

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
AMERICAN LITERATURE

Description

American Literature provides a broad view of American literature from earliest Indian oral traditions through the twentieth century. The course traces movements and the formation of narratives that reflected a growing, evolving society, along with multiple encounters and collisions of multiple cultures and peoples.

About the Professor

Robert F. Sayre is a professor emeritus of University of Iowa. An acknowledged and distinguished scholar, Dr. Sayre is widely published in the field of American Literature and autobiography and memoirs, and his essays, articles, and anthologies have received positive reviews.

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Unit II 4-6	Early 19 th Century American Literature: American Renaissance	Weeks
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Unit V 13-15	Late 20 th Century American Literature: Post – Modernism	Weeks

General Instructions: The course is divided into five chronological units, each of which has three weeks of readings. For each unit, there is a short Overview that supplements the introductory material in the texts. Read both carefully and refer to them often as you read the assigned literature. Each unit ends with a short essay on one of three suggested topics. In the sixteenth and final week you will write a longer essay. As you read, consider all the questions you might write on. Keeping careful notes and/or a journal will help you prepare to write the essays at the end of each section as well as the final essay.

Instructions for the Short Essays: They should be 1,250 to 1,500 words, responding to one of the suggested topics or questions, which are designed to help you compare, contrast, and better understand the readings and the general themes, concepts, and ideas in them. Send each essay to your instructor before proceeding to the next unit. You may send an outline and drafts to your instructor for feedback and guidance before you send the finished essay.

Instructions for the Final Essay: It should be 5,000 words, responding to one of the three final questions, which are designed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the literature you have read. As with the shorter essays, you may again send an outline and drafts to your instructor first.

Required Texts:

Bedford Anthology of American Literature: Volume One, Beginnings to 1865. Ed. Susan Belasco and Linck Johnson. NY: Bedford-St. Martins, 2008.

Bedford Anthology of American Literature: Volume Two, 1865 to the Present. Ed. Susan Belasco and Linck Johnson. NY: Bedford-St. Martins, 2008.

ASSIGNMENTS

Unit essays

Unit 1 – Beginnings to 1830s

Contrasting world views: Indian and Colonists'

Contrasting moralities: Puritan, Quaker, and Enlightenment

Contrasting philosophies: Sentimental and Romantic / Irving and Emerson

Unit II -- The American Renaissance

One of the subjects in the writing of the American Renaissance that was comparatively new to world literature was the subject of work. Previously, most great literature was about love, war, religion, statecraft, and related subjects of morals and manners. Not so in American slave narratives and in the novels and stories of Herman Melville and Harriet Beecher Stowe, Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron-Mills" and the poems of Walt Whitman. Describe the many kinds of work that these writers write about and their many different attitudes towards it. Why is writing about work an important subject in America?

Thoreau's essay, "Resistance to Civil Government," and Melville's short story, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," illustrate not only radically different forms of protest but also radically different faces of the romantic movement in America. Compare and contrast them and explain why they are both romantic.

Contrast the poems of Emily Dickinson with the prose writings of the other women read in this section of the course. What does Dickinson have in common with them? How is she also different?

Unit III – American Realism

Regional writing is sometimes treated as inferior. Do you think it is or is not? Answer by comparing two regional stories with three other assigned stories in this unit. What are your ultimate criteria for successful and important fiction?

The autobiographical writings assigned in Week 9 are all concerned with the complexities of race and ethnicity in America, whereas the fiction assigned in Weeks 7 and 8 is often concerned with social and economic class. Why is this? Is an author more inclined to be personal and refer to his or her own experience when writing about gender and race? Is class a more subtle subject that is better treated in fiction? Or are there other reasons? Discuss these issues as they appear in two or more works of each kind.

Many of the readings in this unit are protests against the social and economic conditions of the period. But it is often said that "protest literature" is not real literature – that it is simplistic, shrill, didactic, and has limited appeal. Is this true of some of the things you have read? If so, which ones? Are there other stories and poems which do make social criticisms and protests but which are also better literature – better written, more entertaining and instructive and with a greater human appeal? Discuss at least five works.

Unit IV – Modernism

Compare and contrast the modernism of two white poets or short story writers with two black writers or poets. What is “modernism” for each and how concerned are they with it? Do they have other concerns like race, region, manners, and study of character that mean more?

Compare and contrast the modernism of two male writers and two female writers, looking at their choices of subject, their styles, and their sympathies.

The early Twentieth Century brought a Southern literary renaissance. Porter, Hurston, Toomer, Faulkner, Wright, and Welty were all southerners, and their subject matter was mainly the South. Write a portrait of the South and Southern characters and concerns as they collectively describe them.

Unit V – Post-Modernism, 1945 to the Present

As the producer of Amiri Baraka’s *Dutchman*, Edward Albee must have thought highly of it. How different and how similar is it to Albee’s surreal or absurdist play *The Sandbox*? Which is closer in style to Arthur Miller’s *The Death of a Salesman*?

Discuss the similarities and differences among three of the writers read in this unit – one American Indian, one Afro-American, and one Mexican-American. What are their attitudes towards race and racial prejudice? What use do they make of their race’s history.

Autobiography and protest are prominent in a lot of the poetry in this unit – in the poems of Roethke, Bishop, Lowell, Ginsberg, Rich, Plath, and Harjo, to name seven. Choose four of these poets and try to rank them according to how much you identify with the experiences they describe and how powerful or effective you think their protests are.

Final Essay

Describe the development of American tales / short stories from Washington Irving to Raymond Carver. Since you have read stories by many authors, it is impossible to cover them all. But Irving, Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Mark Twain, James, Jewett, Freeman, Crane, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner, Porter, Welty, Malamud, O'Connor, and Carver are generally believed to be the greatest. They tell engaging stories that grip the reader's attention. The stories can be "read in one sitting" (one of Poe's standards). And each, in his or her own way, adds a new dimension to the genre – in subject matter, character, teller and narrative technique, language, or other formal elements. Choose at least six writers from list above and show what each has added to the genre. For instance, what do we mean when we say a story is "a Poe story" or "a Hemingway story." What makes "a James story" or "a Fitzgerald story"?

The terms "raw" and "cooked" were used in distinguishing between two schools post-modern American poetry. But they may also be useful in describing more American poets. "Raw" is poetry that seems spontaneous, direct, discursive, and usually more easily read. It seems to have come right out of the ground, without fancy preparation. "Cooked" poetry seems more studied, formal, complex, and written by some one who has spent more time, if not in the kitchen, certainly in the library. Which poets or poems that we have read seem to you "raw" and which "cooked"? And which do you like better? Answer by discussing the work of at least six poets in the anthology. (It is o.k. to like some of each.)

Autobiography, broadly defined, is a very common kind of American writing. Choose one autobiographer from each of the four units of the course in which autobiographies of some kind were assigned (for example, Unit I, Benjamin Franklin; Unit II, Frederick Douglass; Unit III, Mary Antin; and Unit V, Maxine Hong Kingston) and describe how this kind of writing has changed. Coming from very different historical periods, they have very different material. But how has the American character changed as well? What was "an American" in each period? How did each author define "an American" and how "American" did each think he or she was?

Early American Literature: Colonial Literature

Introduction

What is American literature? A generation ago the answer was, "the writing in English of people of European descent about their lives and experiences in North America." It followed, you might say, from Hector St. John de Crevecoeur's answer to the question, "What is an American, this new man?" "He is either an European, or the descendant of an European...." (p. 433) Thus the earliest American literature was assumed to be by the explorers and settlers of Virginia like Captain John Smith and the Pilgrims and Puritans who settled Massachusetts, beginning in 1620. These writings, mainly diaries, sermons and histories, were followed by more obviously literary work like the poetry of Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor and various kinds of autobiographical writing: narratives of Indian captivity, travel narratives like Sarah Kemble Knight's story of her month-long journey from Boston to New York, religious conversion narratives, and finally the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*.

Such, in brief, was the canon of early American literature.

Today that definition is inadequate. American literature is considered to include much that was not written in English, such as the writings of French and Italian and Spanish explorers and settlers, as well as the later writings of immigrants from elsewhere in the world. The definition must also embrace the oral literature of American Indians – tales and histories that originally were not *written* at all. So the definition might now be: the stories and expressions of the people of what is now the United States, reflecting their lives and beliefs and cultures in all of their languages, even though most of it is today read more than it is heard and, for the purposes of general availability and popularity, read in English. As a result, the canon of American literature, early and later, is much larger and correspondingly harder to encompass. One must try to understand, for example, the customs and conventions of oral story telling. And one must appreciate the experiences of people of many more cultures, customs, and backgrounds.

The student who can make these adjustments, however, will gain both a more comprehensive knowledge of literature and a deeper understanding of the varieties of races and cultures in North America in general and the United States in particular. In the Indian tales, for example, we learn some of the many different accounts of the origin of the world that were held by different tribes, some resembling the account in Genesis, most not. But what they have in common is something Scott Momaday says of his people, the Kiowas. When they "entered upon the Great Plains," it was "stories [that enabled] them to appropriate an unknown and intimidating landscape to their experience" (p. 58). The story of the Kiowas' being born out a log was analogous to their coming onto the plains from out of the Rocky Mountains. The story of seven sisters raised to the sky by a tree and becoming the seven stars in the Big Dipper made the night sky more familiar and benign. The Seneca story of the "Origin of Folk Stories" also tells us that Gaqka, the boy who learned the stories, won a beautiful bride and became "a great man," a testimony to the power of story-tellers. They entertained, they interpreted the world, and they united people around a common world view, forming communities.

So the early Euro-Americans confronted a landscape that was all the more "unknown and intimidating," to use Momaday's words, because they did not have such native stories. The nearest that seventeenth-century English writers came to stories like the Kiowas' are John Smith's story of Pocahontas taking his head in her arms to save him from death (p. 117) and William Bradford's story of Massasoit and Squanto befriending the Pilgrims (p. 143), because both suggest that these English newcomers were welcomed. But it was later writers and myth-makers who

embellished these incidents. Smith's account is only one sentence long, and Bradford's is also short. The newcomers' stories – like their cultures and religions, their customs and habits, tastes and tools – were all European. So to them the landscape was a wilderness – strange and dangerous, as we see in Cabeza de Vaca's Narrative, William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation* and many other writings of that time (and much later).

What the Europeans did have, however, was the Bible, which was not only the text from which they drew their faith and moral codes but also the glass through which they looked at America and interpreted their experience. This is particularly so of the Pilgrims like Bradford and the later New England Puritans. John Winthrop's "A Model of Christian Charity" is, you could say, the veritable constitution for the Christian commonwealth that he and his followers in the Massachusetts Bay Colony wished to establish. Every principle of behavior – mercy, forgiveness, lending, love, marriage, and more – is drawn from the Bible, with Winthrop giving chapter and verse to support it. The same goes for much of Anne Bradstreet's poetry, although she does not document her sources so precisely and also includes references to Greek and Roman writers.

The Old Testament stories with which early Euro-Americans particularly identified were the stories of the creation and fall and of the exodus. All Puritans believed in original sin, stemming from the disobedience of Adam and Eve, and although they interpreted the story differently, they (and later American writers) could see many precedents for their condition and experience in each and every part of it. In the Exodus story of the Jews fleeing from Egypt, wandering for years in the desert, and later coming upon the promised land they saw a foreshadowing of their leaving England and confronting the trials and privations of the wilderness in order to build what Winthrop called "a City upon a hill." Leaders like Winthrop were their Moses. The Indians were the heathen tribes of non-believers whom missionaries tried to convert and also the foes whom God had provided to test them. The latter is vividly clear in Mary Rowlandson's story of her capture by Indians in February, 1675, during King Phillip's War, "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God." Every kind of suffering and hardship is eventually explained for her by the verse from the book of Hebrews, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth and scourgeth every Son whom he receiveth."

People in other colonies also saw and shaped their experiences along biblical lines, but chose different precedents and teachings. Elizabeth Ashbridge was raised a member of the Church of England, the state church that the Puritans wanted to reform, or "purify." But she says she was wild and liked to sing and dance. Eventually, having

gone to Pennsylvania as an indentured servant, she became a Quaker, a sect the Puritans persecuted. Like Rowlandson, however, she believed that her afflictions were ultimately beneficial. The German Francis Daniel Pastorius, who emigrated to Pennsylvania after meeting William Penn, found biblical precedent for trying to convince his fellow German Quakers to oppose slavery, as did John Woolman with his neighbors and in his missionary activity in the South.

By the 1720's, however, much of the religious dedication of the previous century had begun to wane. The colonies were more prosperous and secure, and divine guidance and protection did not seem so necessary. The result, as has happened several times since, was a religious revival. Two of its leaders were Jonathan Edwards, the eloquent Congregational minister of Northampton, Massachusetts, and George Whitefield, the English associate of John Wesley. Whitefield had come from England to spread the gospel of Methodism throughout the American colonies, and together they had an enormous impact. Edwards was the more scholarly, as can be seen in his "Images and Shadows of Divine Things," a

dissertation which is not as well known as his frightening sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," or his "Personal Narrative," but which is very important as a precursor of modern American symbolism.

Aside from the writings of Jonathan Edwards, the Great Awakening had little impact on later American literature. It was soon followed by the arrival of the writings of the European Enlightenment, which had a profound impact on Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and other leaders of the American Revolution. Their interests were more secular and practical— in business, like Franklin; science and mechanics like Franklin and Jefferson; and in politics, geography, and theories of government (all three). The differences between the writers of the Seventeenth Century and the Eighteenth Century are remarkable, and others are due to more than changes in religion and philosophy. Washington Irving and his contemporaries wrote to entertain. They wrote the first American short stories (though called tales), novels, and plays, trying to imitate the English writers whom they admired and so prove that Americans, too, could be cultivated and tasteful.

But other voices are also heard in the Eighteenth Century. Samson Occom's *A Short Narrative of My Life* is the first Native American autobiography. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* is the first African American one.

The early Nineteenth Century brought more efforts at writing that was self-consciously literary, by authors who wrote for money, like Washington Irving and James Fennimore Cooper, and who tried at the same time to establish a new national literature, answering the call from literary patriots for a literature that celebrated what Emerson called "our incomparable materials.... Our log-rolling, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes and Indians, our boats and our repudiations...the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing,..." It also brought new fiction by women, such as Catharine Maria Sedgwick's novels and stories. Even more surprising, to literary traditionalists, it produced Jane Johnson Schoolcraft's transcriptions of Chippewa tales and legends, like "Mishosha, of the Magician and His Daughters."

Below are the reading assignments for each week, followed by suggested paper topics. Be sure to read each assignment carefully and to make use of both the comments above and the assigned introductions to each period and author that are given in the anthology.

Readings

Introduction, pp. 2-33

"A Tale of the Foundation of the Great Island,..." pp. 37-40

Cherokee story, pp. 40-43

Momaday, 54-59

"Explorations...", Columbus, Cabeza de Vaca, pp. 61-85

Colonial Settlements, 93-106

John Smith, pp. 106-9, 116-7

William Bradford, "Of Plymouth Plantation," 124-146

John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," pp. 153-166

Anne Bradstreet, "The Prologue," 166-71, "The Author to Her Book," p. 181

Mary Rowlandson, "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God," pp. 190-228

Francis Daniel Pastorius, pp.244-51

Jonathan Edwards, pp. 276-8, "Images and Shadows...", pp. 303-5

[182 pp.]

Introduction, pp. 311-33
Franklin, from *The Autobiography of...*, pp. 335-71
Elizabeth Ashbridge, "Some Account of the Fore Part...", pp. 376-89
John Woolman, from *The Journal...*, pp. 390-401
Samson Occom, from *A Short Narrative*, pp. 401-09
Olaudah Equiano, from *The Interesting Narrative...*, pp. 414-26
Crèvecoeur, from *Letters from an American Farmer*, pp. 427-32
John and Abigail Adams, Letters, pp. 442-45
Thomas Jefferson, Draft of the Declaration... and from *Notes on the State of Virginia*,
pp. 446-57
Washington Irving, pp. 520-42
Catharine Maria Sedgwick, pp. 543-55
Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, pp. 577-86

[166 pp.]

Introduction, pp. 587-616
Emerson, pp. 653-724

[101 pp.]

Questions

Contrasting world views: Indian and Colonists'

Contrasting moralities: Puritan, Quaker, and Enlightenment

Contrasting philosophies: Sentimental and Romantic / Irving and Emerson

Early 19th Century American Literature: The American Renaissance

Introduction

The American Renaissance was the title of a 1941 book by the critic F.O. Matthiessen on the amazing achievements of American authors of the 1840s and '50s. (See the chronology on pages 591-3 of the *Bedford Anthology* for a list of some of their works.) In these works such as *The Scarlet Letter*, *Moby Dick*, *Walden*, and *Leaves of Grass*, Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, and Whitman showed little influence from English forbearers. They chose American materials and handled them in unprecedented new ways. Consciously (in the case of Thoreau and Whitman), they had picked up Emerson's challenge to learn not from the "courtly muses of Europe" but directly from nature, the past, and action. And while less influenced by Emerson, indeed, by in some ways rebelling against him, Hawthorne and Melville also followed their own independent geniuses. Hawthorne spent years reading and absorbing early New England history, and spending his summers exploring its countryside. His imaginative treatments of this material were the basis of his "tales," or what we now call his short stories, and his classic novels, *The Scarlet Letter* and the *House of Seven Gables*. Melville's whaling voyage to the Pacific gave him the material for his early fictionalized travel books, *Typee* and *Omoo* and later *Moby Dick*, the first great American novel.

But the American Renaissance was marked by much more than the achievements of Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Hawthorne, and Melville. The growing anti-slavery movement resulted in the publication of over a hundred book-length autobiographies and biographies of escaped slaves, as well as a thousand shorter accounts in magazines and newspapers. These stories of the many horrors of slavery, of rebellion, escape, and eventual freedom were, it can be argued, the most completely original American literary form, for no other country was so divided by race and region. Harriet Beecher Stowe drew on them and on her own observations while living in Cincinnati, just across the Ohio River from Kentucky, in writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the first great American best-seller and, as Lincoln later told its author, the book that started the Civil War.

As noted in the *Anthology* Overview (pp. 607-18) other reform movements, notably Women's Suffrage and the early Labor Movement, led to further literary development. Stowe's sister Catherine Beecher was an advocate for women's right to work. Margaret Fuller was an advocate for women's intellectual freedom and equality. Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron Mills" was a powerful protest against dreary and demeaning factory life, as was Herman Melville's story, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids."

Not all the literature of this period was focused on reform, however. As explained in the *Anthology* Introduction on "Technology, Transportation, and the Growth of the Literary Marketplace" (pp. 594-97), there were also great improvements in printing and distribution that led to many more newspapers and magazines, with much larger and wider circulations that in turn created a larger reading public and more writers of popular poetry and fiction. Two of the most famous writers were Edgar Allan Poe and Fanny Fern. Poe was himself a brilliant magazine editor with a keen sense of what would appeal to a mass audience, and the result, in his own writing, were tales of suspense and fantasy that made him a founder of what we now call the detective story and science fiction. He also attempted to define the short story, writing that it should be readable in one sitting and be carefully designed to have the unity and intensity of effect of a lyric poem. Fanny Fern's fame did not last so well, although she was once the best paid writer in the country. A writer of popular newspaper columns and popular novels, she was

one of the women Hawthorne called a "damned mob of scribbling women" and who were later scorned by male (and female) critics as conventional and sentimental. (Her flowery name, a pen name, did not help.) But contemporary critics have realized that she was actually very witty, colorful, and outspoken.

Emily Dickinson is, in many respects, the most distinctive of all these writers. Though her poems are the antithesis of Whitman's in form and point of view, they are fully as original. They are also equally different from the popular poetry of the period, as the student can see by looking at the selections in the *Anthology* under "The American Muse: Poetry at Midcentury," (pp. 1202-1235). They too are a part of this miraculous period.

Readings

Introductions, pp. 607-18
Margaret Fuller, pp. 725-33
Harriet Beecher Stowe, pp. 747-52
Harriet Jacobs, pp. 763-68
Henry David Thoreau, 792-854
Frederick Douglass, pp. 855-922

[173 pp.]

Nathaniel Hawthorne, pp. 966-1017
Edgar Allen Poe, pp. 1018-9, 1030-43
Fanny Fern, pp. 1062-1071
Herman Melville, 1072-1118
Rebecca Harding Davis, pp. 1149-1177

[161 pp.]

Walt Whitman, pp. 1236-1313
Emily Dickinson, pp. 1314-1346

[100 pp.]

Questions

One of the subjects in the writing of the American Renaissance that was comparatively new to world literature was the subject of work. Previously, most great literature was about love, war, religion, statecraft, and related subjects of morals and manners. Not so in American slave narratives and in the novels and stories of Herman Melville and Harriet Beecher Stowe, Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron-Mills" and the poems of Walt Whitman. Describe the many kinds of work that these writers write about and their many different attitudes towards it. Why is writing about work an important subject in America?

Thoreau's essay, "Resistance to Civil Government," and Melville's short story, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," illustrate not only radically different forms of protest but also radically different faces of the romantic movement in America. Compare and contrast them and explain why they are both romantic.

Contrast the poems of Emily Dickinson with the prose writings of the other women read in this section of the course. What does Dickinson have in common with them? How is she also different?

Late 19th Century American Literature: American Realism

Introduction

As explained in the "Introduction" to the second volume of the *Bedford Anthology*, the Civil War brought tremendous change to the United States. Not only were the slaves now nominally free, the South was now defeated and the North free to proceed to expand its capitalist-industrial might. Transcontinental railroads were built. The West was further explored and settled. Immigrants began to come in ever-increasing numbers. Enormous new fortunes were made, creating a huge gap between the very rich and the millions of farmers, miners, and laborers who worked in the new factories and laid the track for the new railroads. At the same time, many other Americans reached new levels of middle class success and prosperity, with leisure in which to read and travel.

