his suffering and anger due to his knowledge of physical as well as spiritual weaknesses. Both his collection of poems—*The Day of Doom* (1662), *Meat Out of the Eater* (1670)—were popular, saw success, and were also reprinted, revised and memorised by generations of New England Puritans.

Wigglesworth is a significant figure and one of Colonial America's foremost religious poets. By the 19th century his plain style, harsh religious Calvinistic doctrine and no real poetic appeal or attribute interested no more critics and scholars. However, despite his literary shortcomings, *The Day of Doom* has earned the title of America's first best-seller, circulating 1800 copies during the first year of publication in 1662. It went through ten editions in the next fourteen decades. Even today, many readers regard it as the best official statement of a Puritan's attempt to apply poetry with the purpose to exhibit his beliefs and lead a life by those. Though to modern readers, his works on Puritan themes may be challenging and are not comfortable due to strict Calvinistic undertones, no one can ignore the significance of Wigglesworth's achievement-associated with the development of Puritan thoughts in America.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: State the significance of Wigglesworth's "The Day of Doom."



1.6 LET US SUM UP

By this time, we have realised that the Colonial or Puritan age of American literature spans the time between the establishment of the first settlement at Jamestown to the outbreak of the American Revolution till the colonists felt a sense of nationalism. The early works in the Puritan colonies were mainly religious that set forth the colonists' views, to defend and promote their visions of religion. Even histories like Cotton Mather's epic

Magnalia Christi Americana (1702) had religious overtones. Puritan poetry was offered to the service of the Almighty. Michael Wigglesworth's *Day of Doom* (1662) was totally theological while Anne Bradstreet's poetry reflected her own piety. Sermons were hugely popular until Calvinism found its last utterance in Jonathan Edwards. The gems of the colonial age who managed without any theological shadow in their writing were Edward Taylor and William Byrd. Taylor's works remained unpublished until two centuries after his death while Byrd's *History* received poor reviews from the target audience.



1.7 FURTHER READING

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1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Many reasons… …some came with a secular venture… …some came to make money in the virgin land… …but majority arrived with a religious aim... …some came to save themselves from bloody religious persecution in England… …some to follow their faith without any compromise... …some to promote true religion in the American wilderness... ...some came to reform, purify and establish Church in America, rejecting the Church of England.

Ans to Q 2: The Puritans came with an intention of settling not of simply exploring the land… …wanted to leave their mark… …create history… …make a place of their own.

Ans to Q 3: Puritanism was a political, social, cultural, intellectual force… ...Puritan age in America lasted upto 1728 till the country came away from just depending on religion as the primary force to growing on economic front... …however religious thoughts and a high sense of Puritan morality continued to influence the American writers.

Ans to Q 4: The native American literature was mostly oral… …consisted of myths… ...but the Puritan Literature had historical values as they record social, intellectual and political growth of the country… ...Puritan authors had a profound effect on subsequent generations born on the land.

Ans to Q 5: Bradstreet's maturity increased with each of her poems expressing her personal feelings… …many of her later poems show impressive intelligence and mastery of the poetic form… …she tried hard to handle the lofty style of the already established male poets, though she is known today for her expressions on issues like faith, grace, and salvation.

Ans to Q 6: His poems deal with the spiritual conflict between the soul and Satan in allegorical ways… …*God's Determinations Touching His*

Elect displays his religious beliefs as a Calvinist in Predestination, Creation, Nativity, Original Sin and Redemption through God… …*Preparatory Meditations before My Approach to the Lord's Supper* is yet another collection of some two hundred poems not discovered until the 20th century.

Ans to Q 7: Without Mather's contributions, Puritan literature of America would have been much poorer… …he was a tragic figure… …his influence on literature was immense but his efforts were confined to his Massachusetts society that no longer exited… …he was one of the outstanding leaders of the early New England Puritan theocracy… … Mather became the symbol of Puritan doctrine—the symbol of an orthodox mindset doomed to fail.

Ans to Q 8: *The Day of Doom* is based on the themes of salvation and damnation… …aim was to remind the New Englanders the doctrine of righteousness, a Puritan doctrine… …*The Day of Doom* is regarded as the best official statement of a Puritan's attempt to apply poetry with the purpose to exhibit his beliefs and lead a life by those.



1.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What are the important aspects of the works of the American authors of the Colonial period? Discuss with reference to at least two of the authors.

Q 2: What does the literature of the Colonial period reflect on the early American aspiration and values?

Q 3: Discuss the contributions of the Puritan authors towards the growth and development of early American literature.

Q 4: Discuss the various social and intellectual contexts of the early literature of America with special reference to one or two authors and their works.

Q 5: Mention some of the important Puritan authors and discuss the Puritan elements expressed in their works.

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UNIT 2: PURITAN BEGINNINGS & FRONTIER EXPERIENCE (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Major Writers

- 2.3.1 William Bradford (1590-1657)
- 2.3.2 Thomas Godfrey (1736-1763)
- 2.3.3 Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)
- 2.3.4 Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)
- 2.3.5 William Byrd II (1674-1744)

2.4 Influences on Later Writers

2.5 Let us Sum up

2.6 Further Reading

2.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

2.8 Possible Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- identify some of the other important authors of the Puritan period
- discuss the contributions of these writers
- find out how the Puritan authors, had influenced American literature as well as its culture so deeply

2.2 INTRODUCTION

We shall read this unit as part of the previous unit. In this unit, we shall read about some of the other important American writers of the Colonial period whom we could not include in the previous unit. We shall have to note that the early English colonists were mostly Puritans who came either to escape religious persecution at homeland or to exercise their faith in a free land. Not until the 1760s, these people started to claim America as

their land and call themselves Americans, distinguishing from their European ancestors. With the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the United States of America was legally born as an independent nation. After many conflicts with the French and English on the issues of territories, in 1789, George Washington became the first elected President and after two years, Washington DC was recognised as the nation's capital. In the previous unit, we have already looked at the social and intellectual history of the colonial period in American literature with reference to some of the authors. However, as we finish reading this unit, we shall also be able to identify some other important authors and examine how they influenced the formation of American literature and culture in the days to come.

2.3 MAJOR WRITERS

The following are some of the other important authors from the Colonial American literature who deserve critical attention.

2.3.1 William Bradford (1590-1657)

Born in a small farming community of Austerfield, Yorkshire in 1590, William Bradford was one of the founders of Plymouth Colony in 1620. He was a signatory of the Mayflower Compact, writer of 'Of Plymouth Plantation' (1651), the most interesting of the narrators of Puritan histories on European settlement in the New World.

With no formal education, Bradford was a self-educated man who had learned several languages, including Hebrew with a purpose to "see with his own eyes the ancient oracles of God in their native beauty." A deeply pious man, Bradford possessed innate literary merit. His active role in the Mayflower voyage to Plymouth, framing the Mayflower Compact, establishing Plymouth Colony and his responsibilities as the governor for long thirty years made him ideally suited to be the first historian of his colony. Form 1630 he started writing a vivid account of the early settlement of the Plymouth Colony known as *Of Plymouth Plantation*, which was published in 1856.

Around 1630, Bradford started compiling his second volume of *Plymouth Plantation*. It was the first work of the period in its tendency to separate religion from secular concerns. Unlike orthodox Puritans, authors of the colony of that time, Bradford never interpreted temporal affairs as the inevitable unfolding of God's wish or great providential plan. Leaving behind the dogmatic temper and religious enthusiasm of the contemporary Puritans, Bradford headed for a middle path for the Plymouth colony between the Holy Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the tolerant secular community of Rhode Island. His History also recorded the first written document of Colonial self-governance in the New England—the 'Mayflower Compact' at a time when the pilgrims were still on board the ship. No doubt, the Mayflower Compact was the harbinger of the Declaration of Independence which was to arrive a century and half later. With the just, clear and compelling description of the first view of the colony's beginning, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (1651) has been a unique source of information about early America, the Puritans' voyage and the challenges the early settlers faced. Today, it is regarded as one of the most important early chronicles of the settlement of New England written "in plain style, with singular regard to the simple truth in all things".



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: State the significance of William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*.

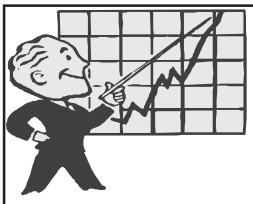
2.3.2 Thomas Godfrey (1736-1763)

Born on his family's farm in Bristol Township, Thomas Godfrey, the American poet-cum-playwright became apprenticed to a watchmaker after his father's early death. He was left to the care of his relations. He had an English education but showed a strong inclination towards poetry and painting. However, he ended up becoming a watchmaker. He devoted himself to the study of

polite letters in his private hours. With great zeal, he read and wrote several poetical scraps, which were later published in the 'American Magazine' and accepted well. He also entered the military services in the Pennsylvanian forces for the campaign expedition against Fort Duquesne. However, while on the frontiers, he composed a poetical epistle addressing a friend. At the end of the expedition, he went to North Carolina and lived there for three years. He engaged in mercantile transactions. During this period, he composed a tragedy in blank verse to be presented at Philadelphia, but he met with several disappointments in business and came back to North Carolina. A few weeks after his arrival, he felt feverish occasioned by riding into the country on a very hot day. He died of this illness on 3rd August 1763. He was only 27.