All these changes and developments are reflected in the new literature of this period, roughly the fifty years from the end of the Civil War to the beginning of World War I. But literature does more than reflect historical events. It attempts to reflect the changes in people and their surroundings – in nature and society and the character and beliefs of individuals – that cause and are caused by the historical events. This is especially so of the literature of this period, known in literary histories and anthologies as the Age of Realism. The pre-Civil War writers are called romantic because they wished to inspire themselves and their readers to higher, nobler lives, like Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, or to show extremes of heroism, introspection, suffering, isolation, and horror, like Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe. Realists, to use a figure of the French realistic novelist Stendhal, wanted their novels to be like a mirror carried down a highway, reflecting everything from the sky above to the dirt and puddles below. American realists, at least initially, showed less of the dirt and puddles than did their European contemporaries. As William Dean Howells wrote, "our novelists concern themselves with the more smiling aspects of life." Their audience and subject matter was generally the middle and upper middle class. But they nevertheless wanted, in another famous phrase, to show life as it is in the world that is.

A good example of an American realistic novel of the 1870s is Henry James's *Daisy Miller*. Daisy is an upper-middleclass American girl traveling in Europe with her mother and little brother, while her father is back in Schenectady making money. She is independent, curious and high-spirited, reflecting the confidence and optimism of her country, while her little brother Randolph is bored with Europe and thinks everything American is better – which also reflects some Americans' attitudes. The crisis comes when Daisy takes up with an Italian man in Rome and refuses to abide by the cautions given her by elders. The novel was James's first big popular success, creating quite a controversy over whether Daisy was or was not a reliable portrait of the new American girl.

Mark Twain's greatest novel is *Huckleberry Finn*, which is unforgettable for its poetic descriptions of the Mississippi River and the life on its shores in small towns and plantations in the decades before the Civil War, all as seen through the eyes of a poor and barely schooled, but very observant boy. *Old Times on the Mississippi* is an interesting companion to it because it has the same setting but is autobiographical. Moreover, Twain's account of the differences between a passenger's and a pilot's views of the river are almost an essay on the differences between romantic and realistic writing, as he saw them. However, a reader should not be misled by the words "realism" and "realistic." James's clever short story, "The Real Thing," can also be read as a kind of critical essay, subtly making the point that art and reality are still and always decidedly different.

"A New England Nun" and the short stories and poetry assigned in Week 8 introduce two other schools or types of writing in this very productive and contentious period, regionalism and naturalism. Sometimes treated as evolutions of realism, sometimes as distinctly different, they are fascinating to compare. Regionalism, as the name suggests, is rooted in place. It evokes the character of a small town or countryside and how it has become a powerful force in the values and behavior of the residents. Louisa Ellis's 15-year engagement to Joe Dagget, while he has been in Australia seeking his fortune, has given her the opportunity to become deeply and happily habituated to her single life. Her garden, her house, her daily rituals and tastes in food and clothing all suit her perfectly and give her calm and tact and dignity. Marriage would destroy them. Similarly, Sylvia in "A White Heron" has identified with the heron and the other birds of the ponds and woods around her grandmother's farm. Both of these stories, and other regionalist fiction, show that by this time New Englanders like Mary Wilkins Freeman and Sarah Orne Jewett had developed a sense of place comparable to that of the Native Americans whose tales were read earlier. But there is also something universal to these stories. Though they celebrate the manners and values of rural Massachusetts and Maine, they are not just about those places.

A different image of New England emerges in Edward Arlington Robinson's poems. His characters like Richard Cory and Miniver Cheevy are also solitary and, in their way, independent. The difference is that they are lonely and desperate. Life has passed them by, as it had by that time also deserted the little towns and villages of New England. They are victims of time or fate or just their own habits and illusions, which illustrates a primary condition of the characters in literary naturalism. Where the major characters in realistic writing are roughly equal to or reflective of their surroundings, and the major characters in regionalism are embodiments of them, the characters in naturalistic literature are inferior to their surroundings. They have been or are being overcome by it and so are usually the victims of it. Robinson might be called both a regionalist and naturalist.

The stories by Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Jack London are examples of a purer American naturalism, but with some interesting additions. Crane's "The Open Boat," is based on his own experience, after a shipwreck off the coast of Florida, a condition in which the ocean is vastly superior in power to the four men. Some have greater strength and experience than others, but that makes little difference. Survival is mostly a matter of luck. Frank Norris's "A Deal in Wheat," however, introduces two levels of character: Sam Lewiston, the Kansas wheat farmer who is a helpless victim of the fluctuations of the market, and the two speculators, Hornung and Truslow, who compete with each other to make enormous sums of money by manipulating prices. They are two supermen, as superior to poor Lewiston as the ocean was to Crane's four sailors. Hornung, by his clever deception, finally outdoes Truslow, but both go on, as Norris says, "jovial, contented, enthroned, and unassailable." As manipulators of the price of wheat, the staff of life, they are, in a perverse way, superior to nature. The figure of a Nietzschean superman intrigued and even obsessed naturalists like Norris, Dreiser, and London. They sought, to use the title of London's short story, "The Law of Life." Dreiser later wrote two novels, *The Financier* and *The Titan* based on the life of the millionaire Charles T. Yerkes, who built the Chicago Loop. If "nature" was a force to which most creatures were inferior, then there must be a few who by embodying nature are the superiors of all others.

The readings in Week 9 are autobiographical writing by contemporaries of the authors of realism, regionalism, and naturalism that does not easily fit into any of these styles. They demonstrate, for one thing, how no single literary or artistic style ever dominates an era. Further, they, along with the stories of Kate Chopin,

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and other feminists, demonstrate how the issues of race, gender, ethnicity, and immigration took new form and continued to trouble the country. Is the United States a "Melting Pot," as illustrated in Israel Zangwill's popular play of 1908? Or is it "a salad," where different ingredients toss against one another but never break down? Or is it something else?

Readings

Introduction, pp. 2-39

Howells, pp. 51-4

Mark Twain, "Jim Smiley and his Jumping Frog," pp. 61-7

"Old Times on the Mississippi," 71-93

Ambrose Bierce, pp. 122-29

Henry James, from "The Art of Fiction," pp. 47-9

Daisy Miller, pp. 130-73

"The Real Thing," pp. 173-93

Sarah Orne Jewett, "A White Heron," pp. 193-202

Mary Wilkins Freeman, "A New England Nun," pp. 202-13

Kate Chopin, "At the Cadian Ball" and "The Storm...," pp. 213-42

Pauline E. Hopkins, "As the Lord Lives,..." pp. 241-50

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-Paper," pp. 251-65

Edith Wharton, "The Other Two," pp. 279-95

Sui Sin Far, "In the Land of the Free," pp. 296-305

Mary Austin, "The Basket Maker," pp. 305-13

Edward Arlington Robinson, poems, pp. 313-23

Frank Norris, "A Deal in Wheat," pp. 323-33

Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat," pp. 334-53

Theodore Dreiser, "Butcher Rogaum's Door," pp. 359-72

Paul Lawrence Dunbar, poems, pp. 372-78

Willa Cather, "A Wagner Matinee," pp. 378-87

Jack London, "The Law of Life," pp. 388-94

"Writing 'American' Lives," pp. 397-497 (Jose Marti, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, Zitkala-Sa, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Henry Adams, Mary Antin)

Questions

Regional writing is sometimes treated as inferior. Do you think it is or is not? Answer by comparing two regional stories with three other assigned stories in this unit. What are your ultimate criteria for successful and important fiction?

The autobiographical writings assigned in Week 9 are all concerned with the complexities of race and ethnicity in America, whereas the fiction assigned in Weeks 7 and 8 is often concerned with social and economic class. Why is this? Is an author more inclined to be personal and refer to his or her own experience when writing about gender and race? Is class a more subtle subject that is better treated in fiction? Or are there other reasons? Discuss these issues as they appear in two or more works of each kind.

Many of the readings in this unit are protests against the social and economic conditions of the period. But it is often said that "protest literature" is not real literature – that it is simplistic, shrill, didactic, and has limited appeal. Is this true of

some of the things you have read? If so, which ones? Are there other stories and poems which do make social criticisms and protests but which are also better literature – better written, more entertaining and instructive and with a greater human appeal? Discuss at least five works.

Early 20th Century American Literature: Modernism

Introduction

Modernism in American literature took so many forms that it is hard to define. It was, at least initially, an attempt to break clear of what a new generation called Victorian sentimentality – especially the poetry that was didactic and aimed to be inspiring and heroic. In fiction it generally aimed at greater realism and economy, by being nearer to everyday speech and experience. In drama it sought the same, as opposed to the histrionics of Victorian melodrama and the stale humor of music halls. For all of these new values American writers had European models, such as Rameau and Baudelaire in poetry; Flaubert, Proust, and Joyce in fiction; and Chekhov, Ibsen, and Strindberg in drama.

As the anthology suggests, the poets were perhaps the first American modernists. They were less dependent on the marketplace – there being a very small market – and they had Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell as outspoken, flamboyant leaders and Harriet Monroe as a creative publisher. Pound in the early 1900's was also very eclectic in his tastes, with a genius for spotting many different talents and then promoting them. So universal was his influence and presence, in both Europe and America, that the critic, Richard Ellman, titled his great biography of him *The Pound Era*. Pound was also very eclectic in his reading and the choices of the poets and poetry he imitated and experimented with – from parodies of his English contemporaries to imitations of Latin, Greek, French, Japanese and Chinese. He even made his "Pact" with Walt Whitman and later, despite his infamous fascism and anti-Semitism, won homage from Allen Ginsburg. The title of his essays, *Make It New* (borrowed, paradoxically from Confucius), became like a slogan of the entire modernist movement.

And new came in many different styles, forms, and subjects

Amy Lowell's "Imagism" was one of the first new movements to become popular, though it was later treated as rather silly and passé.

Robert Frost took Edward Arlington Robinson's New England and gave it a wholly new harshness, severity, and universality, by using the understatement and indirection of rural speech, while employing traditional forms and meters.

Pound's closer friend and fellow ex-patriot, "Tom" Eliot, as Pound called him, was also both new and traditional, but in very different ways. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" was the interior monologue (a "love song" never sung) not of a colorful Renaissance Italian like the speakers in Browning's dramatic monologues but of a meek and sensitive modern urbanite. It also shocked the reader with its opening lines comparing the evening to "a patient etherized upon a table." But it was "The Waste Land" for which Eliot suddenly became most famous – a poem whose title seemed to sum up the cultural condition of Europe and America after the Great War. Its implicit and explicit allusions to other poems invited the reader to compare the dry, infertile, and demeaning present with a more vibrant past. Such references also displayed its debt to English and classical traditions. As Eliot later wrote in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," he believed that a poet should write with all of his literary tradition at his finger tips.

A third friend of Pound's, though rival of Eliot's, was William Carlos Williams, who spent most of his life as a general practitioner in Paterson, New Jersey, while also staying very close to most of the avant garde movements of his time.

Other poets were modern in different ways. Edna St. Vincent Millay epitomized the rebelliousness of witty and outspoken modern women. Carl Sandburg's "Chicago" celebrated the raw energy and power of that "Freight Handler to the Nation" in lines that updated Walt Whitman. E.E. Cummings surprised with

his unorthodox typography, pacifism, and resistance to cant. Wallace Stevens's verbal elegance celebrated the power of poetry itself to summon new worlds and orders. Claude McKay mixed the traditional language and form of the sonnet with tributes to Africa and protests against the treatment of Afro-Americans. Langston Hughes used jazz rhythms and vocabulary, in praise of black people and in bitter reflections on their mistreatment.

Modern American fiction represented less of a break with the past, at least initially. Edith Wharton and Theodore Dreiser were still writing after the Great War and were much admired by the new generation, she for *The Age of Innocence* (1920) and he for *An American Tragedy* (1925). The most radical new writer was Gertrude Stein, who attempted to break up sentences by repetition and contradiction as Picasso and the cubists had broken up pictorial painting. At the same time she imitated the patterns of common speech. This influenced Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway, as readers can realize in turning from "Ada" to the stories from Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River." What is further important in Anderson is his gentle sympathy for his small-town characters, his "grotesques." Unlike earlier naturalists, he does not treat them as victims, but finds their distortions "amusing, some almost beautiful." (p. 862)

The influence of Anderson can be felt in both Hemingway and Faulkner, though they accepted it differently and moved on independently. Hemingway used his short sentences and simple vocabulary in order to recover beauty and order and meaning in the post-war wasteland. His heroes also attempted to live by the basic masculine codes of good hunters and fishermen. Faulkner sometimes kept his sentences short and simple, as in "That Evening Sun," but introduced more dialogue. At other times, as in "Barn Burning" and his later novels, his sentences became as long and complex as uninterrupted, entangled thoughts and feelings.

For all of them, as for Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Hurston, Richard Wright, Katherine Anne Porter and most of their contemporaries, the novel was the most important medium. But they also excelled in short stories. Mass circulation magazines paid extremely well, and little magazines and some monthlies like the *Atlantic* had prestige and encouraged experimentation. Porter's "Flowering Judas" and Wright's "Almos' a Man" are tense and intensely absorbing short stories. Fitzgerald's "The Ice Palace" is at once very readable popular fiction and a realistic study of character and manners. Eudora Welty and Zora Neale Hurston give us two very different studies of Southern rural character, the one of a determined, heroic elderly Negro lady and the other of affectionate, happy Negro lovers. Jean Toomer's *Cane* is, like Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, a combination of novel and stories.

Serious modern American drama was dominated by Eugene O'Neill, whose work is too extensive and varied to be represented by just one play. He experimented with all the modern dramatic styles and also tried to adapt classic Greek drama. *The Emperor Jones* is generally described as one of his experiments with symbolic expressionism, in which dream and reality are combined. But it is also a study of ego-maniacal character and underlying fear and insecurity. Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* is interesting to read with it. Although Glaspell and O'Neill worked together in the Provincetown Players, it is a very different play – realistic, more subtle in its action and clues, and distinctly feminist in its sympathies. From one point of view, it is just a short detective drama. But the irony is that the detectives – male – all strut around, patronize the women, miss the right clues, and end up wrong. It is the two women who slowly put the evidence together. But do they really get to the bottom of the case?

Reading

Poetry

Introduction and critical statements: pp. 538-40; Pound, 542-4; Lowell, 544-8; Eliot, 548-52; Johnson, 553-4; Hughes, 557-61; Frost, 564-6; Williams, 566-9 [26 pp]
Lowell, 575-80
Frost, 581-94
Sandburg, 598-604
Stevens, 605-18
Williams, 626-40
Pound, 641-50
Eliot, 669-97
McKay, 704-9
Millay, 710-6
Cummings, 716-26
Hughes, 752-65

Fiction

Introduction and critical statements: pp. 819-27; Anderson, 828-30; Stein, 830-3; Hurston, 839-41; Wright, 843-46 [21 pp]
Stein, "Ada," 847-51;
Anderson, "The Book of the Grotesque," "Hands," "Paper Pills," 857-68
Porter, "Flowering Judas," 869-80
Hurston, "The Gilded Six-Bits," 880-91
Toomer, "Portrait in Georgia," "Blood-Burning Moon," "Seventh Street," 905-15
Fitzgerald, "The Ice Palace," 915-36
Dos Passos, "Two Portraits," "Vag," 937-948
Faulkner, "That Evening Sun," "Barn Burning," 948-76
Hemingway, "Big Two-Hearted River," 976-92
Wright, "Almos' a Man," 1008-20
Welty, "A Worn Path," 1021-9

Drama

Introduction, pp. 773-9
Glaspell, "Trifles," 780-92
O'Neill, "Emperor Jones," 792-817

Questions

Compare and contrast the modernism of two white poets or short story writers with two black writers or poets. What is "modernism" for each and how concerned are they with it? Do they have other concerns like race, region, manners, and study of character that mean more?

Compare and contrast the modernism of two male writers and two female writers, looking at their choices of subject, their styles, and their sympathies.

The early Twentieth Century brought a Southern literary renaissance. Porter, Hurston, Toomer, Faulkner, Wright, and Welty were all southerners, and their

subject matter was mainly the South. Write a portrait of the South and Southern characters and concerns as they collectively describe them.

Late 20th century American Literature: Post-Modernism

Defining post-modernism is even more difficult than defining modernism. The number and variety of authors, movements and styles are greater, and many authors and their works break down the previous barriers between the experimental and new (the "elite") and the popular. Many authors also wrote in two or more genres. Sylvia Plath, for instance, wrote both poetry and autobiographical fiction, both of which later sold widely, although after her death. Norman Mailer, one of the most prominent and controversial authors of the whole period, wrote both best-selling fiction, like *The Naked and the Dead*, his first novel, about World War II, and best-selling non-fiction, like *The Armies of the Night*, his account of the huge October, 1967, peace march on Washington. James Baldwin wrote in three genres – fiction, essays, and drama. All three of these authors, like many others, also are identified with one or more of the social and cultural movements of their time – feminism and the women's movement, the anti-war movement, civil rights, and gay liberation. As the anthology's very useful Introductions explain, the paperback revolution that started in the 1940s cut the cost of books and made them more widely available, with the result that literature could become a part of popular culture, although the latter was increasingly dominated by sports, television, films, and the music industry. Any kind of "serious literature," as it was sometimes called, was likely to be a literature that was culturally critical or that asserted the values of previously unrepresented groups.

Reflective of all this, the final section of *The Bedford Anthology* is not divided by either periods or genres. Instead, it gives us selections from a total of 40 authors in the order of their years of birth, followed by 6 more in a section subtitled "The Contemporary Memoir," although it is also difficult to define modern memoirs. They could have been included with the others. Thus, we shall study them in roughly the same order, although to make some connections and comparisons, we must also skip around.

One early movement in the poetry of the first post-war decades was called "the new formalism," in recognition of the fact that poets like Theodore Roethke, Elizabeth Bishop, John Berryman, and Robert Lowell turned away from the so-called "free verse" of their predecessors and wrote in rhyme, with more attention to conventional meters and greater use of traditional forms like the sonnet, sestina, and villanelle. But their subjects were not so traditional. Roethke wrote the delightful "My Papa's Waltz" and many more poems about his father and his father's greenhouse business. Bishop evoked "Brazil, January 1, 1502," praised "The Armadillo," and recalled pictures she saw in a *National Geographic* in a dentist's waiting room, in 1918. Berryman's *Dream Songs* were, he said, about the musings and reverses of an unheroic "white American in early middle age." (p. 1129) Robert Lowell, although associated with the new formalists, also became much more autobiographical and political in the 1960s, beginning with *Life Studies*, which contained a prose autobiographical piece, "91 Revere Street."

Robert Hayden's "Middle Passage" is not an example of "new formalism." Nor is it autobiographical. Rather, it illustrates the tendency of black poets and novelists and other minority authors to search their people's history for better understanding of their suffering, their heroism, and thus the present. It is also interesting that thirty-five years after Hayden's poem, the story of the revolt on the *Amistad* was made into a movie.

An equal or greater contrast with formalism is Allen Ginsburg's *Howl*, which seemed in 1955 to be so different that some people began to speak of it as poetry

"raw" rather than "cooked." Ginsburg seemed as revolutionary as Whitman once had. He was also a mystic, like his friend Gary Snyder. But there is order to *Howl* – in its long repetitions of the opening words of lines and in the ways in which lines correspond to the rhythms of speech. It is a poem to be read aloud and as a kind of chant and incantation.

The 1950s are often regarded as a time of complacency, contentment, and conformity. College students of the time were said to belong to "the silent generation." But a surprising amount of the literature of the late 1940s and '50s is, like *Howl*, full of anger and protest. Tillie Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing" (1956) is an interior monologue of a woman oppressed by poverty, domesticity, children, and the frustrations trying to find time to write. Ralph Ellison's story, "The Invisible Man" (1947), an early chapter from his great novel of the same title, tells of the cruel humiliations of young black men at a white men's smoker. Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman* (1949) has become a classic tale of the delusions of the middle class businessman. Bernard Malamud's "The First Seven Years" (1950) is the sad story of an immigrant Jewish shoemaker who wants his daughter to marry "Max the college boy." James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son" (1955), about his father and his relations with him, ends with his resolution to hold in his mind two conflicting ideas. He must accept the fact that life is unjust, but he must fight injustices "with all one's strength." Flannery O'Connor's short story, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1953) is a frightening vision of a world in which an ordinary family's vacation trip ends in an overturned car and senseless murders.

The 1950s were followed by the peace movements and civil rights movements of the 1960s, which produced an outpouring of powerful literature of all kinds. In 1964 Amiri Baraka (then called LeRoi Jones) published his angry play, *The Dutchman*, about a fatal encounter between a young black man and a white woman on a New York subway. Its producer was Edward Albee, author of the absurdist play, *The Sandbox*, and it was staged with a play by Samuel Beckett, one of Albee's models, but its racial rage was radically different from the theater of the absurd. Two years later Alex Haley published *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1966), the electrifying story of how Malcolm Little, a small-time Boston hustler, converted to the Black Muslims while in prison, and became the most prominent of its ministers. It and Baraka's plays, poems, and essays, along with Ellison's *Invisible Man* and the works of James Baldwin soon became part of many college literature courses. White students and their professors sought to understand black experience. Colleges were admitting more black students, and they wished to read more works by black authors.

The example of the black civil rights movement inspired white and black women to probe their experience more deeply, to write about it, and to identify with other women writers, old and new. One of the "new" was Sylvia Plath, who had committed suicide in London in February, 1963. Her first book had been published in 1960, but the poems posthumously published in *Ariel*, like "Daddy," comparing her father to Nazis and herself to "a Jew," seemed to express many women's previously suppressed feelings of rejection and rage.

The poems of Plath, Adrienne Rich, and Audrey Lorde are not difficult to read and understand. They are not "obscure," to use the word often applied to earlier twentieth-century poetry. But they do often introduce and develop violent metaphors and associations. Rich's "Trying to Talk with a Man" is set on an atomic testing site in the desert. In "Diving into the Wreck" the poet is a scuba-diver exploring the "wreckage" of old history and mythology.

The words are purposes.

The words are maps.
I came to see the damage that was done
And the treasures that prevail.

In "Coal" Lorde compares herself to "the total black / being spoken / from the earth's inside." In "Stations" she writes "Some women wait for the right / train in the wrong station" and ends

Some women wait for something
to change and nothing
does change
so they change
themselves.