He was recognised as a colonial playwright and poet and was a significant member of a small intellectual circle in Philadelphia. He was also a founding member of Benjamin Franklin's 1727 Junto club and served as the director of the Library Company of Philadelphia from its establishment in 1731. In 1743, the American Philosophical Society listed him as "Mathematician". *The Court Of Fancy* (1762), his most notable volume of poetry, offers the most favourable example of his poetic merits. The poem shows the influence of both Chaucer and Pope. The design is drawn from Chaucer's *House of Fame* but his art of description is noteworthy. The images are carefully selected and are in perfect harmony with the verse. In 1765 appeared *Juvenile Poems on Various Subjects*, Godfrey's posthumous collection of early works, including his famously known romantic tragedy *Prince of Parthia* that was composed in 1759. It is believed to be the first attempt at dramatic composition in blank verse by a native born American. The work is known to be the earliest American tragedy to be professionally performed on stage at Southwark Theatre, Philadelphia in 1767. The five-act blank verse tragedy, based on Parthian history, is reminiscent of Shakespeare and Marlowe. Godfrey was only 22

when he finished the work. Though the tragedy was a complete failure with its heavy dialogues, stiff language, uninteresting characterisation, the poetical tragedy is the first important dramatic undertaking made in the colonies. The natural flow of poetry in *Court of Fancy* has proved as a work of high credit to American literature, giving much evidence of his distinct poetic power.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: Who is Thomas Godfrey?

Q 3: State why Godfrey's Prince of Parthia is important in American Colonial history?

2.3.3 Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

Jonathan Edwards, the American puritan theologian and philosopher, was born in East Windsor, Connecticut. Edward entered the Collegiate School at New Haven (known today as Yale University) and graduated four years later in 1720 as valedictorian. He stayed there to continue his studies in theology. He received his Master's later. Young Edward was unable to accept the Calvinist sovereignty of God and it appeared to him "a horrible doctrine". He believed in the inward communication of the soul with God and dedicated himself completely to Christ. He believed that God is innocent and man can regenerate. He had a symbolic way of looking at things—to him God created the world out of himself by diffusing Himself into time and space. Therefore, everything in the world is an image of God. In 1727, Jonathan Edwards was ordained minister at Northampton and appointed assistant minister to his maternal grandfather Solomon Stoddard. In the same year, he married Sarah Pierpont, a 17-year-old beautiful, witty girl and later they had eleven children.

Two years later, Edwards took charge of one of the largest and wealthiest congregations in the colony upon his grandfather's death, a position Edwards held for twenty long years. Throughout

this time in Northampton, he became a significant figure whose preaching brought two remarkable religious revivals in New England. The first revival was known as the "First Great Awakening", which took place during 1734 and 1735. The second awakening occurred in the early 1740s. These revivals were results of the flood of religious excitement in the colonies when people started realizing their sins. Edwards moved to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where he ministered a small congregation and served as a missionary to the Housatonic Indians. It was here that he returned to study and finished his celebrated work *The Freedom of the Will*. His last position was that of the President of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) in early 1758. He was a popular personality, as the most eminent American philosopher-theologian of his time. Edwards is seen as the last medieval man—a relic of Puritanism and also the first modern American for his vast knowledge of science lighted by Newton—one of the most influential men in Colonial America. Edwards was one of the greatest writers of pre-nineteenth century America. He is best known for his frightening, powerful sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741). His sermons had enormous impact and were somewhat dogmatic and medieval.

2.3.4 Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)

Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston, Massachusetts on 17th January 1706, the tenth son of a family of fifteen children. His father earned a living by making candles and soaps. Young Benjamin loved to read, hated his father's career, and later became an apprentice to his printer older brother. After helping his brother compose pamphlets and set type, young Ben sold their products on the streets. At 15, his brother brought out the first newspaper in Boston "The New England Courant". The other two newspapers in the city were reprinted news from abroad. "The New England Courant" had articles, opinions by the printer's friends, advertisements, news of ship schedules, etc. Benjamin had little formal education but he was an avid reader. Fearing rejection from his brother, Benjamin

began writing letters under the pseudonym of **Silence Dogood**, a fictional widow who was full with suggestions and very critical of the world around her. He wrote those letters at night and left those under the print shop door. They were a big hit and after publishing 16 letters, Ben confessed the truth. At this, his brother became jealous of Ben's growing fame. Unable to take any more harassment from his brother, Ben escaped to Philadelphia and found a job of an apprentice printer. By 17, he was a fully skilled printer. With this skill, he went to London and spent several months as a printer. Upon returning to Philadelphia, he borrowed some money and started his own printing business.

In 1929, Benjamin bought the newspaper 'Pennsylvania Gazette' which became a great success in the colonies. It was his most famous publication. He not only printed but contributed pieces and political cartoons to the paper; the cartoons being the first of their kind in America. Benjamin devoted himself to public good and initially gained acclaim for his organisation called Junto or the Leather Apron Club, a young working men's group dedicated to self and civic improvement. He became a public service man initiating a paid city-watch, a voluntary fire department, a library and the American Philosophical Society that promoted scientific as well as intellectual dialogues. Today, the American Philosophical Society is known as one of America's premier scholarly associations. He also joined the Masons. He became a busy social figure of the time.

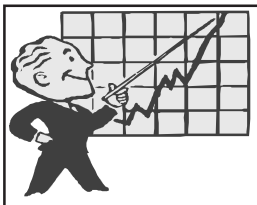
Benjamin Franklin was a scientist, remembered for the invention of bifocal glasses, swing fins, effective street lighting, lighting rod, a glass armonica, watertight bulkheads for ships and the wood stove. Much later inventors like Thomas A Edison and Alexander Graham Bell followed Benjamin's footsteps and helped to improve people's lives by inventing electricity and telephone. He was a man of many qualities and varied interests with a natural curiosity to know things around him and finding ways to make them work better. His *Autobiography* is the first of its kind in American literary history. It is one of the frankest of all personal records. With a comic tint in it, the Autobiography is today considered a model for

self-improvement. His famous publications were surely the *Pennsylvania gazette* and his very popular *Poor Richard's Almanac* (1732-1757). The latter expressed his sense of humour but never without moral advice. Franklin's prose style was clear, lucid and dignified. He was flexible, which came from his studying the virtues of the masters. He believed in the power of press, using his printing press as a means to bring news and views to the public. He used cartoons to express his new ideas to enable the laymen understand his thoughts. Benjamin's publication reflected his democratic spirit and advised his readers on issues like politics and philosophy. It was a hit with Benjamin's lively writing and witty aphorisms. Apart from the print shop, he also ran a bookstore, which was very enterprising.



LET US KNOW

In the 1750s, Benjamin Franklin started taking interest in politics. He was in England from 1757 to 1775 as a colonial representative. English thinkers, philosophers, artists, litterateurs, which America lacked, inspired the learner-cum-artist-cum-scientist in him. He believed in building a new nation and actively worked for American's independence and helped to draft the Declaration of Independence. He was a true statesman, one of the makers of the nation, considering his vital diplomatic role during the Revolution and the alliance with France. He served as a member of the Constitutional Convention and was elected President of the Pennsylvania Society for promoting the Absolution of Slavery. He died in 1790 at the age of 84. His funeral was attended by 20,000 people.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What is Silence Dogood?

Q 5: Why did Benjamin Franklin use Cartoons?

2.3.5 William Byrd II (1674—1744)

William Byrd II, born in 1674 in Westover, Virginia was a merchant, trader, planter and one of the first Americans to record his appreciation of the Vast American wilderness, linking the natural world to science, unlike the settlers during Byrd's early years, who disdained the wilderness. Young Byrd was lonely and unable to find a place for himself in England. He graduated in 1695, received his law degree from Middle Temple and joined the Bar where he developed a friendship with Sir Robert Southwell. His father's reputation helped him to become a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1697. On his father's death, he returned to Virginia, much against his wish. Upon his return, without any acquaintance in New England, he started suffering from identity crisis. He was unable to identify himself as an English man. However, his American compatriots valued him greatly, admired his reaction in Europe against the unpopular Governor Spotwood. In 1727, Byrd was appointed one of Virginia's boundary commissioners, experiences of which serve as the factual basis of his *History of the Dividing Lin*'. His literary works remained unknown until over 100 years after his demise. His ability to appreciate wilderness indicates refinement and good breeding.

Byrd's *History of the Dividing Line*, which established him as a significant historical figure, is based upon an actual journal that he kept during the surveying trip where he drew the boundary line between Virginia and North Carolina. Byrd maintained the journal regularly and faithfully from 1709. The journal with maps, illustrations, notes on the native flora and fauna along with his private memories served as the basis for his lively *History* in detailing the experiences and achievements of his troop into the heart of America. Byrd never planned to create a book from his accounts of the American wilderness; but with time, it took the shape of a prose work. It started as a long report of the expedition to the Board of Trade. When a friend showed interest in his adventures and difficulties in a letter,

the unexpected impression prompted him to send letters detailing experiences to some well-known educated friends in Europe. At last, he decided to craft a literary account—revealing the issues of his identity crisis as well as his perception of America and the American wilderness, the Indians and the half-savage whites.

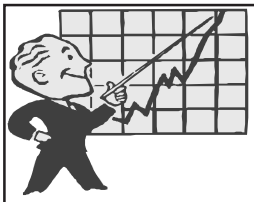
Thus came out the *History*, appreciating and celebrating the beauty of American wilderness, a work Byrd is best known for today. His writings show the great interest the Southerners took in the material world— land, plants, animals, Indians and settlers. His writings, full of irony and humour, were like fresh air in the world of colonial literature. The book stands apart from other texts of its age. The way he refers to America's wilderness in the romantic light is refreshing and beautiful and this makes it a significant American text. His interest in wild life, flora and fauna and their characteristics reveal a significant tone. The author believed that his project into the wilderness would prove an important step into the cultivation of the wilderness and provide a better understanding of the Americas and the nation. He considered himself as an explorer, first of the human race and probably the last to attempt it ever. Byrd was very critical of unsophisticated and lazy settlers in the border area— the North Carolinians. However, while writing the *History*, Byrd got a scope for the first time in life to assume all the positive qualities of 'Steddy'— the character representing his own self, which is at odds since his childhood. It provides for himself a solid sense of self-confidence, virtue and independence.