Feminist and minority literature was often criticized as inferior to the classics of the older canon. It was being read and taught, traditionalists said, just to be "politically correct." But literary canons change over time, as anyone can see by looking at anthologies of fifty or one hundred years ago. They change with changes in audience, because all people need to read literature by writers like themselves as well as different from themselves. They change as new writers write from new experiences, needs, and desires. And they change with changes in social, economic, and cultural history. John Updike's "A & P" catches the language and values of a super-market checkout boy. David Mamet's short memoir, "The Rake: A Few Scenes from My Childhood," is a scene from late twentieth-century suburbia, not a pretty one, but certainly a believable one. Annie Dillard's childhood was obviously more pleasant, but it is also important to know that her first book, *Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek*, was a celebration of the common but little seen natural world in Virginia's Roanoke Valley, where she went to college. It was a new kind of nature book. Tim O'Brien's "The Things They Carried" is about soldiers in the Vietnam War. Raymond Carver's short story "Are These the Actual Miles?" is about a couple selling their car, a common enough experience. But Carver's very spare "minimalist" treatment mixes suspicion with loss, making both harder to bear.

But it is perhaps from the later feminist and minority writers that we get the widest views of late twentieth-century America. Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" is not racial protest but racial celebration, like some of the poems of earlier black poets. Leslie Silko, Joy Harjo, and Scott Momaday provide us with more insight into contemporary American Indian life. After recounting miraculous survivals of all kinds, from glaciers and earthquakes to recent shootings, Harjo concisely sums up one of the ironies of Indian life and history in the last stanza of "Anchorage,"

Everyone laughed at the impossibility of it,
but also the truth. Because who would believe
the fantastic and terrible story of all of our survival!
Those who were never meant
to survive?

Maxine Hong Kingston beguilingly fuses her own experience with traditional Chinese stories. Gary Soto, as a third-generation Mexican-American, describes his courtship of his future wife, a second-generation Mexican-American.

Toni Morrison's "Recitatif" is on the one hand a "post-racial" story because, as the anthology says, "it is never revealed which of the two main characters is black and which is white." On the other hand, because Morrison is black and some of the

subject matter is racial, we want to know, and the energy we expend trying to tell may be a sign of how obsessed by race we still are.

Readings

Introduction, pp. 1067-78
Roethke, 1079-87
Bishop, 1088-98
Hayden, 1111-18
Tillie Olsen, 1119-26
Berryman, 1127-33
Ellison, 1134-46
Malamud, 1147-56
Miller, 1174-1252

Lowell, 1250-65
Brooks, 1266-73
Baldwin, 1284-1301
O'Connor, 1301-15
Ginsburg, 1315-27
Ashbery, 1327-32
Albee, 1332-42
Rich, 1342-49
Le Guin, 1349-53
Snyder, 1353-60
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Plath, 1380-90
Updike, 1390-97

Baraka, 1397-1414
Lorde, 1415-20
DeLillo, 1421-26
Harper, 1427-33
Carver, 1433-41
Anzaldua, 1441-48
Walker, 1448-57
O'Brien, 1457-71
Silko, 1472-81
Harjo, 1481-87
Dove, 1487-92
Cisneros, 1492-96
Momaday, 1521-28
Kingston, 1528-33
Dillard, 1534-39
Mamet, 1539-43

Questions

As the producer of Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, Edward Albee must have thought highly of it. How different and how similar is it to Albee's surreal or absurdist play *The Sandbox*? Which is closer in style to Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman*?

Discuss the similarities and differences among three of the writers read in this unit – one American Indian, one Afro-American, and one Mexican-American. What are their attitudes towards race and racial prejudice? What use do they make of their race's history.

Autobiography and protest are prominent in a lot of the poetry in this unit – in the poems of Roethke, Bishop, Lowell, Ginsberg, Rich, Plath, and Harjo, to name seven. Choose four of these poets and try to rank them according to how much you identify with the experiences they describe and how powerful or effective you think their protests are.

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
AMERICAN LITERATURE

An Online Guide to American Literature

Description

American Literature e-book provides a broad view of American literature from earliest Indian oral traditions through the twentieth century. The book traces movements and the formation of narratives that reflected a growing, evolving society, along with multiple encounters and collisions of multiple cultures and peoples.

About the Professor

Robert F. Sayre is a professor emeritus of University of Iowa. An acknowledged and distinguished scholar, Dr. Sayre is widely published in the field of American Literature and autobiography and memoirs, and his essays, articles, and anthologies have received positive reviews.

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Period I: Beginnings to 1760 – Colonial and Pre-Colonial

Introduction

The earliest American literature was the oral literature of native American people, telling their stories of the origins of the earth and of people, animals, and customs. Later came the accounts of Spanish, French, and English explorers and adventurers. Not until the 1600s is there significant writing in English by European settlers.

Most of this early colonial writing was by the English Puritans, beginning with the Pilgrims who came on the *Mayflower* in 1620, led by William Bradford. They were Separatists who had separated from the Church of England, because they believed it had become too similar to the Church of Rome and because of persecution by William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The later Puritans, led by John Winthrop, wished to reform or purify the Church of England. They were heavily influenced by the theology of John Calvin (1509-64) and his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1560).

Calvinism emphasized the supreme authority of God, as revealed in the Bible; the duty of each person to learn, accept, and fulfill God's will; the depravity of human nature, or original sin, stemming from the fall of Adam; the power of God's grace and mercy to save those who are elect, as possibly revealed by their good deeds; and the right of individual congregations to govern themselves, without a hierarchy of church officials. Puritans, therefore, emphasized education, hard work, and obedience, although the emphasis on a personal relationship with God also encouraged some, like Anne Hutchinson, to break away.

One of the most common Puritan heresies was Arminianism, named for Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), a Dutch theologian who believed that atonement from sin is always possible, given the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Methodist Church of John Wesley and George Whitefield (1714-70), who led great revival meetings in America, had a similar faith.

Settlers of Virginia and southern colonies were nominally members of the Church of England. Their leaders were aristocratic and established great estates on which the principal crop was tobacco, introduced to the Chesapeake Bay area from the islands of the West Indies. The first African slaves were brought to Virginia to work on tobacco plantations in 1619.

Many settlers of Maryland were Catholic. William Penn (1644-1718), a wealthy English Quaker, who had acquired a charter from King Charles II in 1681 to establish Pennsylvania as a colony for Quakers. New York, being founded by the Dutch as primarily a trading post, and New Jersey, which was also for a time under Dutch rule, had more secular values.

Topic 1: Indian Oral Literature

Overview: The ancestors of American Indians came to America from Asia roughly 15,000 years ago during the last Ice Age, when sea levels were 600 feet lower, and what is now the Bering Strait was dry land. As they gradually made their way south and east, they created an oral literature that helped them to explain and possess their surroundings.

Origin Stories: One of the most common Indian stories was that the world was once all water, until the Creator asked a beaver to dive down to the bottom. The beaver brought up a little lump of sand which the Creator put on the back of a turtle. It dried out, and as it did it grew and grew and became the earth. But different people created and told different stories that were in character with the places they lived, their environment, what they needed to know to live there.

Collections: One of the earliest collections of Indian stories was made by the French missionary, Gabriel Sagard, who went to eastern Canada in 1623, learned the language and tales of the Hurons, and published them in *Le Grand Voyage du Pays des Hurons* (1632). But John Eliot, the Puritan missionary, learned the language of the Massachusetts Indians to teach them Christianity and to translate the Bible, not to collect their stories, which he regarded as heathenish. So the earliest English versions of Indian stories were by Indians like David Cusick and people of mixed race like Jane Johnston Schoolcraft. Their collections of Iroquois and Ojibway stories were published in the early 19th Century.

Authenticity in Indian stories can be a vexing issue. By its very nature, oral literature changes from speaker to speaker and generation to generation, although most tellers usually insist that their version is ancient and unchanged.

You know, everything had to begin, and this is how it was: the Kiowas came one by one into the world through a hollow log. They were many more then than now, but not all of them got out. There was a woman whose body was swollen up with child, and she got stuck in the log. After that, no one could get through, and that is why the Kiowas are a small tribe in number. They looked all around and saw the world. It made them glad to see so many things. They called themselves Kwuda, "coming out." (N. Scott Momaday)

Topic 2: Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca (c. 1490-c. 1557)

Overview: As one of the four survivors of a Spanish expedition of 600 men that was to establish a colony in Florida, this Spanish aristocrat's account of many disasters and adventures and is the first account of travels across Florida and the Gulf Coast, through Texas and the Southwest. It can also be called an original American captivity narrative, conversion narrative, and defense of native Americans.

Summary: Landing in 1528 in what is now Tampa Bay, the expedition was depleted by disease and attack by Apalachee Indians. Attempting to sail to Spanish settlements in Mexico, Cabeza de Vaca and eighty survivors were shipwrecked on the "Isle of Misfortune" (Galveston Island?), and taken captive by Indians. After two years as a slave, he escaped to the mainland and worked as a trader for five years among the seminomadic Coahuiltecan. Reuniting with three other Spanish survivors, he made his way through unexplored country by becoming a medicine man, mixing Catholic and native beliefs and practices. Arriving Mexico, he and his three companions encountered Spanish slave hunters who tried to enslave the hundreds of Pima Indians admirers who were following him. He defended the Pimas and was escorted to Mexico City, arriving in July, 1536. Back in Spain later that year, he wrote his story and on the basis of his knowledge of native languages and customs, and he was made governor of what is now Paraguay.

Significance: As a captivity narrative, Cabeza de Vaca's *Relation* (in Spanish *La Relacion que dio Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca*) can be compared to later ones by John Smith, Mary Rowlandson, Olaudah Equiano, and many others. He learns Indian cultures and adheres to his faith. Indeed, he impresses the natives with its power. But it is also in some respects an immigrant's story of being reduced to naked poverty and then surviving by adapting to a new culture and using his wits.

Aftermath: In his later story, *La relacion y comentarios del gouernador Alvar nunez cabeza de vaca* (1555), he tells how in Paraguay he was attacked by the colonists who wished to exploit the land and people, while he was sympathetic to them. He was arrested and sent back a prisoner to Spain, where he was sent to North Africa. Thus his life also illustrates the tragedy of a man caught between different, conflicting cultures.

Topic 3: John Smith (1580-1631):

Overview: This English adventurer was vitally important to both the founding of the Virginia Colony in 1607 and the exploration and promotion of New England. In Virginia, he led efforts to find food when people were starving and could both fight Indians and befriend them. Later, he explored the coast of New England, which he named, and offered to lead the Puritans there, though they declined his services. A bold and realistic leader, he was also a colorful self-promoter, which has led some readers to doubt the truth of some of his extensive writing.

The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles (1624): Smith's most famous book. Writing in the third person, he tells his part in the founding of Jamestown and defends himself against accusations of mutiny. It continues with an account of his later explorations. The best known part is his rescue by Pocahontas, after Powhatan and his men had laid his head on a rock and were about "to beate out his braines." She, "the Kings dearest daughter, when no intreaty could prevaile, got his head in her armes, and laid her owne upon his to save him from death...."

Criticism: Doubts about this famous story arise from the fact that Smith did not include it in his earlier books: *A True Relation of such occurrences and accidents of noate as hath hapned in Virginia...* (1608) or *A Map of Virginia with a Description of the Country* (1612). Did it really happen? If so, why did Smith not tell it earlier? Equally interesting, however, is the question of why it has become so popular. What does its popularity, retold in many books and a Walt Disney film, reveal?

Other Issues: Smith is in many ways an archetypal American character. He saw the difficulties of settlement. His criticism of the incompetence of other settlers and their leaders made enemies. He saw the need for accurate maps and knowledge of the country. He realized that there were no gold mines in Virginia and New England. Yet he was also an influential advocate for settlement.

Topic 4: William Bradford (1590-1657):

Overview: Most of the earliest colonial writings were histories of the different settlements, and William Bradford's *Of Plimoth Plantation* is one of the greatest. The Pilgrims of 1620 were separatists, dissenters who believed that the Church of England could not be reformed, and so left to establish their own church, first in Holland and then in New England. Bradford became their leader, and so was uniquely qualified to write their history, which he started in 1630 and added to for the next twenty years.

Puritan History: To the Puritans, all history was the working out of God's will, which in turn dignified the writing of history as a record of His work, as was the Bible, which was their model. Moreover, as the Israelites of the Old Testament were His chosen people, so did the Puritans see themselves and seek and find correspondences between the people and events in the Israelites' history and their own. Such faith helped the Pilgrims survive the privations and trials of settlement. In the first winter fifty members of the first party that had come on the *Mayflower* – half their number – died of hunger and disease.

Style: Although Bradford's model was the solemn prose of the King James Bible, he also was a master of the common language of Yorkshire, where he was born. For example, he says his people's desire to remove to America was "not out of any newfanglednes, or other such giddie humor." His images are plain and vivid, as when he says of the November landscape, "For summer being done, all things stand upon them with a wetherbeaten face,..."

Relations with Indians: Bradford's primary view of native American was that they were savages whom God sent to test their fortitude and faith. They generally "came skulking about" as the settlers were working, and once stole their tools. But the exceptions were Samoset, who appeared in March of 1631, spoke to them in broken English, and soon introduced them to Squanto, who had been taken to England by John Smith. Squanto introduced them to Massasoit, the Sachem or chief of the Wampanoags, with whom Bradford and the Pilgrims made peace. Squanto, whom Bradford calls "a spetiall instrument sent of God," became their interpreter, taught them where to fish and plant corn, and helped them to find other food.

Topic 5: John Winthrop (1588-1649)

Overview: Leader of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop was the son of wealthy land-owners. Planning to become a minister, he spent two years at Cambridge University, but later studied law. In the 1620s he and other Puritans feared increasing persecution by King Charles. In April, 1630, he sailed with 700 others in a fleet of eleven ships, bound for New England.

A Modell of Christian Charity: an address Winthrop delivered to the company as they were preparing to leave from Southampton (though once thought to have been delivered on the *Arabella*, Winthrop's ship). It is a remarkably complete synthesis of common law and Christian doctrine, the basis of Winthrop's policies as governor of the Colony and the code by which he believed Puritans should live. Its language is at once clear and elevated, inspiring Winthrop's listeners (and readers today) to build a Christian Commonwealth, "a city on a hill." Thus it is also a definition of what Puritanism actually was.

The Journal: Begun on the *Arabella*, Winthrop's daily journal became in his further intention and eventually in published fact, *The History of New England* (2 volumes, 1825-26). It is a fascinating combination of the important and the trivial, ranging from major matters like the trials of Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, to the first "wild pigeon" that landed on his ship, to a fight between a mouse and a snake. But from this the reader truly realizes that to a Puritan historian all are acts of God and signs and symbols of His purpose.

Topic 6: Puritan Poetry – Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor

Overview: Although some people are always surprised that American Puritans took time out to indulge in poetry, the fact is that some Puritan divines believed that writing poetry was a useful training. Moreover, didactic poetry like Michael Wigglesworth's "The Day of Doom" was meant to carry religious instruction, while Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor used poetry as an aid to meditation and contemplation.

Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672) was the daughter of Thomas Dudley, manager of the estate of the Earl of Lincoln. She was educated by private tutors and began writing poetry as a girl. At 16 she married Simon Bradstreet, and a year later he was employed by the Massachusetts Bay Company to prepare for the voyage to America, on which they all sailed in 1630. For the rest of her life she lived in Boston, bore eight children, and supervised her household, sometimes without her husband, who was Company Secretary and later a governor of the Colony. In 1661 he went to England on a diplomatic mission.

Despite her wifely loyalty and obedience, she was often witty and outspoken, as in these lines from "The Prologue" (1650):

*I am obnoxious to each carping tongue
Who says my hand a needle better fits,
A poet's pen all scorn I should thus wrong,
For such despite they cast on female wits:*

Her first book, *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America*, was published in 1650 in England without her knowledge. John Berryman's tribute to her, *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*, was published in 1956.

Edward Taylor (1644-1729) was born in England, emigrated to Boston in 1668, and graduated from Harvard in 1671, after which he became the minister in the frontier town of Westfield, Massachusetts. Only a few of his poems were published during his lifetime. The majority of his extensive writing was not known until it was found in the Yale library in the 1930s. It was widely praised for its similarities to the devotional and metaphysical poetry to John Donne and George Herbert.

His 195 *Preparatory Meditations* were written between 1682 and 1725 as meditations on Biblical texts used in the communion service, though the images are often astonishing, as in # 8, "I kenning through astronomy divine / The world's bright battlement, wherein I spy / A golden path my pencil cannot line,..."

One of his best known poems is "Huswifery," which opens "Make me, O Lord, Thy spinning wheel complete."

Topic 7: Samuel Sewall (1652-1730)

Overview: Sewall's extensive diaries, which he kept between 1673 and '77 and 1685 and 1729, are a rich documentation of the changes in Puritan culture and society during those years. A graduate of Harvard, where he roomed with Edward Taylor, he became a judge, and was one of those who presided at the Salem witch trials. Later, however, he apologized for his role in them (the only judge to do so). In 1700 he published the first American antislavery pamphlet. Still later, as a widower, he endeavored to marry the wealthy Madame Katherine Winthrop, appearing amusingly awkward and unsuccessful.

The Diary -- Key passages:

Jan. 13, 1677, where he makes a typically Puritan association while feeding his chickens

April 11 thru Sept. 20, 1692, the Salem witch trials

Jan. 15, 1697, the Bill he gave to his pastor accepting "the Blame and Shame" for the witch trials

June 19, 1700, resolves to write *The Selling of Joseph*, attacking slavery

Jan. 14, 1701, death of his mother

Feb. 6, 1714, skillfully quiets drunken revelry on the Queen's birthday

Oct. 1717, the passing of his wife

Sept. 30, 1720 & passim, courting Madame Winthrop.

These are only a few highlights. Since Sewall had many contacts throughout Massachusetts and held very important positions, his diary describes many aspects of over half a century of Puritan life.

Topic 8: Mary Rowlandson (c. 1635-1711)

Overview: New England Puritans also wrote many stories of captivity by Indians, of which Rowlandson's is perhaps the most famous. The wife of a minister in Lancaster, Massachusetts, she was captured in February, 1676, during King Phillip's War, 1675-76 (named after the Wampanoag chief, Metacomet, whom the Puritans called King Phillip). First published in Boston, 1682, as *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, it served, like many later captivity narratives as propaganda against the enemy, and as an illustration of the power of the victim's faith. Both are important.

As Anti-Indian Propaganda: The title of the English edition, also published in 1682, read in part *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson... Wherein is set forth, the Cruel and Inhumane Usage she underwent among the Heathens for Eleven Weeks...* In portraying the Indians as cruel heathens, this presentation of the book served to justify the war, which was the bitterest of New England Indian wars. Such justification could counter claims that the basic cause of the war was Puritan encroachment on Indian land.

As a Proof of Faith: Rowlandson's account can also be called religious propaganda, a story told to bolster the belief that God watched over every event, testing members of the church and protecting the elect, whom he would save for his kingdom.

Individualism: In exalting God, Puritanism also exalted the individual who believed in God, making individual experience important as a microcosm in which to see God's workings. Thus a relatively unknown woman could in this case write her personal story.

In considering these different interpretations, readers should also look for how her attitudes towards her captors change and what she says about King Philip himself.

The Genre: American captivity narratives stretch from Cabeza de Vaca's to the present. How is Rowlandson's like and unlike others?

Topic 9: Jonathan Edwards (1703-58)

Overview: Intellectually the greatest Puritan, Edwards graduated first in his class at Yale in 1720, served at a Presbyterian church in New York, as a tutor at Yale, and later became the powerful leader of the Congregational church in Northampton, Massachusetts, where his preaching helped start the Great Awakening, the revival of religious fervor that ran through all the colonies from the late 1730s through the 1740s. Dismissed by his congregation in 1750 over differences in doctrine, he moved to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, as a missionary to the Indians, then became President of the College of New Jersey (Princeton), in 1757.

Writings: A prolific writer, Edwards's sermons and theological treatises fill many volumes, of which the most important are *Freedom of Will* (1754) and *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758). In them he expanded on the primary Calvinist teaching that man is inherently sinful and refuted "the Arminian notion of Liberty of Will." Yet he insisted that divine love is available to all and that mankind should in turn love all of God's creation, looking on it as the face of God. Salvation through God's grace is available to all, but certainty of grace is impossible to know.

The best-known of Edwards' writings today are:

"On Sarah Pierpont" (1723) – believed to be a tribute to the "young lady in [New Haven]" Edwards married and who bore him eleven children. It poetically describes the "sweet delight" that comes to her from the love of God and how "She loves to be alone, and to wander in the fields and on the mountains and seems to have someone invisible always conversing with her."

"The Personal Narrative" (1765) – Now called his autobiography, it was probably written in 1739 or 1740, during the Great Awakening, as a searching analysis of his own religious experience.

Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God (1741) – His most famous sermon, expanding on the doctrine that "nothing...keeps wicked man...out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God. The most vivid image is of man dangling over hell fire like a spider on a thread.

"Images and Shadows of Divine Things" (1748) – 212 notes found by scholars that Edwards made on the correspondences between the objects of the natural world – plants, mountains, seasons, etc. – the supernatural. Can be read as a link between Edwards and Emersonian transcendentalism and also 20th-century symbolism.

Topic 10: Elizabeth Ashbridge (1713-55)

Overview: Ashbridge's story of going from England to Ireland and then to America as an indentured servant and becoming a Quaker has attracted great interest since it first became known to a wider, non-Quaker audience in 1968. She was wild and spirited and did not conform to either the religious or the common social codes of her time. The result is a very different view of early eighteenth-century America than one gets from men's writing and the writing of middleclass and upperclass women. She is also surprisingly modern in her search for her own faith and her standing up to abusive men.

Some Account of the Fore Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge is her autobiography and only surviving writing. It is written from the perspective of her latter years, after her conversion. Thus she recounts many of her early misdeeds and mistakes, describing both her unhappiness at the time, as in the story of her elopement at age fourteen, and her quest for a new religious faith. She meets Catholics, Presbyterians, and Quakers – all of whom disappoint her. It is also ironic that when she sees a Quaker woman preaching, she “looked on her with Pity for her Ignorance (as I thought) & Contempt of her Practise, saying to my self, ‘I am sure you are a fool, for if ever I should turn Quaker, which will never be, I would not be a preacher.’” Her joining the Quakers, however, gives her the strength of conscience and behavioral strategies for bearing up under her second husband's threats and attacks and temporarily reforming him.