LET US KNOW

The early immigrants had settled in the southern colonies more due to economic opportunities than religious freedom. During that period, the Southern literature catered more to the aristocratic, secular and London readers representing the dominant social and economic systems of the Southern plantations. The Southerners were poor farmers

but the upper class was influenced by the classical, old world ideal for nobles served by slaves. The wealthy class could afford leisure and lead an aristocratic life amidst American wilderness whereas their Puritan contemporaries emphasised on education and hard work. The Southern feudal lords were highly moved by the ideal of the gentlemen who were equally good at managing a form and studying classical literature—a true Renaissance man in America.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Explain the important aspects of Byrd's *History of the Dividing Line.*

Q 7: In what ways were the colonies of Southern America different?

2.4 INFLUENCES ON LATER WRITERS

There is no doubt about the fact that American writing began with the work of English colonists and experiences in the New World aiming at the readers belonging to their country of origin, yet the large body of literature they produced has its significance even today. A good portion of these early works reached the level of literature that influenced later writers profoundly. The truthful account of adventures encountered by Captain John Smith who established Jamestown in his *Description of New England* (1616), the journalistic histories of William Bradford and William Byrd form interesting reading even today. Taylor's metaphysical verses are considered worthy of comparison with George Herbert whereas critics maintain Byrd's witty and urbane observations in his *History* as the best writing of the colonial period. The variously gifted Benjamin Franklin made America literature move a step forward not only by his literary works (his *Autobiography* is first of its kind in American literature) but by founding and promoting newspapers and periodicals.

Like any other colonial literature, American literature too imitated the form and technique of the mother-country. The only difference was the religious passion, frequent reference to Bible (for the authors, the great model of writing was the Bible which was also the model for their life) and the new environment that had given New England writing an identity of its own. Lack of books in the colonies and the rejection of English authors in New England cut themselves off form the finest lyrics and style of English literature. Writings by early colonial writers were already outdated in England but they proved a source of inspiration for the later writers who showed striking originality. Both Puritan authors and later writers of the colonial era who started relying heavily on reasoning and individualism had influenced the subsequent generations of American writers.

The early settlers, the pilgrims, had to fight for life—they were god-fearing but ambitious, hard working people who aspired for earthly success in life too. Life for the Puritans was a mixture of all these (earthly as well as eternal achievement) and they saw God's design rather than deeper spiritual meaning in every little object. In their secular achievement laid the community's success. This idea later influenced the transcendentalist authors deeply.



2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, and also in the previous unit, we have discussed in some details how American literature in the colonial times, came into formation as can be read through its social and intellectual history of the period. We have learnt that the early settlers, mostly known as the Puritans, had reached the shore of America, discovered the virgin forests and unexplored land mass with its vast wilderness, and started believing that God had purposefully sent them to this blessed land. Like Moses, the Puritan Fathers took the charge of cleaning spiritual corruption by crossing the sea and establishing forms of governments in New England with new laws. We have learnt that important writers like Edward Taylor, Cotton Mather, Michael

Wigglesworth, with their outstanding contributions shaped what we today call the social and intellectual history of American literature in the Colonial period. The Great Awakening in American literature finally brought about the following changes in Puritan theology—it stressed the emotional part of religion, wreaked institutional supremacy, rejected doctrinal orthodoxy, made religion more popular, flexible and democratic in nature, and most importantly it made religion trans-colonial.



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2.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Form 1630, Bradford started writing a vivid account of the early settlement of the Plymouth Colony known as *Of Plymouth Plantation…* …it is the first work of the period in its tendency to separate religion from secular concerns.

Ans to Q 2: A colonial playwright and poet… …a significant member of a small intellectual circle in Philadelphia… …Founding member of Benjamin Franklin's 1727 Junto club… … director of the Library Company of Philadelphia since its establishment in 1731… …the American Philosophical Society listed him as "Mathematician".

Ans to Q 3: *Prince of Parthia* is a Romantic tragedy… …the first attempt at dramatic composition in blank verse by a native born American… …the earliest American tragedy to be professionally performed on stage at Southwark Theatre, Philadelphia… …The five-act blank verse tragedy, based on Parthian history, is reminiscent of the works of Shakespeare and Marlowe.

Ans to Q 4: Silence Dogood is the pen name under which Benjamin Franklin wrote some important letters… …The name referred to a fictional widow who was full with suggestions and very critical of the world around her… …he wrote those letters at night and left them under the print shop door… …they were a big hit and after publishing

Ans to Q 5: Because, he believed in the power of press, using his printing press as a means to bring news and views to the public. He used cartoons to express his new ideas to enable the laymen understand his thoughts.

Ans to Q 6: *History* celebrates the beauty of American wilderness… …also show the great interest the Southerners took in the material world—land, plants, animals, Indians and settlers… …references made to

America's wilderness in the romantic light is refreshing and beautiful… …his interest in wild life, flora and fauna and their characteristics reveal a significant tone as it provides a better understanding of the Americas and the nation.

Ans to Q 7: Some early immigrants had settled in the southern colonies more due to economic opportunities than religious freedom… …the Southern literature catered more to the aristocratic, secular and London readers representing the dominant social and economic systems of the Southern plantations… …the Southerners were poor farmers but the upper class was influenced by the classical, old world ideal for nobles served by slaves… …the Southern feudal lords were highly moved by the ideal of the gentlemen who were equally good at managing a form and studying classical literature—a true Renaissance man in America.



2.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How did the writings of the puritan authors in early Period of Colonial literature contribute towards the growth of American literature? Discuss.

Q 2: How would you judge the significance of William Bradford as an early American writer?

Q 3: How did Benjamin Franklin emerge as a writer in Colonial America? Discuss with reference to some of his important works.

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UNIT 3: TRANSCENDENTALISM AND AMERICAN MODERNISM (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 The Social Context

3.4 The Intellectual Context

3.5 Let us Sum up

3.6 Further Reading

3.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.8 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the literary, social, and cultural influences of authors in American Literature from 1800 to 1945
- assess the intellectual contexts of American literature of the period mentioned.
- discuss the philosophy of transcendentalism of 1830 which is an outcome of the influence of American romanticism and the transcendentalists of the period

3.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the third unit of Block 1 of the course on American literature. As we already have an impression, this unit deals with the history of American literature that traverses through Transcendentalism and ends with American modernism. This unit will help in understanding how America as a nation was born as the result of the evolution of a new, topical, clear prose style in literature. Moreover, this unit also intends to offer you a brief idea of the Romantic age from 1828-1865 (American Literature to American Modernism). Attempts will also be made to discuss the social as well as intellectual background of this age and explore the contributions of the major

American authors during this period. The period between 1828 and 1865 is generally known as the Romantic age in American literature. The authors during this period revolted against the cult of reason and good sense and were inspired by the English Romantics. The democratic spirit was congenial to the rise of romanticism in America. The age is also roughly referred to as the American Renaissance or the age of Transcendentalism. As we finish reading this unit, we shall have learnt that literature during this period portrayed the love of wild American nature, of the past and the Orient. Romanticism helped in shaping the ideas, mindset, thoughts and ideals of the people, especially the young American authors.

3.3 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

Till the early years of the 17th century, the process of settling down in New England was on and the whole of America had been colonised. The Enlightenment had already made its mark in American literature through political writings and through works of authors emphasizing logic and sense rather than religion. Benjamin Franklin had been a major influence. During the period, the establishment of Harvard University enabled youths to exchange views, ideas and beliefs, publication of newspapers, journals and periodicals. The social, political, economic, religious, cultural issues of the period were conducive to the birth of a nation and growth of a sense of nationalism. The Loyalists continued to be loyal to the British Crown and the Republicans wished independence from the oppressive British rule for the colonies to be within the framework of a strong Federation. Some ten thousand pamphlets were published in this period in a span of twenty years. The result was the evolution of a prose style, which was entirely topical, simple, easy to follow for the masses, yet forceful and clear for both intellectuals and laymen. In the works of these poets, orators and prose writers, democracy found its true voice and some of the significant documents of the nation's history were also authored. Thomas Paine, the most gifted prose writer of the Revolutionary age wrote 'Commonsense' with a strong plea to revolt against the tyrannical English monarchs. Then, Thomas Jefferson, a scholar and statesman, authored "The Declaration of

Independence" that was adopted in the Continental Convention in 1776. Alexander Hamilton wrote 'The Federalist' in defence of the constitution, which served the source of the Constitution. Finally, in 1787, the US Constitution was drafted and in 1789, it was ratified. The early national age (1775—1828) witnessed the foundation of a literature that was truly American. It followed the English style but had significantly distinct themes, characters, backgrounds—which were authentically American. Independent of its British counterparts, the American poetry made a distinct mark on its own.



LET US KNOW

Transcendentalism (1840-1855), which is an offshoot of Romanticism (1800-1855), held the view that intuition and conscience would transcend experience. The transcendentalists brought out a new idea that one who follows intuition and remains faithful to personal vision becomes a more moral, idealistic individual. Thus, many of them were critical about things that were 'evil' and wanted to bring a positive change in the society. Transcendentalism also was the force behind the abolition of slavery.

Many literary figures of the time who belonged to Concord exerted a formidable influence on American cultural life throughout the 19th century. The Transcendentalist Club, established by Ripley and Emerson in 1836, tried to connect diverse minds from different places that believed in transcendentalism and thus gave a chance to be in one place with the best of American thought and art.