Period II: 1760-1830 – Revolutionary and Romantic

Introduction

This tumultuous seventy-year period was marked by so many different and conflicting influences and kinds of writing that it has always been difficult for historians to characterize. At the beginning, the major intellectual influence was the European Enlightenment – the rise of scientific investigation and discovery and philosophic speculation that inspired Franklin, Jefferson, and the writers of the Constitution. Right on top that, and to some degree provoked by it, came the Revolution, fanned by the writings of Thomas Paine and pamphleteers. In 1788, with the founding of the American Republic, American literature became self-consciously continental and nationalistic as it had never been before. A consequence was a fierce new ambivalent attitude towards England and Europe. On the one hand, Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper and their contemporaries imitated closely their English predecessors and contemporaries like Addison, Steele, Pope, and Walter Scott, because they and their readers believed that these were literary masters who set the standards of taste and achievement. On the other hand, they were expected by reviewers and readers to be different and strove to express American independence. Simultaneously, American artists and architects imitated the styles of the early Roman republic, but mixed that Federalist classicism with a romantic spirit of hope and a worship of nature, common people, and simplicity. Tellingly, it was also in the latter part of this period that the plain, unadorned, almost box-like churches and meeting houses of New England were remodeled and given their inspiring white steeples and classical front pillars. Puritanism gave way to Unitarianism.

Topic 11: Benjamin Franklin (1706-90)

Overview: Although Franklin is famous for many achievements, his fame in American literature rests primarily on his *Autobiography*, which is the archetypal success story of a young man of industry and virtue rising from humble beginnings to fortune and fame. Also widely read is *The Way to Wealth*. But Franklin was a voluminous writer, for whom letters, essays, scientific papers, diplomatic reports, and satiric “projects” and “bagatelles” were essential to all his work. He embodies the American intellectual transition from Puritanism to the Deism of the eighteenth-century enlightenment philosophers, although his writing is generally in a clear middle style.

The Autobiography: written in four parts, the first in 1771, when he was colonial representative in England, tells of his boyhood in Boston, breaking of his apprenticeship to his brother, move to Philadelphia, work as a printer in London, and return to Philadelphia, where he became a successful printer. The second, written outside Paris in 1784, describes his “bold and arduous Project of arriving at moral Perfection.” The third, written back in Philadelphia in 1788, recounts his many civic projects in Philadelphia and brief service in the French-Indian War. It ends in 1757, as he is setting leaving as the Pennsylvania agent in England. The brief fourth part was added sometime in 1789 or 1790.

Franklin was a master at adopting different personae, appropriate to different audiences and subject matter. Note how the personae change and how they are also related.

The Way to Wealth: a compendium of the maxims and folk wisdom Franklin had printed in the annual editions of *Poor Richard's Almanac* (1733-58). Though often criticized for being mean and simple, emphasizing prudence and thrift, the maxims were also contradictory.

Other Writing: For a broader appreciation of Franklin, read some of the following:

- “The Dogood Papers” (1722)
- “A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain” (1725)
- “The Speech of Polly Baker” (1747)
- “Proposals Relating to the Youth of Pennsylvania” (1749)
- “Exporting of Felons to the Colonies” (1751)
- “A Narrative of the Late Massacres in Lancaster County” (1764)
- “An Edict by the King of Prussia” (1773)
- “The Ephemera” (1778)
- Letter “To Sir Joseph Banks” (1783)

Topic 12: John Woolman (1720-72)

Overview: Born to Quaker parents who were successful farmers in Burlington County, New Jersey, near Philadelphia, Woolman had little formal education, but through reading and study of the Bible became convinced of the need to live a simple life and try to do God's will, eventually becoming a Quaker missionary. His *Journal*, begun in 1752, was a record of his thoughts and work and has long been admired as a model of gentle but precise and firm language.

A Journal of the Life, Gospel Labours, and Christian Experiences of That Faithful Minister of Jesus Christ, John Woolman was first published in Philadelphia in 1774. After a summary of his early life and "fresh and heavenly openings in respect to the care and providence of the Almighty over his creatures," the first chapter ends with his being asked by his employer, a shop-owner, to write the bill of sale for "a Negro woman" he was selling to another Quaker. Woolman obeys, but "was so afflicted in my mind that I said before my master and the friend that I believed slaveholding to be a practice inconsistent with the Christian religion." From then on he refused to assist in such sales, later writing two pamphlets against slavery and preaching against it throughout the colonies.

His further refusals to participate in other actions or obey orders and requests contrary to his conscience are a predecessor of civil disobedience.

He also came to opposing wearing clothes made of dyed cloth, because the dyes were harmful to the cloth makers.

Language: In Woolman's writing, words are very carefully chosen, as he endeavors to subdue ego and avoid harsh, showy, violent speech. If style is the dress of thought, Woolman's is modest and comely. It fits.

Some of the great carry delicacy to a great height themselves, and yet real cleanliness is not generally promoted. Dyes being invented partly to please the eye and partly to hide dirt, I have felt in this weak state, when traveling in dirtiness, and affected with unwholesome scents, a strong desire that the nature of dyeing cloth to hide dirt may be more fully considered.

Other writings:

- *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes* (1754, 1762)
- *Considerations on the True Harmony of Mankind* (1770)
- *A Plea for the Poor* (1793)

Topic 13: J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur (1735-1813)

Overview: Born in France and wounded while defending Quebec in 1759, during the French-Indian War, Crevecoeur later settled with his American wife on a farm in Orange County, New York, which provided the nominal setting for *Letters from an American Farmer*. But he also traveled widely in the English colonies and remained a Loyalist in the Revolution, when he returned to France. After the war, however, he returned as French consul for New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Both a sentimental man of feeling and a cosmopolitan, he returned to France in 1787, where he died.

Letters from an American Farmer -- his most famous book. First published in England in 1782 and then in France in 1783 as *Lettres d'un cultivateur Americain*, it first of all attempted to define the ideal of the independent American yeoman, asking the question, "What is an American, this new man?" Such a self-supporting, self-respecting farmer benefits from cheap land, sensible laws, and a modest education, and he avoids religious disputes. There are no hereditary aristocrats, and America is God's intended destination for the oppressed.

But Crevecoeur was also critical. On the frontiers, beyond established farms and communities, Americans return to the savage hunter state of society, where they degenerate and become crude and careless. Contrariwise, in cities like Charleston, South Carolina, they become too luxury-loving.

There is also a "melancholy scene" when the traveling "farmer" comes upon a slave locked in a cage hanging from a tree in the woods (Letter IX).

In the end, sickened by the Revolution and society's crimes, the "farmer" leaves to go live with the Indians.

Topic 14: John and Abigail Adams (1735-1826, 1744-1818)

Overview: One of the committee of three (with Jefferson and Franklin) to write the Declaration of Independence, Ambassador to France, member of the Constitutional Convention, and then the first Vice-President and second President of the United States, John Adams' fame has always been great. His wife Abigail Smith Adams has usually been in the background, however, until American feminists drew attention to her again in the 1970s, especially for her admonition to John in a letter, March 31, 1776, "Remember the Ladies" and "Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could." In fact, both John and Abigail were brilliant writers, in their radically different ways. – John in his letters and discourses and fragments of his autobiography, Abigail in her vivid, colorful letters and diary. Both gave Puritan traditions of personal narratives a new vigor and worldliness.

John Adams: Important, revealing, and characteristic works are—

"Diary and Autobiography" – description of sharing a bed with Benjamin Franklin, September, 1776, and arrival in Bordeaux, 1778.

Letters to Abigail, April 14, 1776; July 3, 1776; and May 1st, 1780 (with thoughts on what "our Country requires.")

Letter to Mercy Otis Warren (wife of the president of the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts and a writer of a political satire), April 16, 1776.

Letters to Thomas Jefferson, September 2, 1813; November 15, 1813

Discourses on Davila (1789-90) – reflections on the human passion for emulation and its power for good and evil.

Abigail Adams:

Letters to John, March 31, 1776; June 30, 1778.

Letters to Mrs. Cranch, September 5, 1784; September 5, 1784 – descriptions of domestic arrangements in Paris and of Benjamin Franklin.

"Diary," March 30-May 1, 1788 – descriptions of her and John's return to America

Topic 15: Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)

Overview: The greatest of America's Enlightenment philosopher-statesmen, Jefferson was the principal author of the *Declaration of Independence*, ambassador to France during the French Revolution, the third President (making the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and directing the Lewis and Clark expedition), and later the author of *Notes on the State of Virginia*. A philosophical liberal and Deist, he was often attacked as an atheist and Francophile, even by his friend John Adams. But the two reconciled in later years. That they both died on July 4, 1826, was taken as a solemn omen and wonder.

The Declaration...: The most revolutionary ideas: that (in Jefferson's words) "all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; ..." John Locke, had called the basic rights "life, liberty, and estate," meaning property. The slogan of the French Revolution, "liberte, egalite, fraternite," incorporated two of Jefferson's words and added "fraternity." Jefferson's original text is in his *Autobiography*.

Notes on the State of Virginia. Written in answer to 23 questions about the United States from the secretary of the French legation and first printed in France in 1784, it was published in London in 1787 and in the U.S. in 1788. A major work not only on customs, beliefs and government but also on natural history and horticulture. Prophetic for Jefferson's words on the inevitable crisis to arise from slavery, "a fire-bell in the night."

Other writing:

The Autobiography. Note how it is different from other autobiographies.

Letters. Very numerous. Note those to John and Abigail Adams.

Topic 16: Samson Occom (1723-92)

Overview: John Eliot (1604-90), the Puritan missionary, had begun preaching to Indians and converting them to Christianity in the 1630s. But Occom, a descendant of the famous Mohegan Indian chief Uncas, was the first Indian to become a missionary to Indians. Raised near New London, Connecticut, he was so affected in 1740 by the Great Awakening that he learned English and became a student and follower of the missionary Eleazer Wheelock. A powerful preacher, Wheelock sent him to England in 1766 to raise money for his proposed Indian school. Preaching 300-400 times in a year and a half, Occom raised over 12,000 Pounds, including 200 from King George III, and returned to America in 1767, only to have Wheelock take the money to found Dartmouth College. Disappointed, Occom continued to work among the Mohegans around New London, and in the Oneida territory in New York, to which they moved, but where they were also disrupted by the Revolution. He died there in 1792.

A Sermon Preached at the Execution of Moses Paul, An Indian Who Was Executed at New Haven on the 2nd of September 1772 for the Murder of Mr. Moses Cook... Occom's most famous sermon. Execution sermons were very popular, delivered at the site of public hangings and addressed both to the guilty and the audience. Speaking on the text from Romans, VI, 23, "For the Wages of Sin is Death," Occom also warned the Indians in the audience against drunkenness, because Moses Paul had been drunk when he killed Moses Cook, a prominent white man. Drunkenness was a serious social problem, among both Indians and whites. The sermon went through 19 editions.

A Short Narrative of My Life. This short autobiography, which Occom wrote in 1768, was not published until 1982, after being found in the Dartmouth College archives. It tells of his conversion, his education, and his supporting himself, his wife, and their many children by teaching, raising corn, hunting, fishing, book-binding, and making "wooden Spoons and Ladles, Stocked Guns...Pails, and Churns." He always felt underpaid – "I *must* Say, 'I believe it is because I am a poor Indian.' I can't help that God has made me So; I did not make my self so."

Other works -- *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, ed. By Joanna Brooks (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006).

Topic 17: Olaudah Equiano (1745-97)

Overview: If not the first African slave narrative, certainly the first famous one, Equiano's two-volume *Narrative* of his capture, transport to Virginia, sale to a sea captain, adventures as a seaman, learning English, conversion to Christianity, and efforts to abolish slavery was well known in the nineteenth century in both England and America. Its fame was revived in the 1960s, and it is now read for both its historical importance and its literary interest.

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself (1789, 1791): Note, first, Equiano's use of the autobiographical conventions – his apology for writing, his means of claiming the reader's attention.

...did I consider myself a European, I might say my sufferings were great; but when I compare my lot with that of most of my countrymen, I regard myself as a particular favorite of heaven, and acknowledge the mercies of Providence in every occurrence of my life.

Secondly, note his similarities and differences to other slaves' experience – how he learned English, how he bought his freedom, the importance of his conversion, how he joined the anti-slavery movement in England. Is he "the African," an Afro-American or an Afro-Englishman?

Recent research has discovered that on a Royal Navy muster roll he was listed as born in South Carolina. If so, why doesn't he say so? What is the advantage of the story as he tells it?

How is his *Narrative* similar to other autobiographies of self-help like Franklin's or religious conversion, like Elizabeth Ashbridge?

How is it similar to other American slave narratives?

Topic 18: Phillis Wheatley (c. 1753-1784)

Overview: Born in Africa, Wheatley was brought to Boston in 1761 as a little girl and bought by John Wheatley to serve his wife Sarah. Not knowing a word of English and named apparently after the ship that brought her, she was educated by the Wheatleys' daughter Mary and began to write poetry, publishing first in a Rhode Island newspaper in 1767. A poem "On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield," the Methodist evangelist, in 1770 attracted many readers. But her first book was published in 1773 in London, where she had been taken by the Wheatleys' son Nathaniel, and where she met Benjamin Franklin. On her return, John Wheatley emancipated her, she married, and became an advocate of American independence, hoping it would also bring freedom for slaves. Her poems were later published by American abolitionists, then largely forgotten until the 1960s, though long an inspiration to Afro-American poets.

Poetry: Jefferson wrote of Wheatley, "Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Wheatley; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism." Do these poems prove him wrong?

--"On Being Brought from Africa to America" – note the tone and audience

--"To the University of Cambridge, in New-England" – could this poem be written today by an outsider to privileged college students?

--"A Farewell to America. To Mrs. S.W." – note the formal "poetic" language, like "liquid plain" for the Atlantic Ocean. Why does she use it?

"To His Excellency George Washington" – one of several poems on American independence.

Letter to Samson Occom (1774): Note Wheatley's sense of kinship and common cause with Occom, the Mohegan missionary. (See Topic 16)

Topic 19: Washington Irving (1783-1859)

Overview: America's first really popular and prolific man of letters, Irving grew up reading the popular English essayists like Addison and Steele and broke into print in 1802 by writing satirical pieces on New York society under the pen-name of Jonathan Oldstyle, Gent. for a newspaper founded by his brother Peter, the *Morning Chronicle*. He traveled extensively in Europe, wrote a satiric history of New York under another pen-name, Diedrich Knickerbocher, a pedantic old Dutch-American, and returned to England, where he started *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* Popular in both England and America, he became the American attaché in Madrid, where he wrote more tales and histories and a biography of Columbus. Returning to the U.S. in 1832, he reclaimed his American identity with a summer trip to Arkansas and Oklahoma, resulting in *A Tour on the Prairies*. In 1842-45 he returned to Spain as the American ambassador. Otherwise, he lived in his country home near Tarrytown, "Sunnyside," a model of the gothic picturesque, where he wrote more histories and biographies, including a five-volume biography of George Washington.

The Sketch Book (1819): Irving's best-loved book, primarily for "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, both of which are set in rural New York but adapted from German folk tales. However, many of the tales and sketches have English settings and subjects, e.g. "Westminster Abby," the British Museum, Stratford-on-Avon, and a series on English Christmas customs. Note:

--Irving's Anglo-American sympathies, only a few years after the War of 1812,

--"The Author's Account of Himself" & the character of Irving's persona

--The style – genteel, cultivated, and often humorous and detached

--His sympathy for Indians in "Traits of Indian Character" and "Philip of Pokanoket" (the King Philip who was hated by Puritans)

--What modern writers are like Irving?

A Tour on the Prairies (1835): Perhaps Irving's most interesting travel book, for the images of the frontier and frontier characters.

Influence: Admired by both Poe and Hawthorne, Irving is important in the development of the short story and as an early American romantic. Also called a man of sentiment for his cultivation of feeling, sympathy and good manners.

Topic 20: James Fennimore Cooper (1789-1851)

Overview: America's first best-selling novelist, Cooper grew up at his father's estate on Otsego Lake, New York, site of Cooperstown. Expelled from Yale in 1806, he was a midshipman in the navy for four years, then married and settled down as a country gentleman. Wrote his first novel *Precaution* (1820) as an imitation of English novels of manners, followed by *The Spy* (1821), set in the American Revolution, and *The Pioneers*, his first great success. Lived and traveled in Europe (1826-33), while continuing to write, and returned to the U.S. to be shocked by the crass manners of Jacksonian democracy, which brought out his aristocratic conservatism and sharp social criticism. Settled again in Cooperstown, where he continued to write voluminously and to be the subject of law suits and controversy.

The Leather-Stocking Tales -- Cooper's five most famous novels, each centering on the exploits of the hero Leather Stocking, the hunter and frontier scout who is the prototype of today's heroes of pulp fiction and films. He has different names in each of the five books.

The Pioneers (1823), set in the Cooperstown of Cooper's boyhood. The hero, Natty Bumppo, is an old woodsman whose defense of hunting and wilderness and natural law conflicts with the civil law being introduced by Judge Marmaduke Temple, who is based on Cooper's aristocratic father.

The Last of the Mohicans (1826), set in 1757, during the French-Indian War, the hero is Hawkeye, a younger man with staunch Indian friends (Chingachgook and Uncas) and a fierce enemy (Magua). Important source of good-and-bad-Indian stereotypes and romantic thrillers.

The Prairie (1827), set on the western plains in 1804, Natty Bumppo is nearly 90 but still a keen trapper and frontiersman who is fleeing civilization.

The Pathfinder (1840), set in 1759, again in upstate New York, Pathfinder is 40

The Deerslayer (1841), set in 1740s, early in the French-Indian Wars, when Deerslayer is a young man.

Collectively these novels are a romanticized history of the frontier and conflicts between civilization and savagery. They are comparable to Sir Walter Scott's Scottish Border novels.

Other Works: Cooper also wrote sea fiction, a history of the U.S. Navy, novels of the American Revolution, and brilliant commentary on American manners and values, most notably *The American Democrat* (1838).

Topic 21: Henry Rowe Schoolcraft (1793-1864) and Jane Johnston Schoolcraft (1800-43)

Overview: Henry Rowe Schoolcraft was a geologist-explorer who became the government agent to the Ojibwa at Sault Ste. Marie in 1822. There he met and married Jane Johnston, the daughter of John Johnston, an Irish fur trader and Ozha-guscoday-way-quary (Woman of the Green Valley), an Ojibwa chief's daughter. Jane, who was bi-lingual, taught the Ojibwa language to Henry, and together they translated Ojibwa tales that she learned from her mother. They were the basis of his book on the Ojibwa and other tribes between the Allegheny & the Atlantic coast, *Algic Researches* (1839). Later he was commissioned by the U.S. government to compile a six-volume collection of *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting...the Indian Tribes of the United States* (1851-57). Recently, scholars have resurrected Jane's contributions to his work and published collections of her writing. She is now recognized as the first American Indian woman writer and first American Indian to transcribe traditional Indian tales.

Two Stories that now appear in anthologies of American literature are "Mishosha, or the Magician and His Daughters" and "The Forsaken Brother." The first is about a young man who is captured by a magician but, with the help of his daughters, finds ways to trick and escape him. The second tells of a little boy who his deserted by his older brother and sister, and survives by living with wolves, "until he changed into a perfect wolf." Like many Indian stories, their meaning is illusive. But there are other, more fruitful questions and approaches:

- What do the stories do?
- Why would they have been told and preserved?
- In what ways are they different from or similar to non-Indian stories?
- Try to learn and re-tell them. What are some of the differences between oral and written literature?
- Contrast these tales with Irving's and Cooper's writing about Indians

For further information see Robert Dale Parker, *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky: The Writings of Jane Johnson Schoolcraft* (2007). (The title is the English translation of her Ojibwa name, O-bah-bahm-wawa-ge-zhe-go-qua.)

Period III: 1830-1865 -- The American Renaissance

The important difference between the literature of this brief period and the romantic writing of the years just before is that in both form and content it is distinctly American. The major writers of this period – Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, Emerson, Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, and Whitman – did not imitate European writers. They developed new forms like the short story and the long, shaggy, unrhymed lines of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* to convey American experience. Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman also overflow with an American optimism, based on a trust in the goodness of nature and wilderness and their beneficent affect on the American individual and a new democratic society. They were, to use Emerson's words, members of the "party of the future." Poe, Hawthorne and Melville, with a stronger sense of evil and Calvinist original sin, spoke for the "party of the past," while probing deeply into the psychologies of guilt, obsession, and ambition.

Other major writing and writers of the period are also American originals. Most original are the many slave narratives, of which Frederick Douglass's and Harriet Jacobs's are outstanding examples. Women writers like Fanny Fern perfected the short journalistic column and the sentimental novel, usually about a young woman's suffering and education, what is now recognized as "women's fiction." Rebecca Harding Davis stands out for her protest against conditions in factories, and Harriet Beecher Stowe for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the best-selling novel of the era and one of the most popular American novels ever. Margaret Fuller, though never so popular, was the outstanding feminist of the period.

Topic 22: Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82)

Overview: A descendant of Puritans, Emerson went to Harvard and entered the Unitarian ministry but then resigned as pastor of the Second Church in Boston in 1832 because he no longer believed in the Biblical miracles, as celebrated in the communion service. He toured Europe, meeting Carlyle, Wordsworth, and Coleridge and studying German transcendentalist philosophy. In 1835 he settled in Concord, Massachusetts, where he wrote addresses and essays and attracted a group of other young idealistic ministers and writers who became known as the Transcendentalists. Emerson's own early essays also inspired Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Walt Whitman, and Emily Dickinson, and his work has had a lasting affect on many later American writers and philosophers, notably William James and John Dewey. Although not a systematic philosopher, many major American ideals and influences come together in his work.

Major Essays:

Nature (1836) the most important statement of Emerson's ideas of man's relation to nature, from the source of the basic commodities on which we live to the sources of the sequentially higher values beauty, language, discipline, idealism, and spirit.

"The American Scholar" (1837), first delivered as the Phi Beta Kappa lecture at Harvard, called upon young Americans to reject "the courtly muses of Europe" and live according to nature, spirit, and their own instincts. Described by James Russell Lowell "our intellectual Declaration of Independence."

"The Divinity School Address" (1838) attacked formal religion and defended a face-to-face relation to God.

"Self-Reliance" (1841), the boldest statement of the Emersonian doctrine of individualism. Opposes conformity and promotes "self-trust" as the voice of conscience and God.

"The Over-Soul" (1841), his definition of "that Unity...within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other..."