The mid-19th century was a period of great civil turmoil and unrest in America. The age witnessed the emergence of a new, proud, and self-confident nation. The public was interested in socio-cultural issues and wanted to find an answer to the political unrest and economic upheaval of the time. The literature of the period was national in its outlook, showing intense loyalty of the authors to the national flag. There was a rapid expansion of the means of communication, which linked all sections of the

state. There was progress in both agriculture and commerce. American ships were on all seas carrying American merchandise. While the North America industrialised rapidly, the South predominantly grew tobacco and cotton, which resulted in a conflict between the North and South that ended in the Civil War.

The Civil War and its aftermath are known as the National Period II in American history when the nation emerged more powerful, more united and more proud with President Lincoln. There occurred profound legal changes during this time, making it a significant era in American legal history. The war on the question of slavery from 1861—1865 ended with the defeat of the South under the able leadership of President Abraham Lincoln. Another significant development of the period was the rise of American democracy. 'Liberty, fraternity and equality' of the French Revolution inspired the Americans. Lincoln offered the classic definition of democracy as "the government of the people, for the people and by the people".

With the increase of wealth, towns and cities sprang up. The increase in the number of quality educational institutions was the most distinctive feature of the time with Cambridge and Boston becoming the seats of learning. Boston, over a period grew into a city of art, culture, literature and theology. Even the South had Charleston, its only literary centre. In addition, New York became the noted industrial as well as cultural centre of America. New York's wealth contributed to the growth of the publishing industry. At the same time, there was an advent of many newspapers. With the growth and spread of trade and industrial prosperity, the standard of living rose and a commercial class came up. Thus, the social and economic lives of the people grew richer. Eventually, they developed interest in philosophy, literature, science and issues related to education, the rights of the poor, of women, of prisoners, etc. The age also experienced a craving for amusement. Theatre groups sprung up in the cities and later the infant American theatre grew up to be a nation-wide success. Following the Civil War, the modern American literature entered into a different period altogether—the age of realism. It was the era of common man and the focus was on their lives and aspirations. Rapid industrialisation, urbanisation

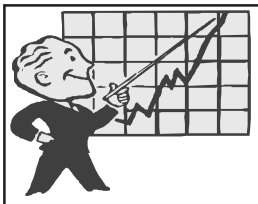
and individualistic society caused anxiety, ennui, boredom, a sense of loneliness, etc., which were the characteristics of the age.

Between 1914 and 1929, the nation entered into another phase—the modern era—and great changes occurred in the state. The Americans were devastated by World War I, the Great Depression and World War II. They saw many great leaders during this time that very ably dealt with issues like depression, war, etc. and managed to keep the American ideals intact. However, unlike the earlier tumults that crisscrossed the lives of the Americans, this time they witnessed the advent of technology in an altogether new form that transformed people's lives. Radio and television broadcasting along with other technological advancements brought great changes. The Jazz age, often described as the period of 'flaming youth', for the younger generation, challenged the traditional society and freed themselves to set a new way of life. Movies were made and people took special interest in sports. Advertisements, in both print and radio, reached a new level. It was an era of progress with the automobile too. The country was witnessing optimism and prosperity.

However, the Great Depression devastated America in 1929—a tragedy that was one of violence, disturbance and poverty. Penniless, workless, Americans were losing hope and the nation's economy completely broke down. The situation changed for the better with President Roosevelt's New Deal programmes that eased the hardship of the people. In 1939, after the bombing of Pearl Harbour, when America joined World War II, there was a major but positive change that had taken place for the American economy. There was demand for people in the army and in the industries to manufacture food, weapons, artillery, ships, airplanes, etc. The Post-war period was a time to re-establish domesticity in the American society. A happy family life became significant to the Americans.

The 60s and 70s were remarkable for the Americans for events like the Bay of Pigs crisis, the Vietnam War, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the Civil Rights Movement that played a significant role in the lives and minds of the citizens. Then the Watergate scandal and the oil crisis were a matter of great concern and stress for the Americans.

The Cold War remained a threat to America and the Soviet Union was viewed as its major enemy.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Comment on the changes in the social history of America following the Civil War.

Q 2: In what ways did the American cities become the centre of attraction?

Q 3: State some of the characteristics of the modern era between 1914-1929.

3.4 THE INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

Historically, the Romantic Period in American literature was an era of tensions and turmoil that resulted in the Civil War. However, in literature one gets to see a different, peaceful depiction of life. The American Romanticism was a reaction against the rationalistic philosophy or the philosophy of Enlightenment. Human emotion, intuition, and instincts were emphasised rather than intellect; the individual became the centre of life over art; more emphasis was placed on man's goodness; nature became a source of inspiration and knowledge; man was portrayed as closer to nature than society; democracy and free will of man became matters of prime importance; medieval tales, ancient forms and the Gothic were highlighted in literature. Transcendentalism was a movement within this Romantic Movement that emphasised the importance of nature in man's life. The optimistic tone of Romanticism appealed to some of the most influential transcendentalist American authors like Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman. Aesthetically, romanticism liberated literature from the restrictions imposed by earlier literary philosophies and so came out novels, essays and lectures. Romanticism brought a literary revolution in America. Romanticism found its voice in the poets and novelists of the American Renaissance.

Transcendentalism was a philosophical movement of the 19th century in New England that made a deep impression on the people,

nation and even on Europe. It also symbolised a battle between the young and the old generations and the desire to reform the society and education as well as to assert the emergence of a new national culture. The transcendentalists believed in the essential oneness of all creation; they believed in the innate goodness of man and intuition over individual necessity. They argued that the human conscience is a better guide to the deepest truth and considered that the individual was superior to the tradition and society. They respected the individual spirit and glorified nature. They believed in the omnipotence of God. The principles that the transcendentalists insisted upon were strongly American. The transcendentalists struggled for the abolition of slavery and for women's rights. The transcendentalist movement itself originated around a small town called Concord, Massachusetts, 19 miles from Boston, which was also the first battleground of American Cradle Revolution and of the American independence. Transcendentalism, roughly assigned from 1835—1880, definitely marked the beginning of the American Renaissance— radical/ new thoughts in lively aspects of art, literature, poetry, painting, sculpture, music, architecture of the period.

The 18th century brought notable changes to the literary arena even in England. It was the period of the rise of novels that were authored by the great masters – Defoe, Richardson, Fielding and Scott. Their novels were very popular in America as well. The American writers were profoundly influenced by the English authors. The first professional American novel was a Gothic romance named 'Wieland' (1799) by Charles Brockden Brown (1771 -1810) who adopted the English gothic novel to American settings. Brown along with his gothic romances became a precursor to the American Romance best presented by later writers like Poe, Melville and Hawthorne. However, at that time, every aspiring American writer wanted to be recognised in Europe, especially in England. The two men of letters from New York who adopted European legends to the American context and achieved immense popularity were Washington Irving (1789–1859) and James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851). Irving won attention by presenting American folklore. His short stories like "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Story of

Sleeping Hollow" in *The Sketch Book* (1819) marked the beginning of a new chapter in literature with typically American pattern. After several years of stay in Spain, he composed 'The Alhambra' (1832)—tales with Moorish flavour.

Another American writer who enjoyed great success like Irving was Cooper who adopted Walter Scott's historical novels to the American context and created Western prototypes. His *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Deer Slayer* (1841) are fine examples of Romances. He composed enduring tales of adventures on the frontier and at the sea. His stories have great epic and mythical power. In fact, he is probably the first American writer to deal with the "man *vs* nature" theme, which would go on to have a deep impact on American literature.

By 1825, William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878) had appeared as America's leading poet with his delicate lyrics, extolling nature and composing philosophical poems, talking about Romanticism in America. His 'Thanatopsis' (1817) and 'To Waterfowl' (1819) reflect his admiration of nature. Combing the style of essay and sketch, Washington Irving created a new genre called short stories; Cowper with his historical romances and Bryant inspired by English romantic poetry went on to describe American landscape and to find moral significance in natural beauty.



LET US KNOW

The influence of Romanticism was to be distinctively noticed in poets like Joseph Rodman Drake, Fitz-Greene Halleck, Henry Wordsworth Longfellow, etc. who wrote moralizing verses and won the hearts of the Americans.

Edgar Allan Poe appeared in the literary scene with his emotional poems, aesthetic themes and tales of horror and mystery, which won him much respect and popularity. He believed in the line of the great English Romantics—the end of poetry is to express the yearning for the beautiful. A number of seminal works of American literature were composed during the 1850s. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), depicted the gloomy

setting of early Puritanism, the suffering caused by the concealing sin. He used Romance to study the depths of human nature. Herman Melville's classic *Moby Dick* (1851), another example of the American romance, infused into an adventure tale of whaling days offered profound symbolic significance. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), with the optimistic principles of American democracy marked the beginning of a new kind of poetry in American literature. Poe was the best exponent of Gothic fiction with its gloomy atmosphere and setting.

You must have understood that the Transcendentalist movement in the 1830s and 40s rejected the conventions of the 18th century philosophy, rationalism and thoughts with members who led many contemporary reform movements led by socialist and communist thoughts and fought for women's and workers' rights, children's education and for several other humanitarian causes. Most of them were born into Unitarianism of England. They were highly influenced by the new literature of England and by the Continent as well as the Orient. Ralph Waldo Emerson has been regarded as the founding father of the Transcendental Movement in America. Tragedies in personal life made Emerson consider both life and world in a different light. He advocated individualism and the inner goodness in man. Thoreau, who meditated in a self-made cabin to have some freedom to compose, was an example of the transcendental life to its fullest potential. By far his most known work of art, *Walden*, composed while he was at Walden Pond entirely alone, is a landmark in American philosophy. The moral earnestness of Puritanism is evident in Emerson's transcendentalism. It was not a philosophical theory in the strict sense of the term but a new concept for the new American democracy—an ethical guide to the young generation of a young nation.



LET US KNOW

The other significant American renaissance authors Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Margaret Fuller and others belonged to the same social circle. All were influenced by one another's creative work. They were all Romantics

with their own themes, ideas and visions. The masterpieces that flowed were Emerson's *Representative Men*, Thoreau's *Walden*, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, etc. A growing circle of readers, especially women readers, was a significant aspect of the period. Although difficult, writing was gradually becoming a vocation for many writers. However, some of them who are considered 'classic' today were virtually unknown during their lifetimes.

Hawthorne's and Melville's masterpieces were densely symbolic, original works of art and need close reading. These are difficult texts for modern readers. Apart from novels and short stories, Hawthorne also contributed to literary theory and criticism. Hawthorne believed that any object have an underlying deeper significance than their obvious meanings. Hawthorne's novels are imbued with suggestive meanings and coloured with imagination.

Unlike English Romanticism, the Romantic Movement in America was slightly delayed (it begun roughly from 1830 and continued till the Civil War), different and basically concentrated in novel as the most fitting genre for the exposition of Romanticism. The romantics found the individual consciousness and imagination very fascinating. Revolting against the previous style where the power of reason was celebrated, romanticism celebrated 'individualism' and the power of the 'self'. Gradually the concentration on the individual mind moved to a deep, modern and open study of the underside of humanity. During mid-19th century, America faced a political unrest that surely played a vital role in the growth of a darker aesthetics in American literature.

Margaret Fuller, besides her support for abolition, women's rights, and overall social equality is also remembered for her contribution towards publishing ventures. She was the main publisher of *The Dial*, a journal that promoted works by prominent Transcendentalists. The journal still holds a high position in the history of American letters. Other major authors of the Transcendentalist Movement were William Henry Channing, George Ripley, Jones Very, Amos Bronson Alcott, Convers Francis, Elizabeth Peabody and Frederick Henry.

During the second half of the 19th century, a school of thought called Realism swept over Europe in the arts, music and literature. There came a new generation of artists who composed works with a new approach to matter and character. They made an effort to replicate the contemporary view and true side of reality. They were interested in creating something new that reflected the modern city life and the American population. In literature, mainly novel as a genre came out bright. These were psychologically complicated, multifaceted, densely meaningful, composed in journalistic techniques and with layered characters and reflected inner workings of human mind, delicate play of emotions, conflicting impulses and motivations that very nearly replicate the daily tribulations of being human. In literature, a subgenre called Social Realism, following Marxist and Socialist ideas and thoughts came into existence. Major American writers during the period were Mark Twain, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Stephan Crane, William Dean Howells, and Horatio Alger Jr.

Mark Twain was known for his faithful reproduction of vernacular/ natural speech patterns and vocabulary. Rejecting the elite class, Twain focused on middle and lower classes of the society for his characters. William Dean Howells, the editor of Atlantic Monthly that promoted other realistic rising writers, wrote novels reflecting American Realism. His 'The Rise of Silas Lapham' contains ideas of Realism like honest narratives. Henry James practiced realism in fiction most skilfully. He was highly influenced by his brother William James, a noted figure in the history of human psychology.

By the end of the 19th century, Realism gave birth to another literary form called Naturalism. With Naturalism, authors looked to certain factors like heredity, social conditions, environment, history, etc. to define characters. In Naturalism, there are some significant aspects that determine man's actions in life. French novelist and playwright Emile Zola is hailed as the pioneer of the Naturalist movement proper. Stephen Crane's 'Maggie: A Girl of the Streets' is often regarded as the first true Naturalist work in America. Frank Norris who had been influenced by the evolutionary theory of man and Edith Wharton who portrayed a world devoid of free will were two major Naturalists.

At the turn of the 20th century, the group of thinkers known as the Lost Generation marked the age of American Modernism. Profoundly affected by the World War I, intellectuals struggled to find the meaning of life in the world amidst chaos. Literature of the age expresses the disillusionment, frustration and pessimism. Writers turned the mind's eye inward and tried to record the inner space of the human consciousness. Major Modernists include Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, William Carlos, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and several others. The authors adopted simple, day-to-day language in their works. Joyce's 'Ulysses' and Eliot's 'The Waste Land' are considered examples of the experimental mode of the Modernists—the "stream of consciousness" technique. It deals with the self and inner thoughts. Contrary to the works of the Lost Generation, writers who were full of cynicism and alienation, by mid-century, after the Second World War, there came up a new generation of writers with optimism after a long gap in history



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Write briefly about the characteristics of American Romanticism.

Q 5: How did the English authors influence their American counterparts?

Q 6: What are the characteristics of the Realist literature from America?

Q 7: How did Emerson's ideas influence his contemporaries and later writers?



3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have tried to deal with the history of American literature that traverses through Transcendentalism and ends with American modernism. The reference made to the social and intellectual contexts of American Transcendentalism and Modernism must have helped us to

understand that America as a nation was born as the result of the evolution of a new, topical, clear prose style in literature. However, this unit has also offered a brief idea of the Romantic age from 1828-1865 (American Literature to American Modernism). The authors revolted against the cult of reason and good sense and were inspired by the English Romantics. The democratic spirit was congenial to the rise of romanticism in America. We have learnt that the age is also roughly referred to as the American Renaissance or the age of Transcendentalism. We shall in the following unit, discuss the contributions of the major American authors of this period between 1828 and 1865, which is generally known as the Romantic age in American literature.



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3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The period following the Civil War is known as the National Period II in American history… …the nation emerged more powerful, more united and more proud with President Lincoln… …significant era in American legal history… …the war on the question of slavery from 1861—1865 ended with the defeat of the South under the able leadership of President Abraham Lincoln… …the period also saw the rise of American democracy based on 'Liberty, fraternity and equality'… …Lincoln offered the classic definition of democracy as "the government of the people, for the people and by the people."

Ans to Q 2: With the increase of wealth, towns and cities sprang up… …with the increase in the number of quality educational institutions Cambridge and Boston became the seats of learning… …New York became the noted industrial as well as cultural centre of America… …advent of many newspapers, growth and spread of trade and industrial prosperity… …the social and economic lives of the people in the cities grew richer.

Ans to Q 3: The modern era witnessed the advent of technology transforming people's lives… …Radio and television broadcasting along with other technological advancements brought great changes… …emergence of the Jazz age, often described as the period of 'flaming youth' challenged the traditional society and freed themselves to set a new way of life… …movies were made and people took special interest in sports… ..advertisements, in both print and radio, reached a new level… …it was an era of progress with the rise in the automobile industry.

Ans to Q 4: Unlike English Romanticism, the American Romanticism began roughly from 1830 and continued till the Civil War… …different and basically concentrated in novel, not poetry, as the most fitting genre for the exposition of Romanticism… …the romantics found the individual consciousness and imagination very fascinating… …romanticism celebrated 'individualism' and the power of the 'self'.

Ans to Q 5: The English realist writers of 18th century–Defoe, Richardson, Fielding and Scott were very popular in America… …every aspiring American writer of the time wanted to be recognised in Europe, especially in England… …two men of letters from New York who adopted European legends to the American context and achieved immense popularity were Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper… …Irving's short stories like "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Story of Sleeping Hollow" in *The Sketch Book* (1819) marked the beginning of a new chapter in literature with typically American pattern.

Ans to Q 6: The Realist writers of America composed works with a new approach to matter and character… …they were interested in creating something new that reflected the modern city life and the American population… …the novels are psychologically complicated, multifaceted, densely meaningful, composed in journalistic techniques, used layered characters reflecting inner workings of the human mind… …major American realists include names like Mark Twain, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Stephan Crane, William Dean Howells, Horatio Alger Jr.

Ans to Q 7: To Emerson America was left "unsung" and poets must compose poems on it… …Emerson's concepts of self-reliance, liberty, nature, conformity and assertion of individualism inspired Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* and *Walden*… ...his balance between human, nature and spirit directly influenced Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller, Chas. A. Dana, G. W. Curtis etc. … ...indirect influence on the writing of Longfellow, Holmes, Whittier, Lowell, etc. with the idea and aspirations of his new theology.



3.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the basic principles of American Transcendentalism. Is Transcendentalism a theme or a view of life that influenced the authors of America?

Q 2: What are some of the features of Modernism in the context of America? Distinguish the major Modernist writers and assess their contributions.

Q 3: How did the contemporary historical and intellectual background influence American literature in the 19th century? Discuss.

Q 4: Why is T. S. Eliot considered synonymous with Modernism? Discuss.

Q 5: Transcendentalism was a philosophical movement of the 19th century in New England that made a deep impression on the people, nation and even on Europe. Discuss.

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UNIT 4: TRANSCENDENTALISM AND AMERICAN MODERNISM (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Major Writers

- 4.3.1 Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)
- 4.3.2 Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)
- 4.3.3 Mark Twain (1835-1910)
- 4.3.4 Henry James (1843-1916)
- 4.3.5 Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965)
- 4.3.6 Stephen Crane (1871-1900)

4.4 Influences on Later Writers

4.5 Let us Sum up

4.6 Further Reading

4.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

4.8 Possible Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- distinguish the major authors of the age, their influence on the social change
- provide an analysis of their specific contributions to American literature
- assess their contribution to American literature in the subsequent periods.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have discussed the social and intellectual contexts of Transcendentalism and American Modernism. In this unit, which needs to be studied along with the previous, we shall try to identify the important American writers of the period and examine how their contributions

led to the enrichment of America literature with all its vigour and strength during the period under discussion.

4.3 MAJOR WRITERS

The following are the most important authors of American Transcendentalism and Modernism.