"The Poet" (1844), his lofty praise of poetry and the poet's role as "the complete man," who "apprises us not of his wealth, but of the common wealth." Famous also for the Whitmanian concept that "it is not metres, but a metre-making argument that makes a poem."

"Experience" (1844), his most realistic essay, provoked by the death of his son and attempt to deal with grief and the recognition that "Nature, as we know her, is no saint."

Poems: Though not nearly as great or influential as his essays, they have still been popular and contain many lines with pithy expressions of his thought. Especially notable are "The Rhodora," "Uriel," "The Snow Storm," "Ode," and "Concord Hymn."

Topic 23: Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-64)

Topic 23: Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-64)

Overview: Like Emerson, a descendant of Puritans, but haunted by their history. (An ancestor was one of the judges at the Salem witchcraft trials.) His sea captain father having died in 1808, he was raised by his mother and spent many hours reading. After graduating from Bowdoin College in 1825, he remained reclusive, traveling to remote parts of New England and reading extensively in its history, which became the background for many of his stories and greatest novels. Known as one of the founders of the American short story, he was admired by Poe and Melville and an influence on Henry James and Faulkner. In 1857 he was appointed by President Franklin Pierce, a college classmate, as American consul in Liverpool, from which he traveled widely in Europe.

Major Tales: His first books, *Twice Told Tales* (1837, 1842) and *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), were composed of stories written for gift books and magazines. Their principal themes are encounters between innocence and experience, responses to evil, efforts to attain perfection and root out evil and imperfection, and conflicts between the head (intellect and science) and the heart (sympathy and feeling). "The Maypole of Merrymount" memorializes the Puritan abolition of pagan pleasures and old English country festivals. "The Minister's Black Veil" is about sin, sanctity, and isolation from the human community. "Young Goodman Brown," describes a young man's loss of faith. "The Birthmark" describes an attempt to eliminate an imperfection and the tragic consequence. Although Hawthorne sometimes criticized his stories as being "damned allegories," they are masterpieces of complex symbolism.

Major Novels: *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) begins with the author's discovery, while working in the Salem, Massachusetts, Custom House, of a scarlet letter A and the story of Hester Prynne, an adulteress, and Arthur Dimmesdale, the saintly minister who was the father of Pearl, their child. The villain is Roger Chillingworth, her former husband, who suspects Dimmesdale and becomes his scourge and tormentor. Dimmesdale's judgment of him ("That old man's revenge has been blacker than my sin. He has violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of the human heart") and Hester's reply ("What we did had a consecration of its own") are classic statements of Hawthorne's moral code.

The House of Seven Gables (1851) is set in modern time in an old Salem mansion.

The Blithedale Romance (1852) concerns a utopian community like Brook Farm, where Hawthorne lived briefly in the 1840s. The brilliant and alluring character of Zenobia is based on Margaret Fuller.

The Marble Faun (1860) is set in Rome.

Topic 24: Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49)

Overview: The orphaned son of actors, Poe was raised in the family of John Allan, a Richmond, Virginia, businessman, who provided him with a good education but did not support his literary ambitions. So after one year at the University of Virginia, Poe was on his own, enlisting in the Army, briefly attending West Point, and soon becoming a very successful magazine editor. As editor and writer, Poe developed an aesthetic that not only appealed to popular taste but also set standards for the lyric poem, the short story, and the detective story, that have had an international appeal. Though often criticized for his drug and alcohol problems and his striving for sensationalism, he was a valued counter-voice to the literary establishment of his time.

Critical Theories: Poe believed that the highest work of literary art was the "rhymed poem," which could be read in under an hour and whose goal was the creation of beauty. "A long poem is a paradox" and the reign of the epic "is no more." The prose tale may be longer, but should be readable in a "single sitting" and must also strive for a powerful, single effect, such as horror, truth, "ratiocination," "the sarcastic or the humorous." These strictures are elaborated in his review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* in 1842 and "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846).

Poems: His own poetry fulfills these goals. "The City in the Sea" is a recreation of a submerged Sodom or Gomorrah. "Annabel Lee" is about the death of a beautiful woman, which Poe considered the most poetical of all subjects. "Ulalume" was written for its rich vocal effects. "The Raven," his most popular poem, is on the subject of remorse.

Short Stories: Poe's stories are all variations of gothic mystery and horror, or as he called them, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, the title of his first collection, published in two volumes in 1839. Some of the most popular are:

"Ligeia," in which an aristocratic young man watches his dark-haired, beautiful and learned wife die and then come back to life in the body of his second wife, the fair-haired Lady Rowena Trevanion.

"The Fall of the House of Usher," in which the old mansion breaks up and disappears into a dark and gloomy tarn.

"Murders in the Rue Morgue," one of his tales of ratiocination, in which the brilliant detective C. Auguste Dupin determines that the murderer was an ape.

"The Tell-Tale Heart," in which a deranged murderer is overcome by the sound of his victim's watch, believing it is his still-beating heart, and confesses. The story is often read as an early use of stream-of-consciousness technique.

Topic 25: Margaret Fuller (1810-50).

Overview: Fuller was one of the most controversial writers of her time, and her brilliance and outspoken feminism were often satirized. She was the prototype of Zenobia in Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*. An associate of Emerson, she was the first editor of *The Dial*, the Transcendentalist journal, before moving to New York, where she wrote for Horace Greeley's influential *Tribune*. Her letters from Europe, where she went in 1846, were printed on the front page. In Italy she married the Marquis Angelo Ossoli, a follower of Mazzini. They and their child drowned in a shipwreck off of Fire Island, New York.

Women in the Nineteenth Century (1845): her most famous book, based on ideas first developed in "conversations" that she held at the home of Elizabeth Peabody, another feminist, and upon essays that first appeared in *The Dial* under the title "The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men ; Woman versus Women." It is a powerful argument for the spirituality of woman, the "immortal being" that is spiritually equal to man but has been deprived of its "nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such powers as were given to her."

Other Works: *A Summer on the Lakes* (1843) is an important travel book about her voyage through the Great Lakes to Chicago and her excursion across the Illinois prairies to Rock Island and the site of Black Hawk's village. In Sauk Ste. Marie she met Jane Schoolcraft, whose poetry she admired.

Papers on Literature and Art (1846), reviews and essays.

At Home and Abroad (1856) and *Life Without and Life Within* (1859) were published posthumously.

A manuscript on the Roman revolution was lost in the shipwreck.

Memoirs of her were written by Emerson, W.H. Channing, and J.F. Clarke

Topic 26: Fanny Fern (1811-72)

Overview: Born Sara Payson Willis, the daughter of Nathaniel Willis, a Presbyterian deacon who founded the nation's first religious newspaper and first children's paper, Fanny Fern was a pen name that she took when she began to write newspaper columns, following deaths and divorces that left her in 1851 with no means of support except as a seamstress. Writing as a woman who was vulnerable to sentiment and yet leery of it and also frequently sharp-tongued and irreverent, she became the country's first female columnist and one of the best paid. In 1854 a collection of her columns, *Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio*, earned her ten thousand dollars. Though attacked by her male contemporaries as improper and by later literary historians as sentimental, she was praised by many. Hawthorne said she wrote "as if the devil was in her."

The Columns: Now included in many anthologies, they are usually written in the first person and based on her own experiences as a woman and mother, or as if her own. In "Hints to Young Wives" (1852) she describes being told by "Mr. Fern" to mend his overcoat and discovering a "love-letter from him to my dress-maker!!" Other columns like "Soliloquy of a Housemaid" (1854) and "The Working Girls of New York" (1868) protest against the condition of women. One of the once most controversial is "Apollo Hyacinth" (1854) that satirizes her brother, Nathaniel Parker Willis (1806-67), a successful popular travel- and adventure-writer, as a social-climber and hypocrite.

Ruth Hall (1855): a novel based on her own experiences as a widow struggling to support herself and become financially independent. Though she published it under her pseudonym, her authorship was exposed, and it created a sensation for its attacks on her very respectable father and dandified brother, both of whom had been neglectful of her. Although some called it "Ruthless Hall," Fern's popularity survived. She later used Fanny Fern as her common name.

Topic 27: Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-96)

Overview: Writer of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the nation's first great best seller, Stowe was the daughter of Lyman Beecher, an influential Congregational evangelist. Her older sister Catharine was a pioneer in women's education and in training women to be teachers. Raised in Connecticut, she had her first exposure to slavery when she moved to Cincinnati, where Lyman was appointed president of Lane Theological Seminary. With Kentucky just across the Ohio River, Cincinnati attracted many escaped slaves and was the scene of anti-abolitionist riots. When the trustees of Lane Seminary forbid students to live and work with the black population, many of them resigned, reducing the salaries of the faculty, of whom Calvin Stowe, Harriet's husband was one. To earn money, Harriet wrote magazine sketches. But it was not until the Stowes moved to Maine, where Calvin became a professor at Bowdoin College, that she began to write her famous book. In 1850, outraged by the Fugitive Slave Act, her sister-in-law challenged her to "write something that [would] make this whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is." Serialized in an anti-slavery newspaper, it attracted great attention. Ten thousand copies were sold in the first days after publication and three hundred thousand in the first year. Its impact was so great that Lincoln later addressed Stowe as "the little lady who started this great war."

Questions about *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852):

What made the book so popular and influential?

To Stowe's readers, the family was the center of evangelical faith. How does Stowe present black and white families and the effects on them of slavery?

Stowe defended the book with both her own observations and excerpts from many slave narratives. See *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853). What scenes, facts, and characters resemble those in Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* and other books?

What stereotypes of black and white character appear in it?

Is the book melodramatic or realistic? Give examples.

Other Books: *Uncle Tom's* fame has eclipsed Stowe's other writing, although reading it also excites interest in them.

Dred (1856) is another powerful anti-slavery novel.

The Minister's Wooing (1859) has been praised as "one of the great portrayals of life in early New England" and for its strong feminism.

The Pearl of Orr's Island (1862) and *Old Town Folks* (1869) are early regionalist novels.

Her domestic letters and sketches are both vivid and humorous. After the Civil War, Stowe and Mark Twain were neighbors in Hartford, Connecticut.

Topic 28: Harriet Ann Jacobs (1813-97)

Overview: Jacobs's powerful *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is believed to be the first slave narrative by a woman who had been sexually molested. By the time it was published, however, the Civil War had distracted many potential readers. It was also criticized as sensational and exaggerated. But since its republication in 1987 it has been widely praised, and Jean Fagan Yellin and other scholars have uncovered much more information about her life, which substantiates the book.

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Told by Herself (1861). Using the pseudonym "Linda Brent," Jacobs tells of being sexually harassed by her white master, "Dr. Flint," and having children by another white man, "Mr. Sands," in hopes of staving off "Dr. Flint." It does not, she runs away, and hides for seven years in the attic of her grandmother, a freed woman, who is also raising Linda's children. Linda's only contact with them, however, is by hearing their voices and watching them through a peephole. She finally escapes to the north, but the 1850 fugitive slave law keeps her at risk, till her freedom is purchased by a sympathetic northern white woman. The book was edited by the popular author and abolitionist, Lydia Maria Child, who also wrote a brief introduction. It was republished in 1862 in England as *The Deeper Wrong....* Questions to ask are, Why did Jacobs use a pseudonym and to whom was she mainly addressing the book?

The Life of Harriet Ann Jacobs. She was born in Edenton, North Carolina. Her mother died when she was six, and she went to live with her white mistress, who taught her to read and sew. At age eleven, she was willed to Dr. James Norcom of Edenton ("Dr. Flint"). "Mr. Sands," to whom she went when she was sixteen, was Samuel Tredwell Sawyer, an attorney and later U.S. Congressman (1837-39); their children were Joseph and Matilda. Her grandmother was Molly Horniblow, who supported herself by baking. She escaped by boat to Philadelphia, worked in New York for N.P. Willis (Fanny Fern's brother), then joined her brother, who had also escaped, in Rochester, N.Y., where she was associated with Frederick Douglass. It was Willis' wife who bought her freedom from Norcom. During the War she did relief work among slaves who had taken refuge with the Union army. She later lived with her daughter in Boston and Washington.

Topic 29: Henry David Thoreau (1817-62)

Overview: The author of *Walden* and next to Emerson, the most famous Transcendentalist. Also famous for his essay "Civil Disobedience," which was written after spending a night in jail for not paying his poll tax, in protest against slavery. The grandson of a French Protestant who came to America in 1773 and served in the Revolution, Thoreau graduated from Harvard in 1837, lived most of his life in Concord, Mass., never married, and died of tuberculosis.

Walden (1854) A classic of nature writing and autobiography, in which his two years living in the hut he built beside Walden Pond, 1845-47, are compressed into one that follows the cycle of the seasons from summer through fall and winter to spring and rebirth. Note the Transcendental education by study of nature, the past, and action. Also note the complexity of language, the etymological puns, the rhythms of exploration and withdrawal, and the invocations of nature and spirit.

Other Books:

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers (1849) – his first book, based on his boat trip with his brother John in 1839 to climb Mt. Washington. The narrative is interrupted by many digressions on Indians, history, literature, and philosophy.

The Maine Woods (1864) – important posthumous collection of three long essays about canoe and camping trips that Thoreau made in 1846 ("Ktaadn"), 1853 ("Chesuncook"), and 1857 ("The Allegash and East Branch"). The last was with the Penobscot guide, Joe Polis, whom Thoreau deeply admired.

Cape Cod (1865) – based on four visits, 1849-57 to the eastern-most part of Massachusetts, where he could stand on the beach "and put all of America behind him."

The Journal (14 vols., 1906). One of greatest literary and nature journals.

Essays:

"Civil Disobedience" (1849) first published as "On Resistance to Civil Government," defends his famous act of non-violent protest. It was followed by other anti-slavery papers, "Slavery in Massachusetts" (1854), "A Plea For Captain John Brown" (1859), "The Last Days of John Brown" (1860), and "After the Death of John Brown" (1860), in which he endorsed Brown's violent raids.

His best nature essays are "A Winter Walk," "Walking," and "Autumnal Tints." "Life Without Principle" is an inspiring summary of his philosophy, in the form of an attack on American materialism.

Topic 30: Frederick Douglass (1818-95)

Overview: The most famous black abolitionist and author of the most famous slave narrative, Douglass was born in Talbot County, Maryland, son of Harriet Bailey and, he suspected, Aaron Anthony, a plantation manager. His escape, which he finally revealed in his third autobiography, *The Life and Times...*, was by dressing as a sailor and boldly taking trains and boats from Baltimore to New York. To hide his identity, he took the name Douglass from the hero of Sir Walter Scott's *The Lady of the Lake*. In the north he soon became an abolitionist leader and eloquent lecturer, though in 1845-47 he went to England, for fear of being recaptured. He returned to live in Rochester, N.Y., where he started *The North Star*, an abolitionist newspaper, and also joined the women's right movement. During the Civil War he urged Lincoln to enlist blacks as soldiers. Afterwards he was a leader in the Republican Party, eventually serving as minister to Haiti.

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave (1845) The classic structure of a slave narrative, with vivid accounts of his life as a slave and concluding reflections on life in the north. But he refuses to tell how he escaped, lest it be found out and closed to others. Also note how he also appropriates features of white autobiography to emphasize a black man and slave's differences :

- how he is uncertain of his birthday and the significance
- how he learns to read and write, and why it is so important
- the importance of his fight with Covey, the slave breaker
- compare the *Narrative* with Franklin's *Autobiography*
- his concept of his audience

Other Writing:

"What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July," a speech given on July 5, 1852, in Rochester, and later published as a pamphlet.

My Bondage and My Freedom (1855), his second, longer autobiography
Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: Written by Himself (1892)

Topic 31: Herman Melville (1819-91)

Overview: The descendant of distinguished English and Dutch ancestors, Melville's father died when he was twelve, leaving the family in poverty. Quitting school when he was 15, he held various odd jobs, then went to sea as a common sailor, first to England and then on a whaler to the South Seas, which provided him with material for his greatest books, especially *Moby-Dick*. It and his later books were not commercial successes, however, and he spent his later years working as an obscure customs inspector in New York. His reputation was restored in the 1920s by the publication of *Billy Budd* and the praise of *Moby-Dick* and other works by literary critics and scholars.

Early Fiction: His first five books, *Typee* (1846), *Omoo* (1847), *Mardi* (1849), *Redburn* (1849), and *White-Jacket* (1850) are usually studied for the ways in which they anticipate *Moby-Dick*. How does Melville's technique vary from fictionalized autobiography to adventure stories to allegory? What are Melville's images of evil and his principal themes and moral codes? What are the competing attractions of civilization and savagery? But *Typee* and *Omoo* are also interesting as early pictures of life in the Marquesas and Society Islands. *White-Jacket* is a realistic picture of *The World in a Man-of-War* (its sub-title).

Moby-Dick (1851) A tale of adventure, suspense, violence, exploitation of resources, good and evil, innocence and experience, and a celebration of American industry and ingenuity, it rewards close reading of almost every sentence from the beginning ("Call me Ishmael") to the end, when Ishmael survives the sinking of the *Pequod* "buoyed up" on Queequeg's coffin. It also has a great cast of characters – Starbuck, Stubb, Flask, and the monomaniacal Ahab – each a study in himself.

Later Novels. *Pierre* (1852) is tortured philosophical fiction. *Israel Potter* (1855) is set in the American Revolution and most notable for its satiric portrait of Benjamin Franklin. *The Confidence Man* (1857) is a satire on American fraudulence. *Billy Budd* (1920), finished just before Melville's death, turns on the relationships between Billy, the innocent "handsome sailor," his antithesis Claggart, and Captain Vere, who must judge Billy.

Poems: *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866) has been called superior to Whitman's Civil War poetry.

Piazza Tales (1856) contains Melville's great short stories such as "Bartleby the Scrivener," "Benito Cereno," and "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids."

Topic 32: Walt Whitman (1819-92)

Overview: America's greatest poet was born on rural Long Island and named after his father, Walter Whitman, a farmer. After many years working at different jobs – typesetter, newspaperman, teacher, carpenter – he did not find his voice as a poet until writing the long, loose, unrhymed, and sensuous lines of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, published in 1855. From then on his life and the book, which grew and expanded in many later editions, are closely identified and also compose his picture of the democratic American man, although most of his contemporaries found it scandalous. A volunteer nurse and “wound-dresser” during the Civil War, he also wrote vivid sketches of the war and later wrote a harsh Jeremiad on American corruption and failure. An influence on many later poets, particularly W.C. Williams and Allen Ginsberg.

Major Poems:

“Song of Myself,” the long, untitled, most important poem of the 1855 edition, went through many changes. The author's name first appears in section 24, “Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son, / Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,” leading the reader to ask why there and not on the title page (where Whitman only provided a picture of himself, slouching and in work clothes). Also study the poem's long catalogues or lists. Does it have a structure?

“In Paths Untrodden,” one of the “Calamus Poems,” celebrating the poet's homosexuality or “manly love.”

“Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” – an ode to the sights, sounds, and spirituality of New York harbor.

“Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” celebrates his beginnings as a poet and discovery of major images and themes. Consider the earlier titles, “A Child's Reminiscence” and “A Word Out of the Sea.”

“When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd” is Whitman's elegy on the death of Abraham Lincoln. Perhaps his most carefully structured poem.

“Passage to India” – his optimistic response to the building of the transcontinental railroad and opening of the Suez Canal.

Prose:

Preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* – a rambling, nationalistic essay on the importance of poetry in a democracy.

Democratic Vistas (1871) His condemnation of the materialism and other failures of democracy, with prophecies of America's better future.

Specimen Days (1882) opens with memories of his childhood, New York, and Brooklyn. Next come sketches from Civil War battlefields and hospitals. Closes with travel sketches from a trip west, “nature notes,” and descriptions of his old age, when recovering from a stroke.

Topic 33: Emily Dickinson (1830-86)

Overview: As great a genius as Whitman, Dickinson lived a completely different life – sequestered in her wealthy and prominent father’s mansion in Amherst, Massachusetts. And yet she did spend one year at Mt. Holyoke College (where she refused to confess that she was “saved”), traveled to Washington and Philadelphia, and received visits from a few potential suitors. Recent research has also exposed the long affair that her brother Austin, an Amherst College trustee, had with Mabel Loomis Todd, the wife of an Amherst professor—a scandal made all the more difficult by the fact that Sue, Austin’s wife, was Emily’s dearest friend. Dickinson also had an intense intellectual relationship with Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the abolitionist, feminist, and social reformer to whom she sent some poems and who became the editor, with Mrs. Todd, of the first collections of her poems.

Publication History: Only seven of her nearly 2,000 surviving poems were published during her lifetime. Instead, she often sent them to friends and copied her favorites into little hand-stitched manuscripts called “fascicles.” Many therefore exist in different versions, with idiosyncratic punctuation, such as her preference for dashes instead of commas. The first published versions, in 1890, ’91, ’96, and after, normalized them, often at a loss of their ambiguities, depth, and complexity.

Meter and Style: Dickinson’s meter is usually the meter of the Congregational hymns she knew well. (Also the meter of many folk songs like “The Yellow Rose of Texas.”) Her themes and subjects are often the conventional lyric ones of nature, death, fame, immortality, and faith. But the treatments are uniquely her own. Metaphors are constantly surprising. Meter is compressed, as a beat is sometimes skipped. Words are capitalized as she chooses. Pauses are extended, so that the reader has a chance to recognize additional meanings.

Examples: The results are poems which are at once revealing of her own very private life and outlook and also very modern. Consider these first lines and the poems that follow.

“I taste a liquor never brewed –
From tankards scooped in pearl...”

“Success is counted sweetest
By those who ne’er succeed.”

“Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –”

A Bird came down the Walk –
He did not know I saw –
He bit an Angleworm in halves
And ate the fellow raw.

Period IV: Realism and Naturalism (1865-1920)

Introduction: The Civil War, with its immense numbers of dead and maimed, its great destruction in the South, and its acceleration of industrial capitalism brought great changes in American life. Slavery was now gone, although racism remained and new forms of slavery and racial exploitation arose, as many whites tired of the militant idealism of the War. Postwar prosperity, despite recurrent economic depressions, created a new, larger middle class and also a small new upper class of great wealth, power, and privilege. Farmers, industrial laborers, and immigrants often faced severe poverty, long working hours, bad sanitation, and terrible living conditions.