4.3.1 Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

A transcendentalist poet, philosopher, lecturer, essayist, Emerson was born in Boston in 1803 and raised in a Unitarian household in Massachusetts. Emerson's ancestors had been in America for seven generations, dating back to the early days of immigration from England. Both his father and grandfather had been clergymen, following which he became clergy of a church in Boston. In 1832, he resigned his pulpit as he could no longer serve the Sacrament of Communion. He married in 1829 but his wife died in 1831. Following the two incidents, Emerson travelled the whole of Europe for two years and begun to absorb the philosophical ideas of the German idealists as well as of the English giants—Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle—who became his close friends. Then he turned to Platonism, Neo-Platonism, and to the teachings of Swedenborg (1688-1772)—the Swedish scientist, philosopher, theologian and mystic.

Upon his return from Europe, he moved to Concord from Boston and armed with his new conviction, carried forward with the entries in is journal, which he had continued since his undergraduate years. Emerson started public lecturing as a career and writing became his life's passion. The ten-year span from 1834 through 1844 was the time of Emerson's literary flowering. Initially, published anonymously as a little book named 'Nature' (1836) and his two seminal orations, 'The American Scholar' (1837) and 'The Divinity School Address Delivered Before the Senior Class' in Divinity College, Cambridge (1838) established his premises for the doctrine

of Transcendentalism and the principles of his whole canon of writing for which he is famous today. He stood in the centre of Transcendentalism in Concord. Two series of 'Essays' (1841-1844) and 'Representative Men: Seven Lectures' (1850) variously dramatised the basic idea of Transcendentalism and acknowledged their implications. Some poems, essays and dozen other lectures comprise most of Emerson's published writings. Together with Margaret Fuller, he edited a magazine, 'The Dial' from 1842 to 1844 reflecting the ideas, principles and articles relating to the Transcendentalist Movement. After about 1870, Emerson's declining health and mental stress limited his literary activities. Five more titles, essays, ten volumes of his journals and six volumes of his letters were published posthumously. Emerson is hailed as a religious teacher, original thinker, great orator and author. He achieved a reputation, which reached a high point at the time of his death in 1882. Emerson believed in the "Over-Soul".

In the first half of the 18th century, America had believed in the rationalistic philosophy—the philosophy of Enlightenment that regarded Man as a rational being and could discover the ultimate truth only through intellectual enquiry. Romanticism came as a reaction to that, emphasizing the emotional, institutional and instinctual element in human personality. Aesthetically, Romanticism liberated literature from the bondage imposed by rationalism. Literature became spontaneous, imaginative and represented man as a vehicle to lead to the Divine Spirit. To Emerson, the universe and the human spirit were the expressions of God and people and given the chance, they could spur divine inspiration and freedom, truth and knowledge.

Emerson had a deep interest in the sacred writings of the East since his Harvard days. He believed in the concept of Selfhood in the Hindu scriptures according to which the central core of one's self is identifiable with the cosmic whole, namely, God. He was also influenced by the Confucianism and Islamic Sufi poetry. Neo-Platonism that believes in the emplacement of spirit over matter

and an ascending hierarchy of spiritual values rising to God on top impressed Emerson. He believed in the moral earnestness, the faith that nature confides in man, the beauty and harmony of God and their importance on man's duty to glorify the power that has created him. Though he never intended to be a philosopher, today Emerson is considered one of the original thinkers of the age, who poetically expressed his ideas on individualism, non-conformity and on the harmony between men and nature.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How did Emerson's sojourn in Europe help him as a writer?

Q 2: Briefly comment on American Romanticism.

4.3.2 Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

Henry David Thoreau, the American Transcendentalist, philosopher, abolitionist, naturalist, essayist, and poet was born in Concord, Massachusetts in 1817. He attended Harvard but could not make many friends due to his apparently indolent nature. He returned to Concord and worked in his father's factory. Later he took up lecturing and refined the lectures into essays in a direct conversational tone. He also wrote for periodicals on myriad topics like poetry, economy, anecdotes, animals, etc. To find solitude and simplify his life, he chose to live close to nature. He spent two years in a self-built cabin on the edge of Walden Pond on a property belonging to his friend Emerson. For his ever-questing mind, it was an experiment in self-reliance rather than an adopted way of life. He tested the doctrine of self-reliance and his own philosophy of life. The Walden years were his most intense days where he was genuinely his own self—the poet in word and act. Nature became his area of interest and study. Some of his early writings include *A Natural History of Massachusetts* (1842), *Sir Walter Raleigh* (1843), *Thomas Carlyle and His Works* (1847).

The occupation of a land surveyor, which he took up in 1850s to make ends meet, enabled him to come closer to natural surroundings and from the experiences came his book *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Reverse* (1849), which was a memorial based on a river trip he had taken with his brothers and his essay *Walking* (1861) was a detailed journal account of his travel. Then followed 'Cape Cod' in 1865 based on a series of excursions he took to the Atlantic seaside town to study people and the Cap's flora and fauna. He was particularly interested in frontiers and Indians.

He was a supporter of Darwin's theory on Evolution and some of his writings like "The Succession of Forest Trees' (1860), 'Autumnal Tints' and 'Wild Apples—The History of the Apple Tree' (1862) reflect his deep observation and detailed analysis of botanical, meteorological and geographical elements in Nature which was quite uncommon during his time. Thoreau's most influential and famous essay was 'On the Duty of Civil Disobedience' (1849) where he states, "The government is beta which governs least". He was uncompromising in his war against materialism, opportunism and hypocrisy. Thoreau's writings greatly inspired countless individuals including Martin Luther King Jr and Mahatma Gandhi. Thoreau took up political issues promptly and spoke publicly. Many of his lectures published including 'Paradise to be Regained' (1843), 'Slavery in Massachusetts' (1854) where he lectured against slavery and 'A Plea for Captain John Brown' (1859) where he supported John Brown for its abolition. He also wrote on many social causes to reform the society including civil rights, nature conservancy, etc. He died of tuberculosis in 1862.

Walden (1854) is the best known work of Thoreau. It is a definitive text on Thoreau's own philosophy of life, what he believed in and how he lived it. He was critical of the contemporary industrialised, urbanised society. However, as a transcendentalist, he had firm faith on man's inherent dignity and nobility and that man would acknowledge his oneness with Nature. However, he did not

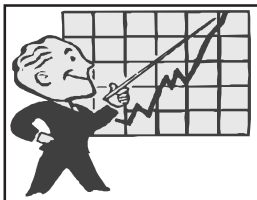
believe on mass reforms. If each individual reforms himself, society will reform automatically. To him, crime could not be abolished by legislative measures. There is Divine law governing each individual and he has to follow the voice of his conscience. Thoreau was critical of rapid growth of large-scale industries as he saw man turning into mere tools. To him, life is beautiful if lived in simplicity, faith, truth and innocence. A significant message in Thoreau's text that man's spiritual quest to find harmony within himself reflects directly in his social, cultural and political surroundings.



LET US KNOW

Other major transcendentalists of the age include the following:

Margaret Fuller (1810-1850),
William Henry Channing (1810-1884),
George Ripley (1802-1880),
Emile Dickinson (1830-1886),
Walt Whitman (1819-1892),
Jones Very (1813-1880),
Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888),
Convers Francis (1795-1863),
Elizabeth Peabody (1804-1894),
Frederick Henry Hedge (1805-1890).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Write in short about Thoreau's nature writings.

Q 4: In what way, is Walden a significant contribution of Thoreau?

4.3.3 Mark Twain (1835-1910)

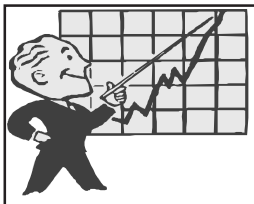
One of the major Realists of American fiction, Samuel Langhorne Clemens, who wrote under the pen name Mark Twain,

was the early pioneer of Realism. Born in Missouri he spent his early days on the west bank of the Mississippi, which was in his own words "a heavenly place" that became his inspiration for writing. At 12, he left school on his father's death and went to a newspaper, turned an apprentice to a printer where he experienced the magic of words. In 1857, he became a team boat pilot who had full knowledge of an ever-changing Mississippi. Due to hostilities, he gave up his career on the river in 1861 and joined a confederate militia group fighting against slavery, which too broke up. Then he returned to journalistic humour where he was at his best. In 1863, he started publishing his writing under the pen name. By 1866, he became a public speaker, which helped him as a writer for "Mark Twain came to write by ear, testing his book by reading aloud".

His travel narrative *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) was an instant success. Besides, his travel letters to the *San Francisco Alta California* and the *New York Tribune*, describing his tour of Europe, Egypt and the Holy Land, ridicules the foreign sights and manners. In 1871, with his wife he moved to Hartford, Connecticut, which proved the most productive period for him. Written in collaboration with Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age* (1873) was Twain's first attempt at writing a novel. As the title indicates, the book satirises the selfishness, moneymaking plans of the decades just after the Civil War. In 1876 came out *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, representing Twain's major book of childhood memories; the other two being– *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), commonly considered as his greatest books and some of the most frequently banned books in schools of that age for using offensive language and Huck's casual morals. However, being a realist, Twain was just representing honest, colloquial speech. On a deeper level, the novel asks for the fundamental equality for all and sketches universal aspirations of all races. The book with humorous parody and faithful reproduction of vernacular speech patterns, inaugurated a new era of writing. He is

noteworthy for his memorable characters belonging to middle and lower classes.

Financial difficulties compelled him to set out on a world lecture tour in 1895 to places like India, South Africa and Australia, which eventually helped him pay his debts off. By this time, he became an international figure. As a public figure, he started enjoying people's love and attention and continued to cynically criticize America's foreign policy. Personal bereavements turned him into a pessimist. His later novels were just echoes of earlier works. His growing pessimism and gloomy views on life, beliefs, and selfish human motives became apparent in his last notable fiction 'The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson' (1894), which was about racial prejudices in the American society. His later works were far from humorous treat of young Twain. Oxford honoured him with the degree of Doctor of Letters in 1907. He died in 1910 of heart disease.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Why is Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* considered a seminal text?