All these changes and developments are reflected in the new literature of this period, from the end of the Civil War to 1920. But it did this not only by describing historical events but also by showing the changes in people and society that were the cause and consequence of the historical events. The pre-Civil War writers are called romantic because they wished to inspire themselves and their readers to higher, nobler lives, like Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, or to show extremes of heroism, introspection, suffering, isolation, and horror, like Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe. Realists were less interested in extremes of character and more interested in careful observation and depiction of the ordinary. In "The Art of Fiction" (1884) Henry James advised young novelists, "Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost." Or to use a figure of the French realistic novelist Stendhal, they wanted their novels to be like a mirror carried down a highway, reflecting everything from the sky above to the dirt and puddles below. American realists, at least initially, showed less of the dirt and puddles than did their European contemporaries. As William Dean Howells wrote, "our novelists concern themselves with the more smiling aspects of life." Their audience and subject matter was generally the middle and upper middle class. But they nevertheless wanted, in another famous phrase, to show life as it is in the world that is.

Naturalistic writers like Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser accepted many of the precepts of the realists but were less interested in the middle class. Their subjects tended to be the poor and the victimized of fate and society and/or the rich and powerful, who seemed to have mastered the laws of life.

Topic 34: Mark Twain (1835-1910)

Overview: America's most popular writer, Mark Twain was born Samuel Clemens in Florida, Missouri, and grew up in Hannibal, on the Mississippi. He inherited his father's restlessness and get-rich-quick ambition, while also rebelling against the family's rigid Presbyterianism. After newspaper work and experience as a riverboat pilot (from which he took his pseudonym), Twain avoided service in the Civil War by taking a stage coach to Nevada and later California, where he won popularity for his stories about mining camps. Further travels and adventures took him to Hawaii and Europe, after which he married, and settled in Hartford, Connecticut to a life of prolific writing and profitable lecture tours, though in 1894 he went bankrupt from investing in an unsuccessful typesetting machine. A trip around the world lecturing and reading recouped his wealth and made him an international celebrity. Later works, however, were often dark and pessimistic.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876) -- an exciting, colorful boys' book loosely based on the author's childhood. Contains the legendary account of how Tom got the other boys to pay to paint his fence.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884) – started as sequel to *Tom Sawyer*, it is now recognized as Twain's greatest book, for the realistic speech, the friendship of Huck and Jim, an escaped slave, and the portraits of frontier life. "All modern literature comes out one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*," said Hemingway, although he disliked the ending.

Life on the Mississippi (1883) – provides further descriptions of the Mississippi River of Twain's boyhood and youth, and his serio-comic account of learning to be a pilot, under the exacting, skillful Horace Bixby. Twain illustrates romanticism and realism as the difference between passenger's and pilot's views of the river.

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1889) – seemingly intended as a satire on the absurdities of chivalry and tyranny of feudalism, the book gains greater gravity from the increasing arrogance and of the Yankee. His use of gun powder, electricity, and other 19th-century inventions makes readers realize it is also a satire on modern civilization.

Critical Estimates: Was Mark Twain primarily a comic writer, who used western humor, as he defined it in "How to Tell a Story," to entertain and support his extravagant life style? Or was he a profound writer, with strong democratic and egalitarian values, whose comic exaggerations masked his grim pessimism about the human condition?

Topic 35: William Dean Howells (1837-1920)

Overview: Howells occupies a literary middle ground. Born in southern Ohio, he was a close friend and admirer of Mark Twain and never lost his plain, frontier values. Yet from writing a campaign biography of Abraham Lincoln, he became the American consul in Venice in 1861. There he traveled and became well-read in European literature. Later he became a close friend also of Henry James. As editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* he was an adopted Boston Brahmin and an arbiter of middle class taste. His giving up the editorship in 1881 and moving from Boston to New York and becoming editor there of *Harper's Monthly* was a sign of New York's cultural ascendancy. Meanwhile, through his long and active life he produced 35 novels, many stories, works of criticism, and several volumes of autobiography. Yet today he often seems prudish and is not as commonly read as Twain, James, and other authors he befriended and aided.

Major Novels:

A Modern Instance (1882) About Bartley Hubbard, an unscrupulous journalist, his loving wife Marcia, and their divorce. Hubbard goes to Arizona, where he is shot by a man he had exposed in print. Although a good and attractive woman, Marcia does not remarry.

The Rise of Silas Lapham (1885) Lapham is a self-made paint-manufacturer who though crude (he has covered New England rocks with ads for his paint), wishes to rise in Boston society. The mansion he is building on "the water side of Beacon" burns, and he loses his money in financial speculation. He has a chance to recoup his fortune in a shady business deal, but chooses not to, thus "rising" morally.

A Traveler from Altrua (1894) A utopian novel criticizing the economic and social conditions in the United States.

Criticism:

Howells's major critical work is *Criticism and Fiction* (1891), developed from articles he wrote between 1886 and 1892 for his "Editor's Study" columns in *Harper's Monthly*. In it he distinguished American realism from European because American novelists are concerned "with the more smiling aspects of life, which are the more American, and seek the universal in the individual rather than the social interests." Despite these rather bland and upbeat standards, he later was very receptive to the grim, fatalistic work of young American naturalists.

Topic 36: Henry James (1843-1916)

Overview: Born to inherited wealth (his father, an admirer of Emerson and Swedenborg, never had to work and raised the family partially in Europe), James nevertheless wished to support himself by his writing, for which he developed his own high professional standards. In 1866 he returned to Europe, where he mainly lived thereafter, and began writing novels that contrasted American innocence with the moral complexities of Europe. Such novels of the “international scene” like *The American*, *Daisy Miller*, and *The Ambassadors* became his specialty. He also pioneered in the psychological novel, mystery stories, stories of artists and writers, and in technical issues like the handling of point of view. Late in life he made his own selection of his fiction for the 24-volume New York Edition, for which he wrote astute critical prefaces. He also wrote incisive and entertaining travel books, biographies, and autobiographies. He has been a major influence on several generations of English and American writers.

Early Works: Reading of James’s fiction usually begins with *The American* (1877), about Christopher Newman, a young bachelor who quits business, having made his fortune, and goes to Europe seeking culture and a new, richer life. He meets Claire de Cintre, a widow of noble birth whom he wishes to marry. The ensuing complex plot leaves Newman rejected and yet with opportunities for revenge – a dilemma that the reader shares with him. *Daisy Miller* (1879), the story of a wealthy young American girl in Rome, is told from the point of view of Frederick Winterbourne, an American expatriate who finds her an “inscrutable combination of audacity and innocence.” It is another good example of early James.

Later Works: His first great psychological novel is *A Portrait of a Lady* (1881), a study of the relations between Isabel Archer, the niece of a wealthy American banker, and a circle of suitors, Europeans, and expatriate Americans. *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) resembles it but is more complex. *The Ambassadors* (1903) centers on the experience of Lambert Strether, a middle-aged American editor who may be based on William Dean Howells, who is sent to Europe by his fiancée, Mrs. Newsome, to bring back her son Chad, who has fallen in love with a French countess.

Stories: Three of James’s best short stories are “The Real Thing” (1892) about an artist and his models, “The Beast in the Jungle” (1901) about a man who wastes his life expecting some great event to spring on him, and “The Jolly Corner” (1908) about an American who returns to New York after 23 years in Europe.

Topic 37: Regionalism

Overview: The growth in the number and circulation of magazines in the post-Civil War era, facilitated by faster presses and better mail delivery, created a market for many new writers. Paradoxically, the spread of a national culture also produced a renewed regional self-consciousness.

New England: Two of the most subtle and observant regional writers are Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909) from the small town of South Berwick, Maine, and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman (1852-1930) of Randolph, Massachusetts, both of whom were encouraged by William Dean Howells when he was editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's Monthly*. Jewett's "A White Heron" and Freeman's "A New England Nun" are frequently anthologized and are interesting to compare. Note that both are about strong-minded, independent characters, one a girl, the other a woman. Consider also the role of local culture and environment.

The South: Kate Chopin (1850-1904) was a wealthy St. Louis woman who married a son of Louisiana plantation owners and went to live in New Orleans. There she became acquainted with the Creole (French-American) society that she described in many stories and her feminist novel, *The Awakening* (1899). Charles W. Chestnutt (1858-1932) was the son of biracial parents who had fled from North Carolina to Cleveland. After the Civil War they returned to Fayetteville. There Chestnutt became a teacher and school principal, but soon returned to Cleveland, depressed by racism and determined to write a book against it. One of the cleverest of his stories is "The Passing of Grandison" (1899), which exposes the plantation myth of happy slaves and understanding masters.

The Middle West: Hamlin Garland (1860-1940) was born in West Salem, Wisconsin, and grew up on farms in Iowa and the Dakota territory, following the frontier. His short stories in *Main-Traveled Roads* (1899) describe the hardships of pioneer life, especially for women. His autobiographies, *Son of the Middle Border* (1917) and *Daughter of the Middle Border* (1922), tell his history of his family and the region. Willa Cather (1873-1947) wrote of pioneer life in Nebraska. In *O Pioneers!* (1913) Alexandra Bergson faces the hardships of the prairie by also recognizing its beauty. *My Antonia* (1918) celebrates the character of the hired girls who come from their families' farms to work in town. The narrator, Jim Burden, is particularly drawn to Antonia Shimerda.

The West: Despite their remoteness, the gold and silver mines of California and Nevada were early sites of regional or "local color" writing, starting with such stories as "The Luck of Roaring Camp" (1868) by Bret Harte (1836-02) and Mark Twain's "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (1865). They were humorous and emphasized the outrageous local tricks and sentimental manners and customs. The stories in *The Land of Little Rain* (1903) by Mary Austin (1868-1934), who wrote about the Owens Valley deserts around Independence, California, are very different.

Topic 38: Edith Wharton (1862-1937)

Overview: Raised in the rigid and exclusive upper class of "old New York," Wharton was both its severe critic and its affectionate historian. She also had personal conflicts between her senses of duty and respectability and her desires for love and release from a loveless marriage and her professional ambitions as a writer, conflicts that are reflected in her fiction. Like her mentor Henry James, she lived for many years in Europe. She also experimented with different fictional forms. After World War I she lived in a villa outside Paris with beautiful gardens, where she was treated very admiringly by Scott Fitzgerald and the Lost Generation.

The House of Mirth (1905) The tragic story, set in the 1890s, of Lily Bart, who is born into New York society but has little money. Needing to marry for money but also wanting to marry for love, she drifts into relationships that make her the subject of scandalous rumor, even though she is innocent. It can be read as both realism and naturalism. The title is taken from the Ecclesiastes 7:4, *The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.*

Ethan Frome (1911) Her venture into naturalistic fiction, the novel is set in western Massachusetts, where Wharton had a country estate, the Mount. Ethan is a poor farmer who years ago had a sledding accident with his lover, who died. He lives on as a physical and psychological cripple, tormented by his unforgiving wife.

The Age of Innocence (1920) The somewhat nostalgic story, in the New York of the 1870s, of Newland Archer, a talented young lawyer who is engaged to marry May Welland, a proper society girl, but falls in love with her cousin Ellen Olenska, who has come back to New York after leaving her husband, a Polish count. Issues of social propriety, especially divorce and other taboos, entrap all the characters. This was Wharton's most popular novel. It won the Pulitzer Prize and has been made into films.

Topic 39: W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963)

Overview: With the death of Frederick Douglass, the most prominent spokesman for Afro-Americans became Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), who advocated accommodation with whites and a focus on trade schools for blacks. He was soon vigorously opposed by Du Bois, who had been born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, where he had been a star student, and had gone on Fisk University in Nashville, Harvard, study in Europe and a Harvard Ph.D. Du Bois's arguments for full racial equality and civil rights were expounded in many books and scholarly studies, through a long career as professor, leader of the NAACP, magazine editor, and public figure.

The Souls of Black Folk (1903)

--Context: At the Cotton States Exposition in Atlanta in 1895 Booker T. Washington had urged blacks to "cast down your bucket where you are," that is, to concentrate on menial labor, accept current conditions, and not seek higher education. He also said, "In all things that are purely social we [blacks and whites] can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress," thereby accepting segregation. These policies had been accepted by almost all whites and many blacks as pragmatic and realistic.

--Structure: Du Bois's book is made up of magazine articles that he revised, as well as new material. It is part autobiography, part history, and part commentary on contemporary events and conditions. Readers can question whether the chapters make a unified whole.

--Style: It is elevated and, some would say, detached from the urgency of the message and therefore "unrealistic." On the other hand, each chapter is begun with a bar of music from Negro spirituals, what Du Bois called "Sorrow Songs." The one beginning chapter one is from "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen."

--Key Phrases: "Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question.... How does it feel to be a problem?"

"It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."

Critical Comment: James Weldon Johnson wrote that *Souls of Black Folk* had had a greater impact "upon and within the Negro race than any other single book published in this country since *Uncle Tom's Cabin*."

Topic 40: Edward Arlington Robinson (1869-1935)

Overview: Because of his severe and unsentimental poems about New England small-town life and characters, Robinson is sometimes called the first modern American poet. He grew up in Gardiner, Maine, where as a student he avidly read both Latin and English poetry. He also was drawn to realistic and naturalistic fiction. (See his sonnet "Zola.") His first books were privately published and drew little attention, although *Children of the Night* (1897) was reviewed by President Theodore Roosevelt in the *Outlook* in 1905. Later he was praised by leaders in the "new poetry," like Amy Lowell and Harriet Monroe, and won three Pulitzer prizes.

Favorite Poems: Robinson is best known to day for his short poems, especially: "The House on the Hill" (1894) a villanelle describing a derelict mansion, ending with the haunting lines: "They have all gone away, / There is nothing more to say."

"Richard Cory" (1897), the gentleman who was admired for "imperial slim" but "Went home and put a bullet through his head."

"Miniver Cheevy" (1907) the incurable romantic who "dreamed of Thebes and Camelot...And kept on drinking."

"Eros Turannos" (1914), about the cruel sovereignty of love, with its dark and clever polysyllabic rhymes, e.g. "allures him / reassures him / secures him."

"The Mill" (1919) about a derelict mill that has "a warm / And mealy fragrance of the past." It ends with a suggestion of the suicides of the miller and his wife.

Such poems produce mixed feelings of humor, pity, sorrow, and regret.

When a reviewer wrote that "The world is not beautiful to him, but a prison house," Robinson responded, "The world is not a 'prison house' but a kind of spiritual kindergarten whose bewildered infants are trying to spell God with the wrong blocks."

Other Works: Robinson was very prolific. He also wrote plays, many more volumes of short poems, and a trilogy of long narrative poems based on the Arthur legends, *Merlin* (1917), *Lancelot* (1920), and *Tristram* (1927)

Topic 41: Frank Norris (1870-1902)

Overview: In his short life Frank Norris produced two of the country's great naturalistic novels, *McTeague* and *The Octopus*. Though he was born in Chicago, his wealthy parents raised him in San Francisco, sent him to Paris to study art, and then to the University of California, where he read Zola and gave up writing medieval romances and romantic poetry. In 1895-96 he went to South Africa to write travel sketches, but found it in the midst of the Boer War, and so he became a war correspondent. In 1899 he reported on the Spanish-American War. Becoming increasingly concerned with economic issues, he then planned what he called an "Epic of Wheat," a trilogy which would follow wheat all the way from its being grown in California to its shipping, to the financial speculators in Chicago, and finally its consumption in Europe. Norris died from an appendix operation before it was finished.

McTeague (1899) -- explores the consequences of greed in the lives of McTeague, a burly and ignorant California dentist and his lovely wife Trina Sieppe, who wins \$5,000 in a lottery. Through a series of exciting events, with additional characters who are in the grip of greed, miserliness, and jealousy, McTeague finally dies of thirst in the California dessert, handcuffed to his dead rival and former friend, Marcus Schouler.

The Octopus (1901) -- tells of the battles between wheat farmers around Bonneville in the San Joaquin Valley and the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad, as the Railroad extends its powerful monopoly throughout the region and the state. Raises questions whether the owners of the railroad are evil or whether they are simply obeying natural laws.

The Pit (published in 1903, after Norris' death) -- The story of Curtis Jadwin, who becomes very wealthy by "cornering" wheat on the Chicago Board of Trade, only to be ruined by an unforeseen increase in production in the West.

"A Deal in Wheat" (1902) – An exciting short story also about wheat speculation.

Topic 42: Stephen Crane (1871-1900)

Overview: The son of a Methodist minister and his wife in Newark, New Jersey, Crane was a literary prodigy who wrote his first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, as a student at Syracuse University and published it at his own expense in 1893. He followed it with *The Red Badge of Courage*, which attracted so much attention that he was soon hired as a war correspondent, even though he had previously never seen war. He reported from Mexico, Cuba, and the Greco-Turkish War, meanwhile gaining attention from many older writers. He died in Germany of complications from tuberculosis.

Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (1893) From the very first sentences (“A very little boy stood upon a heap of gravel for the honor Rum Alley. He was throwing stones at howling urchins from Devil’s Row...”), a grim, concise tale of poverty and the struggle for existence. Maggie is an attractive but maltreated child who is seduced by her brother Jimmie’s friend Pete and soon becomes a prostitute. Crane does not judge the characters, and description is minimal. Nevertheless, he arouses strong, bitter feelings.

The Red Badge of Courage (1895) The story of Henry Fleming, a green recruit, in his first battle, from which he runs, and how he later redeems himself. But the focus is not on the action but Fleming’s mind, making the novel a penetrating psychological study of the sources of cowardice and courage. Is Fleming, (“the youth,” as Crane calls him) active or passive and what is the nature of heroism?

Stories: Crane’s most famous story is “The Open Boat,” based on his and three other men’s 30 hours in a lifeboat following a sinking off of coast of Florida. But other great stories are “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky” and “The Blue Hotel,” both set in the West and told very economically.

Poems: Also economical and often sardonic and bitter-sweet, as in

*Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.
Because your lover threw wild hands toward the sky
And the affrighted steed ran on alone,
Do not weep.
War is kind.*

Topic 43: Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945)

Overview: The most productive and arguably the greatest of American naturalistic writers, Dreiser was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, the twelfth of thirteen children of a German immigrant and his wife, the descendant of Czech immigrants. The family was poor, and at sixteen Dreiser went to Chicago, where he first worked as a laborer and then a newspaper reporter. His first novel, *Sister Carrie*, was published in 1900, but then never advertised because the publisher, Frank Doubleday and his wife, decided it was immoral, a story that Dreiser and his supporters made into a legend of naturalistic art vs. prudery. Later novels were also suppressed in different places. Although his novels have also been criticized for their wordy, cliched writing, their power is not denied.

Sister Carrie (republished, 1907) Carrie Meeber, a poor girl, comes to Chicago and becomes the mistress of a "drummer," the flashy salesman Charles Drouet. She leaves him for George Hurstwood, a married man who runs a stylish bar. They elope to New York, where he fails and she goes on stage, rising from chorus girl to star. Dreiser does not judge Carrie but treats her actions and her success all as simply the force of nature.

The Financier, The Titan, The Stoic (1911, 1914, 1947) A trilogy about the rise and fall of Frank Cowperwood, an industrialist based on the Chicago street railway baron C.T. Yerkes. As a study of the rich and successful, the series is different from more typical naturalistic novels that deal with victims and the poor. But underlying them all are the mysteries of power and cause.

An American Tragedy (1925) Based on a murder and trial in upstate New York, Dreiser worked on this novel for many years. Clyde Griffiths, a poor son of street preachers, falls for a rich girl, Sondra Finchley, at almost the same time he has gotten a poor working girl, Roberta Alden pregnant. He plans to drown Roberta, then changes his mind. Nevertheless, their boat tips over, and she does drown. The trial raises questions of accident, cause, and guilt – personal, cultural, and economic. In 1951 it was made into the award-winning film, *A Place in the Sun*.

Topic 44: Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906)

Overview: Born in Dayton, Ohio, the son of ex-slaves, Dunbar was raised by his mother, a laundress. Attending white schools, he was a classmate of Orville Wright, who published some of his first poems in a small newspaper he and his brother Wilbur printed. From reciting a poem at the Chicago Worlds Fair in 1893, he met Frederick Douglass. His second book of poems, *Majors and Minors* (1895) was praised by William Dean Howells, who also wrote a preface to *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (1896), which became a bestseller and led to reading tours in eastern cities and England. Author of many books of poems, four collections of short stories, five novels, a play, and lyrics to *Dahomey*, the first all black musical, Dunbar was at the time of his death (by tuberculosis) the most famous Afro-American writer in the world.

Poems: Dunbar wrote poems both in black dialect and in conventional English, sometimes complaining that white editors preferred the former. Both, however, are on many subjects, sometimes veiled protests and sometimes not, some appealing to popular sentiments of the time, some not.

Dialect: "An Ante-Bellum Sermon" (1896) In the voice of a black preacher preaching to slaves on the story of Moses and the Pharaoh.

"When Malindy Sings" On "book" music and spirituals.

"Signs of the Times" A Thanksgiving poem.

"A Negro Love Song"

Non-dialect: "Frederick Douglass" On his death.

"Sympathy" The first line is the source of the title of Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

"We Wear the Mask" Interesting to consider, also, when reading his dialect poems.

"The Debt"

"In Summer" In the manner of the popular Indiana poet, James Whitcomb Riley, one of Dunbar's models and fans.

"Summer in the South" What is the intent of the last line?

"And the woods run mad with riot."

Topic 45: Jack London (1876-1916)

Overview: London was a man of extraordinary good looks and energy and a writer of great natural genius. The illegitimate son of a spiritualist, Flora Wellman, who later married a Civil War Veteran, John London, he grew up in working class Oakland, California, getting his formal education from grammar school, the Oakland public library, and one semester at the University of California. His wider education came from his early work at odd jobs and as an "oyster pirate" in San Francisco Bay and then from his amazing adventures as sealer, tramp, Socialist speaker, member of Coxe's Army of the unemployed, and on the Klondike gold rush. Along the way he read Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and Karl Marx, becoming convinced that life was a struggle for existence in which the fittest survived by superior cunning and strength. He combined this philosophy with tales from his adventures to produce an enormous volume of very popular essays, stories, and novels, many set in the frozen north and at sea. Thus he is the naturalist writer not of industry and capitalism like Norris and Dreiser or war and city streets like Crane, but of savage *nature* itself.

The Call of the Wild (1903) A compelling story about Buck, half St. Bernard, half Scotch Shepard dog, who is stolen from a California estate to become a Klondike sled dog. He takes leadership of the other dogs, and serves his master well. But when his master is murdered he answers the call of the wild and become leader of a wolf pack.

A popular children's book and also a philosophical allegory.

The Sea Wolf (1904) About the conflict between Wolf Larsen, the powerful unscrupulous captain of the *Ghost*, a sealing schooner, and Humphrey Van Weyden, an over-civilized literary critic. Larsen rescues Van Weyden from a collision in San Francisco Bay and takes him on a sealing voyage. The *Ghost* rescues passengers from another wreck, including a woman poet, who is sought by both Larsen and Van Weyden. Van Weyden gets the girl, but Larsen remains true to his primitivism.

Martin Eden (1909) The semi-autobiographical novel in which London tries to resolve his personal conflicts between his rough background and personal values and the attractions of cultivated society.

Period V: 1920-1965 -- American Modern

Introduction

The First World War, or Great War, as it was known in Europe, established the United States as an acknowledged world power. Having fought in the war for only a little more than a year and a half and not on its own soil, it also emerged much stronger economically than the European powers. At the Versailles Peace Conference, President Woodrow Wilson led in the creation of the League Nations.

Many Americans, however, were not sure of their new role. Back home, Congress refused to join the League, and Wilson's Republican successors took office promising a "return to normalcy." Isolationist sentiment was strong, and a spirit of reaction swept the country. Laws were passed restricting immigration, and many politicians undertook to suppress people they believed to be anarchists, communists, and labor agitators. The Eighteenth Amendment was passed, making the sale, possession, and consumption of alcohol illegal. But other Americans were shocked by these events, and joined H.L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis in satirizing the narrow-mindedness and provincialism of what Mencken called the "boobocracy." Many artists and writers, taking advantage of the beneficial exchange rates that were the result of inflation in Europe, fled to Paris, where they could join earlier American expatriates and their French associates, study European masters, and at the same time escape Prohibition. Meanwhile, the 1920s brought prosperity; the stock market climbed; and bootleg whiskey became widely available. It became a time of fast music, new popular entertainment, new dances, fast cars, and social rebellion – the Jazz Age.

For all but the very rich, this ended with the Stock Market crash of October, 1929, and the onset of the Depression. The national mood changed rapidly, and with it styles in literature and art. Roosevelt's New Deal supported projects for actors, artists, and writers that encouraged a new documentary realism, emphasizing local history and culture and the experiences of common people. Afro-Americans migrated in greater numbers from the South to northern cities, and Afro-American writers continued to gravitate to Harlem.

World War II ended the Depression, but many of the styles of the Twenties and Thirties continued, as many of the authors of those decades, like Hemingway, Faulkner, T.S. Eliot, Robert Frost, and W.C. Williams continued to write and exert great influence on the younger generation of post-war novelists and poets. It was not really until the mid-1960s, with the rise the Civil Rights Movement and increasing protests against the Vietnam War, that this period fully ended.

Topic 46: Gertrude Stein (1874-1946)

Overview: The daughter of wealthy Californians, Stein graduated from Radcliffe, where she took courses with William James. She started graduate work on the anatomy of the brain at Johns Hopkins, but quit in 1902 to go to Paris, where she and her brother Leo became early collectors of modern art. Her early fiction attempted to break down traditional sentence structure and narrative as Picasso and the cubists had broken down and reassembled visual forms. The results gained her much notoriety, but also the respect of Sherwood Anderson, Hemingway, and other moderns. Made a celebrated tour of the U.S. in the 1930s, building on success of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Continued with experiments in autobiography. Survived German occupation of France by living in the remote countryside, and then returned to Paris, where American G.I.'s lionized her.

Three Lives (1909) Stories of three young American women, the German immigrant serving girls Anna and Lena and the Afro-American Melanctha, who confronts difficult racial and sexual dilemmas. Radical for its use of repetition, very simple language, and Stein's bold attempt to get inside the psychologies of black and immigrant lower class women.

Tender Buttons (1914) A short collection of prose poems divided into, "Objects," "Food," and "Rooms," that use repetition of seeming nonsense to surprise and to defeat expectations. For example: "The change of color is likely and a difference a very little difference is prepared. Sugar is not a vegetable."

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (1933) Toklas was Stein's lesbian companion, who also took care of cooking and domestic duties. (After Stein's death she had a success of her own with *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*.) By writing her "autobiography" for her, Stein both objectifies and praises herself and describes their friends and their salon in Paris. Also tells of their driving an ambulance together for the French and allies during World War I.

Everybody's Autobiography (1937) Her best experiment in autobiography, merging criticism, her own and everyone's experience.

Topic 47: Sherwood Anderson (1876-1941)

Overview: Anderson's legend is almost as important as his writing. He was born in Camden, Ohio, north of Cincinnati, and grew up in Clyde, between Toledo and Cleveland, where he worked dutifully at so many odd jobs that he was nicknamed "Jobby." After service in the Spanish-American War, he married and moved to Elyria, where he was the successful manager of a paint factory, until he suddenly quit and left his family in order to fulfill his long-suppressed desire to write. Moving to Chicago, he became friends with Carl Sandburg and Floyd Dell and published the semi-autobiographical novel, *Windy McPherson's Son* (1916). Following the success of *Winesburg, Ohio*, he became an influence on many younger contemporaries – Hemingway, Steinbeck, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and William Saroyan. A masterful short story writer, his later novels and non fiction are less praised.

Winesburg, Ohio (1919) A collection of 23 short stories about people in this fictional typical small town as they become know to George Willard, an observant, curious, and sympathetic young newspaper reporter. In the preface, "The Book of the Grotesque," the author explains, "It was the truths that made the people grotesque...The moment one of the people took on one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live by it, he became a grotesque, and the truth he embraced became a falsehood."

The result is stories that reveal the hidden passions that drive the characters to their unusual behavior.

In "Hands" Wing Biddlebaum has a passion for touching and caressing things. His hands flutter and he is driven from town.

In "Adventure" Alice Hindman is seduced by a lover who abandons her, goes to Chicago, and never returns. She becomes sexually frustrated and offers herself, naked, to a deaf, drunken stranger.

"Godliness" is the long story of a religiously fanatic farmer who prays for a David to come punish his Philistine neighbors. The "David" who comes is his own grandson, who nearly kills him with a stone from his slingshot.

Such stories have a psychological realism, as distinct from the surface realism with which earlier writers like Howells portrayed their middle class characters. The influence of Freud is strong.

Nevertheless, Anderson has been criticized for the simplicity of many of the endings. George Willard's frequent response is just to want "to go away and look at people and think," as at the end of the story "Mother."

Topic 48: Robert Frost (1874-1963)

Overview: Throughout his long career, Frost managed to combine widespread popularity as a crusty New England sage with respect from fellow poets and academic critics for his careful craftsman and profound ironies. Yet this "New England Poet" was born in San Francisco, and this frequent reader on college campuses and poet in residence at several colleges and universities never graduated from college, though he briefly attended Dartmouth and Harvard. The crowning moment in his career came in January, 1961, when he read "The Gift Outright" at President John F. Kennedy's inauguration. Many of his most famous poems were published in his early books.

A Boys Will (1913) Contains "Mowing," with the line "The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows." Also "The Tuft of Flowers," with the final couplet,

"Men work together," I told him from the heart,
'Whether they work together or apart.'"

North of Boston (1914) Contains "Mending Wall" with the oft quoted lines, "Something there is that doesn't love a wall," and the neighbor's adage, "'Good fences make good neighbours.'" Also "The Death of the Hired Man," "Home Burial," and "After Apple- Picking." Note the effectiveness of blank verse conversations in "The Code" and other long poems.

Mountain Interval (1916) Contains "The Road Not Taken," "An Old Man's Winter Night," "The Oven Bird," "Birches," and the chilling poem about the buzz-saw, "'Out, Out—'"

New Hampshire (1923) won the first of Frost's many Pulitzer prizes. The title poem is a humorous reflection on the virtues and defects of different states and their citizens, ending with Frost saying it is "restful just to think about New Hampshire. / At present I am living in Vermont." It also contains the popular "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and the laconic "Fire and Ice."

In "The Constant Symbol," a rare critical essays, he wrote that the chief fact about poetry "is that it is metaphor, saying one thing and meaning another, saying one thing in terms of another, the pleasure of ulteriority." He also wrote, "Every poem is an epitome of the great predicament; a figure of the will braving alien entanglements."

Topic 49: Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931)

Overview: Born in Springfield, Illinois, Lindsay was strongly influenced by his parents evangelical church (the Disciples of Christ) and the memory of Abraham Lincoln. Publication in *Poetry* magazines in 1913 of "General William Booth Enters into Heaven" with its jazzy, popular rhythms of revival music made him an instant poster-boy for the New Poetry, as did stories of how he had once tramped through the United States "trading rhymes for bread" and preaching "The Gospel of Beauty," a message of civic reform, social justice, and civic beautification. His dramatic readings at churches, schools, and colleges, of later poems like "Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan" and "The Congo" furthered his popularity. Later, however, his Populist and Socialist politics, his strong religious views, and his Prohibitionism were out of favor in the "Roaring Twenties. In 1931, poor and depressed, he committed suicide.

Major Poems: "General William Booth..." is about the founder of the Salvation Army. Its musical echoes ("Are You Washed in the Blood of the Lamb?") and heavy alliteration ("Booth led boldly with his big bass drum") come out when read aloud.

"Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan," (1919) a sweet and raucous ode to William Jennings Bryan, the great populist candidate for President in 1896. It vividly evokes what Bryan represented to his followers.

"Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight" -- a vision of Lincoln's sorrow at modern conditions.

"The Eagle that is Forgotten" -- a tribute to the reformist, pro-labor governor of Illinois, John Peter Altgeld, contrasting the false mourning of his enemies and true sorrow of "the wounded, the lame, and the poor." Is the ending, "To live in mankind is far, far more...than to live in a name," appropriate?

"The Congo (*A Study of the Negro Race*)." The poem's stereotypes were criticized by W.E.B. Du Bois. However, Lindsay was respected by Langston Hughes and helped Hughes become published.

Criticism: Lindsay's interest in popular heroes and popular art forms led to a keen interest in movies. His film reviews were first published in 1915 as *The Art of the Moving Picture*, revised in 1922 and republished in 1970.

Topic 50: Wallace Stevens (1879-1955)

Overview: The most elegant of modern American poets, Stevens grew up in Pennsylvania, was a student of George Santayana's at Harvard, took a law degree at NYU, and spent his working years as an insurance executive in Hartford, Connecticut. He did not publish his first book, *Harmonium*, until he was nearly 44. Standing apart from trends and movements, his poems and essays emphasize the power of the imagination not only to create art but to create and be the world itself. Thus his poetry, which at first seems exotic, witty, and sometimes frivolous, is actually very audacious.

Major Poems:

"Sunday Morning" (1915, 1923, 1954) Sometimes called the first Post-Christian poem, it is written as the thoughts of a woman about the sources of religion in the ever-changing physical world and in the human imagination. Key lines are, "Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her, / Alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams / and our desires."

"Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" (1917) Haiku-like images that create thirteen unique presences of the blackbird.

"Anecdote of the Jar" (1919) A concise 12-line illustration of how art and imagination organize wilderness.

"The Snow Man" (1921) is, organizes and expresses winter, the "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is."

"The Emperor of Ice Cream" (1922) A witty poem on the transience of things, shown in a carnival ice-cream emperor. "Let be be the finale of seem. / The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream."

"Man with the Blue Guitar" (1937) In unrhymed couplets, Stevens meditates on the relations between reality, imagination, and art, as suggested by Picasso's painting with the same title. "'Things as they are / Are changed upon the blue guitar."

"The Idea of Order at Key West" (1934, 1954) A challenge to philosophers of the abstract, in the sounds and images of the sea, a singer, and the lights in fishing boats in the harbor.

Critical Comments: Robert Frost is reputed to have said once to Wallace Stevens, "You write bric-a-brac," to which Stevens is reputed to have answered, "You write poems about subjects." Can these differences be reconciled?

Topic 51: William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)

Overview: Born in a suburb of Paterson, New Jersey, the son of an English-born father and mother of Basque, French, and Jewish ancestry, Williams had a very cosmopolitan upbringing but became determined to be a Twentieth-century poet in the native Whitmanian tradition. He was also determined not to be a starving poet, and so became a family doctor. As outspoken as his college friend Ezra Pound, although they had different visions of modernism, he also was a close friend of Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore and many New York avant garde artists, and a mentor to Allen Ginsberg.

Representative Poems: Williams' poetry gives a sense of being very direct, idiomatic, and spontaneous. Unlike much other modern poetry, it is not obscure or hard to read, although he was aware of the poetic movements of his time and contributed to many little magazines, including *Contact*, which he coedited, 1920-23. He said he often wrote while in his office, rolling his typewriter up out of his folding desk and writing before the next patient.

"Tract" is a humorous lesson to "you my townspeople" on how they should conduct a funeral.

"The Young Housewife," "The Red Wheelbarrow," and "The Great Figure" are good examples of how Williams adapted Imagism to his own world and taste.

"Spring and All" is a brilliant urban pastoral, celebrating rebirth in an industrial city.

"To Elsie," with its bold opening sentence, "The pure products of America / go crazy--" is dedicated to his family's mentally impaired maid.

"These" is perhaps his darkest poem, written during the Depression and as World War II was beginning. Compare it to W.H. Auden's "September 1, 1939."

Paterson (1946-58) is an attempt at a kind of autobiographical epic of the City-Man Paterson, New Jersey, which Williams knew so well. It is perhaps more praised than read and more read than enjoyed.

In the American Grain (1925) is Williams' very unique, independent, and provocative history of America, American leaders, and American writing. It is both iconoclastic and celebratory. It is also a response to what Williams saw as T.S. Eliot's the wrong-headed and reactionary revival of the European poetic tradition in *The Waste Land*.

Topic 52: Ezra Pound (1885-1972)

Overview: The most controversial of modern American poets, Pound was born in Hailey, Idaho, but grew up mainly in Philadelphia, where his father became an assayer at the U.S. Mint. At the University of Pennsylvania he was a friend of Hilda Doolittle (the poet "H.D.") and William Carlos Williams and a passionate student of both ancient and modern languages. After graduate study of more languages and a short teaching career, he went to Europe in 1908, where he published his first book of poems and became acquainted with Henry James, William Butler Yeats and other major writers. He also assisted new poets – Frost, H.D., Williams, T.S. Eliot – to get published and advised Harriet Monroe, publisher of *Poetry*. For the following decades he was the leading spokesman for modernism – his dictum "Make it new" becoming a slogan to other writers and critics. In the 1930s, however, he was drawn to Mussolini, Fascism, and anti-Semitism. During the War he broadcast pro-Axis propaganda, and afterwards was arrested and detained in an American prison in Pisa, until moved to St. Elizabeth's Hospital outside Washington, D.C. Controversies over his poetry and politics increased with his being awarded prestigious literary prizes, but eventually died down with his release from St. Elizabeth's and return to Italy in 1958.

Early Poetry: Pound set out to refresh English and American poetry. He attacked the Victorians and Edwardians as dreary and wordy (see "Mr. Housman's Message") and attacked their readers as effete and decadent (see "Portrait d'une Femme" which begins, "Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea"). He preferred Walt Whitman, as he announced in "A Pact." In his search for the new he also translated and imitated Greek, Latin, Old English and European poets, often offending scholars but defending himself by arguing that he was at the same time making the old new. See his adaptation of the Anglo-Saxon "Seafarer."

Another part of his program was "imagism," the goal of which was to replace description, which he found tedious, with a striking image that immediately lodged in the reader's head, like a picture. "In a Station of the Metro" is only two lines long:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
Petals on a wet, black bough .

In *Cathay* (1913) he translated and adapted Chinese poetry, like "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter" and "Lament of the Frontier Guard."

"Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" is a bitter response to World War I, seen as a consequence of decadent ideas of literature, patriotism, and heroism.

The Cantos (1925-69) The ambitious modern epic on which he worked the rest of his life.

Topic 53: T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)

Overview: Thomas Stearns Eliot was born and raised in St. Louis, the youngest son of a family with deep roots in New England and the Midwest. He went to Harvard, did graduate work there and in Paris, and in 1914 moved to England, where in 1927 he became a member of the Church of England and a British citizen. By then, on the strength of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "The Waste Land" he was one of the most highly respected modern American poets. He also was a very influential critic and the literary editor of Faber and Faber. In the 1930s he wrote two highly praised plays, *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion* and later finished *Four Quartets*, the long meditative-philosophical poems about his religious experiences and faith. In 1948 he won the Nobel Prize.

Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) was Eliot's first book. The opening lines of the title poem,

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table

shocked many readers. The poem as a whole also confused them. Why is Prufrock so self-pitying, indecisive, and weak? Is he a type of modern man?

The Waste Land (1922), dedicated to Ezra Pound, who had helped edit and shorten it, became Eliot's most famous and controversial poem. Its title summed up post-war despair. Its echoes of many other poets, sometimes pedantically identified in the notorious footnotes, gave it great resonance and depth, but also made it seem intentionally obscure. It is still a hard read. One admiring reader was Scott Fitzgerald, who alludes to it in *The Great Gatsby*.

Murder in the Cathedral (1935) about the murder in 1170 of Thomas Beckett, Archbishop of Canterbury by King Henry II's knights. Revived English verse drama.

The Four Quartets (1943) Begun with "Burnt Norton" in 1936, continued with "East Coker" (1940) and "The Dry Salvages" (1941), and ending with "Little Gidding" (1942). The titles are all from places Eliot knew in England and America (the Dry Salvages are rocks off the Massachusetts coast) and sites of pilgrimage or memory. The poems chronicle his religious experiences and conversion, while also reflecting on time and the presence of eternity in the temporal.

Topic 54: Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953)

Overview: Modern American drama begins with Eugene O'Neill, who, with partners like Susan Glaspell and George Cram Cook of the Provincetown Players opened the American theater to serious drama, at the same time experimenting with a wide range of dramatic forms. Significantly, his father was an actor – James O'Neill, who was famous in his time for playing the leading role in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, the kind of romantic melodrama that along with dramatizations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had dominated the nineteenth-century American stage. Eugene O'Neill, after a long period as seaman and adventurer, read Greek tragedy and modern dramatists, and began to write one-act plays and to study playwriting with George Pierce Baker at Harvard. In the summers of 1916 to 1920 many of them were produced on Cape Cod at the Provincetown Playhouse. In 1920 his *Beyond the Horizon* was produced on Broadway and won the Pulitzer Prize. From then until overcome by Parkinson's disease in the 1940s, he wrote an average of one play a year, winning three more Pulitzers and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1936.

Experimentation: O'Neill's range of influences, subjects, and techniques is illustrated by these plays:

Emperor Jones (1920 & after) a one-act play in eight scenes about a black America criminal who becomes the emperor of a West Indian island. The style is expressionist, as Jones exposes his inner fears.

Anna Christie (1921) a realistic drama set in a bar on a barge. Anna is a prostitute, the abandoned daughter of a tugboat captain.

Desire Under the Elms (1924) a modernization of the Greek Phaedra story of property quarrels and incest on an American farm.

Strange Interlude (1928) – One of his longest plays (four hours long) about abortion, and a child secretly conceived by two lovers.

Mourning Becomes Electra (1931) an update of the *Orestia*, set in the American Civil War. Because of strong oedipal conflicts, the play invites Freudian interpretations.

Ah, Wilderness! (1933) O'Neill's only comedy, set in a small New England town on July 4, 1906. It portrays the kind of childhood O'Neill may have wished he had.

A Long Day's Journey Into Night (1940). The very autobiographical play about O'Neill's real youth, with his drunken father and older brother and opium-addicted mother, set in New London, Connecticut, where he was raised. He ordered that it not be published or produced until after his death.

Topic 55: Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960)

Overview: Hurston was born in Eatonville, Florida, a town with no white people and of which she was very proud. But after her father left and her mother died, she had to support herself as a domestic servant and a wardrobe girl for an acting company, which gave her a great love of music and artists. She studied at Howard University, joined the Harlem Renaissance, got a scholarship to Barnard College, and studied anthropology with Franz Boas at Columbia University. She then combined field work on black folklore in the South and the Caribbean with writing her own fiction. In the 1950s, however, she suffered a series of disappointments and returned to the South, where she again worked as a maid and died in a county home. Her work was revived in the 1970s by Alice Walker.

Jonah's Gourd Vine (1934) Her first novel, based on her family's history. Carl Sandburg called it "a bold and beautiful book, many a page priceless and unforgettable."

Mules and Men (1935) African-American folklore, music, and religion in the South. The work that led to her rediscovery by Alice Walker and Robert Hemenway. Compare Hurston's roles as participant in the first half, collected in Eatonville, with the second half, collected in New Orleans, where she is mainly an observer. Is she artist or anthropologist?

Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937) The story of Janie Crawford, a woman of mixed parentage, as she lives and grows through three marriages. Widely praised as Hurston's best novel.

Moses, Man of the Mountain (1939) Hurston's version of the Exodus story, in which the Hebrews are slaves on an antebellum southern plantation.

Dust Tracks on a Road (1942) Her autobiography, telling her own unique story, sharpened by colloquial idioms and her conservative political views, which have often been criticized by other Afro-American writers. Praised by Henry Louis Gates for her "divided voice, a double voice unreconciled, ...a verbal analogue of her double experience as a woman in a male-dominated world and as a black person in a nonblack world, a woman writer's revision of W.E.B. Du Bois's metaphor of 'double-consciousness.'"

Topic 56: E.E. Cummings (1894-1962)

Overview: The son of a Harvard professor who later became a Unitarian minister, Cummings grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and at the family summer home in New Hampshire. On graduation from Harvard, where he earned honors in Greek and English literature, he started to pursue the New Poetry, as well as new trends in painting. During World War I he served in a volunteer ambulance corps (he was a pacifist) but was arrested by the French and served three months in a detention camp. His stylistically unorthodox poems began appearing in the avant garde *Dial* in the 1920s, initially creating quite a fuss, but eventually became very popular for their unpredictable stylistic novelty and childlike naiveté.

The Enormous Room (1922) The memoir, sometimes called an autobiographical novel, based on his imprisonment in France because of letters his friend William Slatter Brown ("B.") had written that were deemed treasonous. Cummings and Brown were bunked in an "enormous room" with thirty other men, and Cummings kept up his spirits by refusing to feel guilty and treating the experience as a modern Pilgrim's Progress, in which his unusual fellow prisoners, of many backgrounds, were "Delectable Mountains."