4.3.4 Henry James (1843—1916)

Henry James, the noted essayist, critic, author and an accomplished practitioner of Realism in American fiction was born in 1843 in the city of New York. His father, also an intellectual, knew Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Carlyle and Longfellow and other influential thinkers of the time very well. No doubt, they affected his son's life profoundly. A student of art in New Port, he spent a year at Harvard Law School. A voracious reader of French, Russian, English and American classic literature, James decided to become a writer and in 1865, he published *The Story of a Year* in the Atlantic Monthly. 1871 witnessed the publication of his first novel *Watch and Ward* (1871) in a serialised form in the Monthly. He left America, visited

Paris and settled down in London in 1876. He continued to compose short stories, novels, one novella and a critical essay. Arguably, his most famous work, the novella *American Daisy Miller* (1879) was followed by *The Europeans*, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Bostonians* (1886). His other works include *A Little Tour In France* (1884), *The Aspern Papers* (1888), *The Reverberator* (1888), *The Tragic Muse* (1890), *The Pupil* (1891), *Sir Dominick Ferrand* (1892), *The Death of the Lion* (1894), *The Coxon Fund* (1894), *The Altar of the Dead* (1895), *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), *The Ambassadors* (1903), *What Maisie Knew* (1897), *The Awkward Age* (1899), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Beast in the Jungle* (1903), *The Golden Bowl* (1904), etc. His autobiographies include *A Small Boy And Others* (1913), *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914), and *The Middle Years* (1917). He received honorary degrees from Harvard and Oxford Universities in 1911 and 1912 respectively. He became a British citizen in 1915 after the outbreak of World War I. He died of pneumonia on 28 February 1916, the year he was awarded the Order of Merit by King George V.

James's works have inspired other authors and adaptations to the stage and screen. His novels are very intricate featuring completely realistic characters. His stories and novels are self-contained and self-explanatory. He was noted for his ability to dispense with commentary or subjectivity within his narratives. Readers can see the events happening through the eyes of the characters. His characters are highly developed, layered and real; they are motivated by emotions, moods, interests, desires, and fears that trigger turning points and climaxes. He was admired for the simple and direct language, which was a feature of his style. He dealt with many themes like freedom, feminism, morality, politics, greed, power, class and status, the exploitation of the New World by the Old, etc. He employed narrative techniques like internal monologue and point of view to expand the readers' enjoyment of character perception and insight. No doubt, his brother William

James, who was a known figure in the early history of human psychology in America, must have influenced Henry's creative development.



LET US KNOW

Other major American realist writers include the following:

William Dean Howells (1837-1920)

Stephen Crane (1871-1900)

Horatio Alger, Jr (1832-1899)

Edith Wharton (1862-1937)

John Griffith "Jack" London (1876-1916)

John Ernst Steinbeck, Jr. (1902-1968)

Benjamin Franklin Norris, Jr. (1870-1902)

Theodore Herman Albert Dreiser (1871-1945)

Upton Beall Sinclair, Jr. (1878-1968) etc.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What are the characteristics of Henry James' works?

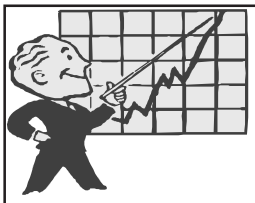
4.3.5 Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965)

You have already read about Eliot in Semester III. One of the 20th century's most cited poets, Thomas Stearns Eliot, was also a renowned essayist, publisher and playwright and literary and social critic who achieved numerous awards and honours in his lifetime, including the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948. He was in St. Louis, Missouri in 1888 and attended Harvard University before leaving America to study philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1910. He earned his Master's degree in English Literature and contributed several poems to 'The Harvard Advocate'.

In 1914 he settled in England where he met Ezra Pound, a contemporary poet who was first to recognize his poetic genius. His first book of poems, *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917) immediately established him as a leading poet of the period. 'The Waste Land' (1922) was Eliot's another famous and oft-quoted work, which is today considered as the single most influential poetic work of the 20th century. His use of poetic techniques like collage, extreme concision and precise visualisation and use of unusual, unconventional sources for inspiration revalorised literature. His major collection of poems include *Poems* (1920); *Poems 1909-1925* (1925), "Ash Wednesday" (1930), *Four Quartets* (1943); *On Poetry and Poets* (1957); *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (1963). His vast collection of works on literary and social criticism include *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928), *Selected Essays 1917–32* (1932), "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism" (1933), "After Strange Gods" (1934), *Elizabethan Essays* (1934), *Essays Ancient and Modern* (1936) and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1940). Eliot was also an important playwright. His plays include *The Rock: A Pageant Play* (1934); *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935); *The Family Reunion* (1939); *The Cocktail Party* (1950); *The Confidential Clerk* (1954); and *The Elder Statesman* (1959). Eliot was the editor of the *Egoist* (1917–1919) and later also published his own quarterly literary journal *Criterion* which is now considered as one of the most acclaimed publications in the genre.

For many, the name Eliot is synonymous with modernism. Eliot's poetry made a departure with the past tradition. His use of interior monologue, fragmented structure, and startling figurative language, focus on form, rejection of older literary forms that seemed outdated and diction that seemed too artificial to suit an era of technological innovations, wonders and global violence, use of myth to express modern experiences are features of his poetry. After World War I began an era of profound disillusion and artists expressed the exhaustion and cultural crisis of the time in art. Eliot's

early and experimental poetry depicts a bleak and barren soullessness. His critical works set the aesthetic standards for the New Criticism in literature. Eliot's reputation began to grow and by 1930, he was the most dominant figure in poetry and literary criticism and 20th century's most profound figure in literature. He became a British subject in 1927 and died in London in 1965.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Which are the specific qualities of T. S. Eliot as a writer?

Q 8: Name some of the important plays of Eliot.

4.3.6 Stephen Crane (1871–1900)

Poet, author, but primarily a journalist, Stephen Townley Crane (1871–1900) was born in Newark, New Jersey to a Methodist minister. He composed fiction, essays, poems and plays, which are remarkable works in realism as well as naturalism in American literature. His first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), is one of the best examples of naturalistic American novel with a realistic and scientific narrative style without any preaching. It did not prove to be a bestseller, yet managed to gain attention by William Dean Howells. He was at once noticed as a new talent in American literature.

Started as a serial, his haunting Civil War novel, 'The Red Badge of Courage' (1895) gained Crane almost instant popularity and respect. He continued to achieve success with *The Black Riders and Other Lines* (1895), *The Little Regiment* (1896), *The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky* (1897), *The Third Violet* (1897), *The Blue Hotel* (1898), *War Is Kind and Other Lines* (1899), *The Monster and Other Stories* (1899), *Active Service* (1899), *The Open Boat* (1898), etc. His reporting career offered him chance to see life in slums and on battlefields. However, he could not enjoy the love and attention of the public much as, having neglected his health, Crane died at the

age of twenty-eight. Thus, he had a short life but an eventful one, highly respected by authors like Henry James, H. G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, Ernest Hemingway and several others. Today he is hailed as a champion of the common man, a realist, and a symbolist.

4.4 INFLUENCES ON LATER WRITERS

Some of the major concepts of Transcendentalism (1840-1855) had huge impact on American literature. The most significant influence that the philosophical movement had on the later generation was the affirmation of the right of individuals. Transcendentalists were strong believers of individualism, which was reflected in their resistance to government and to religion and social norms. They inspired the abolitionist, civil rights and conscientious objector movements of the 19th and the 20th century. Transcendentalism had an impact on American culture and social life too, with its principles of individualism and self-reliance.

Emerson, hailed as the father of Transcendentalism, had an enormous influence on Walt Whitman. The very first line of the poem 'Songs of Myself' was "I celebrate myself" reflects the poet's creed of individualism. The other principles and beliefs of the movement like self-improvement, spiritualism and moral courage not only touched Americans but writers like Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, Willa Sibert Cather, etc. Before the Civil War, the movement, for its main ideas and concerns, acted as a guiding force in American lives and letters. Ideas like self-reliance, democracy, responsibility, optimism, etc. form part of America's cultural practices and political attitudes even today.

Realism that believes in presenting story and style in an unembellished way not only had significant effects on contemporary art, literature and culture but also had become a dominant trend during Modernism in 1920s. Modernist fictionists modified and imaginatively enlarged the basic idea of the Realists, namely truthful representation of American life and people. Realist writers William Dean Howells, Stephen Crane, Edith Wharton, Henry Adams, Horatio Alger, etc. attempted to "give

a comprehensive picture of modern life" and portrayed images showing different classes, manners, and stratifications of life in America. In Realism, the characters were more important than the subject matter; no poetic or decorative language was used as characters were average men; no sentimental and dramatic scenes were portrayed.

The Realists were followed by Naturalists like Benjamin Franklin Norris, Jr., Theodore Herman Albert Dreiser, Harry Sinclair Lewis, etc. The Naturalists presented reality without illusion and imagination. They presented an objective, scientific and detached view of life, which was also followed by the Modernists. They portrayed the American urban life and attempted to explore the fate of the people impacted by the rapid industrialisation in America. These aspects of Naturalism survived into Modernism. The Naturalists believed that social situations, environment, heredity, etc. play a tremendous role in shaping man's life and character. Crane's novel "Maggie, A Girl of the Streets" (1893) is a classic example of Naturalism. Hemmingway's early works show his Naturalist influence. The themes of his novels - the hero being tested by extreme circumstances and fight to live without any self-delusion are borrowed from the Naturalist writers.

The Realists and Naturalists of the late 19th century influenced the Modernists of the 1920s by holding a mirror to the contemporary American life and people without being judgmental and sentimental. The Modernist writers consciously attempted to break from traditional modes of art, literature and culture and experimentation in new forms of narrative. Modern writings were pessimistic in tone regarding issues dealt with by writers from real life. Man's psychological dilemma, his struggle to fit into the society touched by urbanisation, rapid technological changes and industrialisation, isolation and dehumanisation of modern man after the World War I were represented in the works. They found modern life horrific, chaotic and fertile. Eliot's poems are full of a sense of loss and despair.

Modernist authors used the "stream of consciousness" technique as a tool to present inner thoughts of the complex characters. The Modernist authors promoted and combined the individualism of the Transcendentalists, the physical and psychological accuracy of the Realists and scientific

exploration of various aspects from the Naturalists. Modern writers like Hemingway, Faulkner, and F. Scott Fitzgerald bought the modernistic renaissance by employing both Realistic and Naturalistic techniques in writings. Like the Realists, Modernists focused on changes in the society. However, Faulkner wrote about the connection between environment and fate very strongly. F. Scott Fitzgerald addressed the problems that the society faced through symbolism. Modernism has continued to influence and shape the later generation of writers by making art a form of Cultural Revolution.

Thus, though these literary movements were separated by several years, the influence on later writers is quite prominent.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What are some of the features of Realism in the context of American literature?

Q 10: What are some of the features of Naturalism in American literature?

Q 11: Based on which aspects would you like to read Modernism in American literature?

Q 12: How did the ideas of Transcendentalism had an impact on American culture and social life?



4.5 LET US SUM UP

By this time, we have learnt that the period is also referred to as the American Renaissance. Authors like Emerson, Thoreau, Poe, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Melville, etc. created original works that helped shape the ideas, ideals and literary aims of many American writers. The Realistic Period (1860-1890), just after the Civil War, tried to depict a complete picture of the contemporary society. Henry James and William Dean Howells's writings portrayed the changes in the American society, culture, economy and life and also criticised American morality and ethics with an aim to stimulate change. Contrary to the romantic fiction that focused on the ordinary and

the commonplace realistic fiction by authors like Mark Twain, Henry James, Bret Harte, and Kate Chopin forced the readers to believe that such characters actually exist. The characters were complex and the events realistic, not sensational or melodramatic anymore.

Closely related to Realism was Naturalism (1900-1914), the movement that sought to replicate a believable everyday reality. It claimed to give an even more accurate depiction of life than realism with an attempt to present life's truths. However, it was the ugliness and cruelty, rather a pessimistic view of life that the naturalists depicted. The readers are thus left to make their own conclusion about life. Therefore, writings by Naturalist authors like Stephen Crane, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser etc. are blunt, crude, and tragic since the characters in their works act and behave according to their heredity and environment.

Between the two World Wars American literature entered into the Modernist Period (1914–1939). Modernism was highly influenced by Realism and often referred to as an extension of naturalistic ideas. Artists were disillusioned by the effect of World War I and they not only tried to depict the events accurately, but also illustrated the positive aspects. After the period of crisis was over, artists attempted to explore spiritualism in men and the value of his society and institutions. Symbolism and the stream of consciousness techniques were extensively employed by the modernists to paint dehumanisation of civilisations. American Modernists like T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Langston Hughes, W. E. B. DuBois, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Edna St. Vincent Millay, E. E. Cummings, etc., who were stunned by the destructive power of war, and questioned the future of humanity. They also explored the changes brought in by the machines in men's lives. The authors could also see that with increased capitalism every individual was moving towards loneliness. They created a literature with a combination of scientific reasoning, un-idealistic ideas, and physical and psychosomatic examination that highlighted a society aiming to help American society adjust, define, and heal.



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4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Emerson was introduced to the philosophical ideas of the German idealists as well as of the English giants—Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle—who became his close friends.

Ans to Q 2: Romanticism came as a reaction to rationalism… ….emphasis on the emotional, institutional and instinctual elements in human personality… …Romanticism liberated literature from the bondage imposed by rationalism… ...literature became spontaneous, imaginative and represented man as a vehicle to lead to the Divine Spirit.

Ans to Q 3: Thoreau's career as a land surveyor enabled him to come closer to natural surroundings… …*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Reverse* (1849) is based on a river trip he had taken with his brothers… …his essay *Walking* (1861) was a detailed journal account of his travel… …undertook a series of excursions to the Atlantic sea-side town to study people and the Cap's flora and fauna… …he was a supporter of Darwin's theory on Evolution… …works like "The Succession of Forest Trees' (1860), 'Autumnal Tints' and 'Wild Apples—The History of the Apple Tree' (1862) reflect his deep observation and detailed analysis of botanical, meteorological and geographical elements in Nature.

Ans to Q 4: *Walden* reflects Thoreau's own philosophy of life… …he was critical of the contemporary industrialised, urbanised society… …as a transcendentalist, he had firm faith on man's inherent dignity and nobility… …oneness with Nature… …he believed that here is Divine law governing each individual and he has to follow the voice of his conscience.

Ans to Q 5: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* represents Twain's major book of childhood memories… …along with *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) this book is commonly considered his greatest work… …the novel asks for the fundamental equality for all and sketches universal aspirations of all races… …the book with humorous parody and faithful reproduction of vernacular speech patterns, inaugurated a new era of writing… …this book is noteworthy for his memorable characters belonging to middle and lower classes.

Ans to Q 6: James's literary works are self-contained and self-explanatory… …he was noted for his ability to dispense with commentary or

subjectivity within his narratives… …readers can see the events happening through the eyes of the characters… …his characters are highly developed, layered and real… …he was admired for the simple and direct language… …he dealt with themes like freedom, feminism, morality, politics, greed, power, class and status, the exploitation of the New World by the Old, etc… …he used internal monologue and point of view to expand the readers' enjoyment of character perception and insight.

Ans to Q 7: His use of poetic techniques like collage, extreme concision and precise visualisation and use of unusual, unconventional sources for inspiration revalorised literature of the time.

Ans to Q 8: *The Rock: A Pageant Play* (1934); *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935); *The Family Reunion* (1939); *The Cocktail Party* (1950); *The Confidential Clerk* (1954); and *The Elder Statesman* (1959).

Ans to Q 9: Realism departs from the nostalgic and idealistic kind of life… ...honest depiction of life and people... … denial of idealisation and/or romanticism/imagination/emotion/artificiality... …focus on ordinary common man/middle or lower class people... …characters with ethical problems and everyday experiences... …objectivity rather than subjectivity of subject matter... …use of regular language/dialect and not poetic... …a journalistic narrative style.

Ans to Q 10: An offshoot of Realism... …but more detailed/clear/deeper picture of life than in realism… ... emphasis on heredity, environment, instincts, and social and economic conditions... …belief on man behaving according to the rules of nature… ... writer is a distant observer... …so a scientific approach towards the subject matter... …characters are more important than plots... … Darwinian Theory of the survival of the fittest... …a pessimistic world-view.

Ans to Q 11: An international literary/art movement... …in between the two World Wars… ...rejection of traditional attitude and Romanticism… ...extensive use of symbolism, imagism, stream of consciousness technique.

Ans to Q 12: Affirmed rights of individuals… …Transcendentalists were strong believers of individualism, which was reflected in their resistance to government and to religion and social norms… …inspired civil rights movements of the 19th and the 20th century. Transcendentalism influenced American cultural and social life with its principles of individualism and self-reliance.



4.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss some of the major authors of 19th century America and assess their contribution in shaping 20th century literature.

Q 2: Choose two authors representative of the period from Transcendentalism to Modernism, and research his/her life and literary accomplishments to prove why they have been seen as major figures of that era.

Q 3: Emerson is considered one of the original thinkers of the age, who poetically expressed his ideas on individualism, non-conformity and on the harmony between men and nature. Discuss.

Q 4: How did Emerson and Thoreau emerge as American writers? Discuss.

Q 5: Who are the renowned writers of the Transcendentalist movement?

Q 6: Who are the realist writers in American literary history? How would you connect Realism with Modernism in American literature?

Q 7: Between the two World Wars American literature entered into the Modernist Period (1914–1939). Discuss.

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Learner's Feedback on Course

Dear Learner,

Regarding the course as mentioned above, we would like to know your opinions and comments so as to improve the quality of self learning materials in future. Please respond to the following statements by ticking the number you feel most reflect your opinion. After completion of the additional comments, please detach the page and send/mail the same to us at the address given below.

The Director, Centre for Internal Quality Assurance, KKHandiqui State Open University
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(E-mail id: ciqa@kkhsou.in)

1. Approximately how many hours did you spend for studying the units in the course? | | | |
2. Please give your opinions (by √ mark) to the following items based on your reading of the block:

Sl. No.	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I.	The SLMs of the course fulfil the learning objectives set out in the beginning of each unit					
II.	The units of the SLM could satisfy my academic needs and expectations					
III.	The Unit writers have excellent knowledge about the course contents					
IV.	Language and contents of the units were presented at a level which I could readily understand					
V.	Ample opportunity for participation in the activities provided in the units					
VI.	Used enough Illustrations (Diagrams, tables etc.) for conceptual clarity					
VII.	Quality of content is engaging, relevant, and up-to-date					
VIII.	The self check questions are very helpful					
IX.	The Possible/model questions and the answers to check my progress have benefited me a lot					

Additional Comments: *(Please feel free to provide your open comments)*

1. Which aspects of the SLM, according to you, worked well?

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2. What sort of changes/improvements do you feel KKHSOU could implement to improve the overall quality of the SLM?