Poems: The poetry of "e.e. cummings" (as he liked to write his name), with its confusing layout, lack of capitalization, individualistic spelling, and mixed-up grammar, in which nouns are used as verbs and vice-versa, is usually short and lyrical. The stylistic innovation seems carefully chosen in order to refresh his and the readers' appreciation of love, nature, sex, children, and simple pleasure. See "in Just / spring when the world is mud- / luscious"; "you shall above all things be glad and young"; and "anyone lived in a pretty how town."

Conversely, his poetry attacks conventional propriety, as in "the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished-souls";

jingoism, as in

"next to of course god america I
love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh
say can you see by the dawn's early my
country 'tis of centuries come and go

and violence, as in "Buffalo Bill's / defunct."

One of his most powerful is his short ode that begins

I sing of Olaf glad and big
whose warmest heart recoiled at war:
a conscientious object-or

Topic 57: F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940)

Overview: Sometimes called “the poet of the Jazz Age,” Fitzgerald is the most romantic American modern. He was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, where his mother’s father had been a prosperous wholesale grocer. His father was from Baltimore, a descendant of Francis Scott Key. He went to an eastern boarding school, then to Princeton, where he did not graduate, and then into the army, where he met his future wife, Zelda Sayre. After the war he worked diligently on an autobiographical novel, which was published in 1920 as *This Side of Paradise*. It was an instant success; he and Zelda were married; and they became celebrities. But his drinking problems became so serious that they impaired his writing and eventually caused his death. He died in Hollywood, where he was writing for the movies.

Short Stories: Although Fitzgerald often disparaged them as written just for money, he wrote over 150, for *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Esquire*, and other popular magazines. Many are among his best work, for example: “The Ice Palace,” “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz,” “Absolution,” “Winter Dreams,” “The Rich Boy,” “Babylon Revisited,” and “Crazy Sunday.” They turn on issues like money and its effects, conflicts between regional character, fame, and youth.

The Great Gatsby (1925): His best-known and most-popular novel, about the lavish life of the rich on Long Island in the 1920s. Technically, it is admired for its structure, the use of the narrator, and its brilliantly compressed style. In the 1930s, however, it was harshly criticized, and was out of print when Fitzgerald died.

Tender Is the Night (1934): The tragic story of Dick Diver, a very attractive young American psychiatrist who is persuaded to marry his rich patient, Nicole Warren. They lead an increasingly dissipated life on the French Riviera, in which both take lovers. Dick is disillusioned and returns to America. Praised for its ambition, the novel is also criticized for the author’s self-pity.

The Last Tycoon (1941): His unfinished last novel, about the handsome and brilliant film director Monroe Stahr who is loved by the young Cecilia Brady. Stahr is based on the Irving Thalberg.

The Crack-Up (1945): Edited by Fitzgerald’s close college friend, Edmund Wilson. The title comes from one of a series of personal essay-reminiscences Fitzgerald wrote for *Esquire* in the 1900s. It also includes selections from his notebooks and letters. Important for the insights into his self-image, values, and working methods, the book sparked his revival.

Topic 58: William Faulkner (1897-1962)

Overview: Faulkner lived most of his life in Oxford, Mississippi, the “Jefferson” and “Yoknapatawpha County” of his novels. His first success, *Sartoris* (1928), about a decaying aristocratic Southern family, provided him with his major themes and materials, and he followed it with a burst of creativity: *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Sanctuary* (1931), *Light in August* (1932), and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). By the early 1940s his reputation had fallen, and he went to Hollywood to write screen plays. It was revived by the critic Malcolm Cowley, whose introduction to the *Viking Portable Faulkner* (1946) described his myth of the South and the connections between his works. In 1949 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Since then he has been regarded as one of the major twentieth-century writers.

Novels: Faulkner’s greatest novels are those in which he pioneered in techniques like stream of consciousness and use of multiple points of view. *The Sound and the Fury* is told in four parts, first by three members of the formerly genteel Compson family and finally, more objectively, by their black servant Dilsey. *As I Lay Dying* tells of the death of Adie Bundren, mother of a poor family of white farmers, through the voices of her husband, children, and neighbors, and their effort to take her in her coffin to Jefferson for burial. But these and others, like *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Light in August* also engage many themes of race, incest, class, rape, sexual passion, and violence. Because of the prominence of these subjects, some of his novels, like *Sanctuary* and *Requiem for a Nun* have also been regarded as cheap Southern gothic horror stories. Yet his treatment of these subjects also sets him apart from the romantic Southern novelists like Margaret Mitchell (*Gone with the Wind*) and the squalid, sensational novelists like Erskine Caldwell (*Tobacco Road*). He also excelled in Southern humor, especially in *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion*, his “Snopes trilogy.”

Stories: Faulkner wrote over 140 short stories, most of them potboilers for popular magazines. But some are masterpieces, like “The Bear” (made a part of his novel *Go Down Moses*), “A Rose for Emily,” “Red Leaves,” “Dry September,” and “That Evening Sun.” “The Bear” examines the transformation of wilderness into private property.

Approaches: Faulkner is one of the most difficult and provocative of modern American writers. Although he and Hemingway both wrote of violence, coming-of-age, hunting, and the meanings of manhood, their styles are very different. It is also interesting to compare his Nobel prize speech, with its emphasis on the eternal “truths of the heart” and “courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice” and the gothic horror of many of his stories and novels. A third approach is to contrast his images of race and different races – white, Indian, and black.

Topic 59: Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961)

Overview: Hemingway, a doctor's son from Oak Park, Illinois, became a volunteer ambulance driver in France and Italy during World War I and afterwards settled in Paris. His early stories and first novel, *The Sun Also Rises* expressed the disillusionment and tough, laconic stoicism of the war-weary young expatriates, the so-called "Lost Generation." But he also became known for his stories of hunting, fishing, bull-fighting, and war-time courage, and his code of honesty, courage, and tough manliness. He wrote about the Spanish Civil War as a newspaper correspondent and then in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Many younger American novelists tried to emulate his life and writing. He won the Nobel Prize for 1954. But in later years he published nothing, became ill and depressed, and committed suicide by shooting himself.

Novels: *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) Jake Barnes, an American journalist in Paris who was emasculated by a wartime injury, tells the story of a group of expatriates, including Lady Brett Ashley, an English aristocrat who is "as charming when she is drunk as when she is sober" and who attracts Jake, Robert Cohn, and the bull-fighter Pedro Romero.

A Farewell to Arms (1929) The wartime love affair of Frederic Henry, an American lieutenant serving in the Italian ambulance corps, and Catherine Barkley, an English nurse who cares for him when he is wounded. She becomes pregnant, and they flee to Switzerland, where she and the baby die.

To Have and Have Not (1937) About Harry Morgan, a "conch" living in Key West, Florida, who turns from taking wealthy people fishing on his powerboat to smuggling immigrants and rum-running.

For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940) His longest novel. Robert Jordan is a American fighting on the side of the Spanish Loyalists, who is assigned to blow up a bridge. While waiting for three days and nights in a cave, he falls in love with Maria, one of guerrillas he is aiding. The title comes from John Donne's sermon, with the words, "No man is an *Iland*...every man is a peece of the *Continent*... And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*."

The Old Man and the Sea (1952) His famous novella about Santiago, a courageous Cuban fisherman whose greatest marlin is eaten by sharks.

Stories: Hemingway's brevity, plain language, irony and understatement were well-suited to the short story. Some of the great ones are "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," "The Killers," "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," and "In Another Country."

Topic 60: Langston Hughes (1902-67)

Overview: Although mainly known as a poet, Langston Hughes was a very versatile man of letters -- the author of plays, essays, newspaper columns, satirical stories, and autobiographies, making a total of over fifty books. Born in Joplin, Missouri, of mixed races ("there are lots of different kinds of blood in our family," he wrote), he grew up in various Midwestern cities, and later lived and worked in many places. He was a vital member of the Harlem Renaissance, where he did some of his best work.

Poems: "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" was published first in the *Crisis* in 1921 and has been widely reprinted. He wrote it, he says, in ten or fifteen minutes in a train going down the shore of the Mississippi, as he thought of its and other rivers' meanings to Afro-Americans.

"Harlem" The opening question, "What happens to a dream deferred?" is frequently quoted. The third line, "...a raisin in the sun," is the title of Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 Broadway play.

"Jazzonia," "The Weary Blues," and "Dream Boogie" are three of his poems about black music.

Other poems, like "Mulatto" and "Cross," are addressed to the dilemmas of a mixed-race American.

"My writing has been largely concerned with the depicting of Negro Life in America," Hughes said.

Other Works: Hughes' two volumes of autobiography are *The Big Sea* (1940) and *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956). The former includes an account of his giving three of his poems, including "Jazzonia" and "The Weary Blues," to Vachel Lindsay when Hughes was a busboy in a Washington, D.C. hotel, and a long memoir of the Harlem Renaissance. The latter describes his later travels to Russia, Samarkand, Australia, Japan, China, and Europe.

Poems from Black Africa (1963) is an anthology that he edited .

Topic 61: Richard Wright (1908-60)

Overview: One of the most celebrated American writers of the late 1930s and early '40s, Wright was born on a plantation near Natchez, Mississippi, and had a harsh childhood. His father abandoned the family; Wright was placed in an orphanage, and then raised for a time by relatives in Elaine, Arkansas, until his uncle was murdered by white men. He and his mother went back to Mississippi, where he was shuffled again between relatives and went for a while to high school. He moved to Memphis and then, in 1927, to Chicago, where he took various jobs and taught himself to write. In 1934 he joined the Communist Party. He also worked for the Illinois Writers Project, a New Deal program for unemployed writers. His breakthrough came with *Uncle Tom's Children* in 1938 and his sensational novel *Native Son* in 1940. But he remained disgusted by American racism and moved to Paris in 1946. In his remaining years he identified strongly with Third World countries and politics.

Uncle Tom's Children (1938) Begins with the autobiographical sketch, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," followed by the violent story "Big Boy Leaves Home" and four other stories.

Native Son (1940) Like Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, it is a fictionalized account of a murder case. Bigger Thomas, a poor black from the Chicago slums accidentally suffocates a drunk white woman and later intentionally rapes and murders another woman. An example of Depression-era naturalism, it raises questions about the sources of Bigger Thomas's fear and hate. What is a "native" son? Wright tried to answer these questions in a lecture later published as a pamphlet, *How Bigger Was Born*.

Black Boy (1945) Wright's autobiography, describing his life in the South from age 4 to his escape to Chicago. It was a best-seller and a Book-of-the-Month Club selection. Though very vivid, scholars have shown that it is exaggerated. W.E.B. Du Bois protested that it grotesquely distorted black family life. It was originally to be part of a larger work to be called *American Hunger*, perhaps a more suggestive title.

"I Tried to Be a Communist," an essay that Wright first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1944 about his experience in the Communist Party in the 1930s and the reasons he left. It was later included in *The God That Failed*, an influential collection of essays by Wright and five other ex-Communists edited by Richard Crossman (1950).

Topic 62: Tennessee Williams (1911-83)

Overview: Born in Columbus, Mississippi, and christened Thomas Lanier Williams, he did not become "Tennessee" until fellow students at the University of Iowa gave him that nickname, because of his southern accent. His father, who had moved the family to St. Louis in 1918 when he became manager of a shoe company, so objected to his writing stories and reading the plays of O'Neill and Strindberg, that he removed him from the University of Missouri. Williams persisted, worked for the WPA in New Orleans, and became a scriptwriter in Hollywood. *The Glass Menagerie* was produced on Broadway in 1945, followed by *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1947, making him famous for realistic dramas of psychological conflicts. He was severely depressed, however, by the death of his long-time companion, Frank Merlo, in 1963. Altogether, he wrote over a hundred plays, plus novels, stories, poems, and essays.

The Glass Menagerie (1945): Amanda Wingfield is a now-poor, former Southern belle with a daughter Laura who is lame and suffers from an inferiority complex. Laura's passion is a collection of glass animals. Nevertheless, Amanda wishes for Laura to have the romantic life she had. Tom, her brother, brings home Jim, a friend; Jim and Laura dance awkwardly; and her glass unicorn is broken. The play is tense and powerful, but an upbeat ending has disappointed many viewers.

A Streetcar Named Desire (1947): Blanche DuBois is another aging Southern belle, trying to hang onto her respectability despite her alcoholism and promiscuity. She moves into an apartment in New Orleans (reached on a streetcar named "Desire") with her sister Stella Kowalski and Stanley, her primitive, working class husband. The play ends with Stanley raping Blanche and committing her to a mental institution.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955): The tense drama in the family of Big Daddy Pollitt, a rich Mississippi cotton planter, his wife, Big Mama, and their son and daughter-in-law Brick and Maggie. Maggie, the "cat," is a sexy, formerly poor girl who is unfulfilled because Brick, a former football star, appears to be homosexual. The secrets and deceptions in the family are summarized in "Mendacity," the play's most frequently word.

Other Major Plays are *The Rose Tattoo* (1955), *Suddenly Last Summer* (1959), and *The Night of the Iguana* (1964). Many have been made into movies.

Topic 63: Arthur Miller (1915-2005)

Overview: Miller was born in Manhattan, the son of a successful Jewish clothing merchant. The business failed in the Depression, and the family moved to Brooklyn, where Miller went to high school, played football, and worked part-time. In the 1930s he studied playwriting at the University of Michigan, then returned to New York to work in the Federal Theatre Project, till it was closed by Congress for its political radicalism. A lifelong political liberal, Miller's first successful play, *All My Sons*, was attacked as "Communist propaganda." He was later accused by the House Un-American Activities Committee of being a Communist and convicted of contempt of Congress, though the verdict was overturned. He and Tennessee Williams are a fascinating comparison and contrast.

All My Sons (1947) A play about a businessman who sold defective parts to the army during World War II, causing the death of twenty-one pilots. It is based on a true story, but also shows the influence of Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*.

The Death of a Salesman (1949) An American family drama, involving Willy Loman, a tired middle-aged salesman, his fantasies and his dreams for his two sons, Biff and Happy, and Linda, his wife. Technically unusual scenes have Willy talking to himself in one part of the stage, while Biff and Happy talk about him in another.

The Crucible (1953) first attracted attention as an allegorical play connecting the anti-communist hysteria of the 1950s to the Salem witch trials of the 1690s. But it is also a very powerful drama, focusing on the honest and well-meaning farmer, John Proctor, who has nevertheless committed adultery with one of his family's maids and whipped another, who accuses him of witchcraft.

After the Fall (1964) A complex play in which Quentin, a New York Jewish intellectual, surrealistically recalls scenes from his two marriages. The obvious connection to Miller's marriage to Marilyn Monroe (from June 29, 1956 to January 20, 1961) is interesting to some viewers, disliked by others.

Timebends: A Life (1987) his autobiography, in which he reflects on his goals as a dramatist who had strong social and moral convictions and did not wish merely to entertain, and his later work for the international writers' union, PEN, defending free expression world-wide. What he said of Marilyn Monroe may also apply to himself: "She was a poet on a street corner trying to recite to a crowd pulling at her cloths."

Period VI: 1965-Present – Post-Modern

Introduction:

Post-modernism is hard to define. Is it more revolutionary and experimental than modernism? Or does it reject the modern emphasis on being new and return to some of the formalism that the modernist generation abandoned? Is it high-brow or low-brow? Popular or elite?

The answers are that it is a little bit of all of these things and that they differ in different genres.

As early as the 1950s, American poets divided between the New Formalists, who returned to traditional verse forms and rhyming, and the Beats, who continued in the freer traditions of Whitman and Williams. You could have American poetry, as some people said, either cooked or raw.

In prose, some writers like Norman Mailer, James Jones, and William Styron wrote realistic war novels, emulating Hemingway. Others like John Updike and Philip Roth chose the city and suburbs for their scene, but were franker about sex and modern manners and did not try to be so technically experimental. They wanted to be more readable than Faulkner. Later, however, many broke with modernist emphases on fiction by beginning to write memoirs, essays, and what was sometimes called "the non-fiction novel" and "the new journalism."

In drama, one daring new development was the "theater of the absurd," as written by Edward Albee and LeRoi Jones, who changed his name to Amiri Baraka.

All these genres were also very affected by the rise of the black civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement in the 1960s, followed in the late '60s and '70s by the women's movement and other ethnic liberation movements. Women poets like Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich, and Gwendolyn Brooks changed the subject matter of poetry in order to incorporate women's experience. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, perhaps the most radical of all novels of the postwar period can be called modern in some ways – the protagonist does not even have a name – and postmodern for its subject matter. Norman Mailer for a time became a journalist, subtitled *Armies of the Night*, his book about the Washington peace march of October, 1967, "History as a Novel / The Novel as History."

Another post-modern innovation was the introduction of formerly cult genres like science fiction into the respectable society of the best-selling novel. Kurt Vonnegut, whose earliest stories had been published in scifi magazines, used his scifi freedom of invention in his novel of World War II, *Slaughterhouse Five*. Thomas Pynchon made the War itself into science fiction in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

So there are no simple definitions of post-modernism. To understand it, one must look at the many and varied individual examples.

Topic 64: Elizabeth Bishop (1911-79)

Overview: For many readers appreciation of Elizabeth Bishop's work did not come until the publication of *The Complete Poems, 1927-1979* in 1983 and *The Complete Prose* (1984). This is because she had published very little during her life, being very meticulous and a continual reviser, sometimes working on a poem for twenty years. She had also had an unusual life, spending her early childhood in Nova Scotia, then in Massachusetts with relatives (her father had died, her mother became mentally ill and was institutionalized). Many adult years were spent in Brazil. Nevertheless, she had published from time to time in the *New Yorker* and gained the friendship and admiration of other poets, many of whom also moved from formalism to a more personal, confessional style. Thus she seems to belong to a later generation.

Representative Poems: Bishop's work is varied. Some poems are in traditional verse forms from the challenging and difficult villanelle, to the sestina, sonnet, and easier quatrain. Some are in free verse. Some, like "The Wit," a modification of the sonnet, are hybrids. They also range from the funny and occasional, like "Lines Written in the Fannie Farmer Cookbook," to the grim, tragic, and horrifying. Poetry, she sometimes seems to be saying, should be fun. But her eyes are so open, so observant that she does not miss the sad and pathetic, as in "Pink Dog." Another source of her poetry is her memory. "In the Waiting Room" retells the experience of reading the February, 1918, *National Geographic* at age seven, while her Aunt Consuelo was at the dentist. Subjects are frequently animals, insects, and flowers, as they were for Emily Dickinson. She can turn the accidental or trivial into the deeply disturbing, as in "The Armadillo," where the fire balloons sent up in a seasonal Brazilian celebration light fire to an owls' nest and turn a baby rabbit to "intangible ash." Robert Lowell imitated it in "Skunk Hour."

Prose: Bishop's essays and stories are also varied and entertaining. See the memoirs "Primer Class" and "The U.S.A. School of Writing," about being a grader for a correspondence school when she was just out of Vassar College, and the stories "The Farmer's Children" and "The Housekeeper."

Topic 65: Ralph Ellison (1914-94)

Overview: Ralph Ellison was born in Oklahoma City and named after Ralph Waldo Emerson. His father died when he was three, and he was raised by his mother. In high school he became interested in music and in 1933 won a music scholarship to Tuskegee Institute, which he lost when he switched his major to English. In the summer of 1936 he went to Harlem, where he met Richard Wright, who introduced him to the Communist Party and got him a job with the Federal Writers Project. While serving in the Merchant Marine during the War, Ellison did more writing, eventually starting his novel, *Invisible Man*. When it was published in 1952, it won many prizes, making him much in demand as a lecturer and teacher. He published no more novels during his lifetime.

Invisible Man (1952) A first person narrative by a nameless black man who undergoes an American odyssey from adolescence through a college like Tuskegee, to Harlem, where he works for the Brotherhood (an outfit like the Communist Party), then takes on more disguises as a hustler, and finally ends up back in the hole underground from which he started writing. The story and imagery are often surreal. In the opening "Battle Royal" he is blindfolded and made to fight with other blindfolded black youths for money in an electrified boxing ring at a white businessmen's smoker. In New York he briefly works in a paint factory where his boss is a black man who is proud of making super white paint. His invisibility is due to "a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their *inner* eyes...." It can be compared and contrasted with Du Bois's "double consciousness."

Shadow and Act (1964) and *Going to the Territory* (1987) are collections of essays and lectures.

Juneteenth (1999) is a version of the long novel Ellison worked on in the forty years after *Invisible Man*. Made up partly from manuscripts and partly from published stories, it was edited by John F. Callahan and published posthumously.

Topic 66: Robert Lowell (1914-77)

Overview: Born in Boston into the poetically distinguished Lowell family, Robert Lowell became a distinguished poet himself, first as a member of the "New Formalists" and later as a leader of the movement to make poetry more immediate and autobiographical. His early mentors were the New Critics and Southern Agrarians, Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, and Robert Penn Warren, under whose influence he wrote very complex, tight and often obscure poems. During World War II he was, as he wrote, later, "a fire-breathing Catholic C.O." In the 1960s, when he became very active in opposing the Vietnam War, his poetry became more accessible and public.

Lord Weary's Castle (1946) Lowell's second book of poems, containing revisions of his first book, *Land of Unlikeness* (1944), and many more. The title come from an old ballad

"It's Lambkin was a mason good
As ever built wi' stane:
He built Lord Wearie's castle
But payment gat he nane..."

which suggests Lowell's devotion to tradition and craftsmanship, even when not remunerated. Many poems are carefully wrought meditations on New England places and historic figures. "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" is on the irony of the Quaker ship-owners and captains who led the violent whaling industry. "Mr. Edwards and the Spider" recalls Jonathan Edwards' most famous sermon. Other poems reflect Lowell's conversion to Catholicism.

The Mills of the Kavanaughs (1951) The long title poem contains the memories of Anne, a poor girl who was adopted by the wealthy Kavanaugh family and married to their youngest son.

Life Studies (1959) In some ways a radical change from the earlier books. The second section, "91 Revere Street," named for his family home in Boston, is a prose memoir of his childhood and his parents. The third is poems to other poets, like "Words for Hart Crane" – "When the Pulitzers showered on some dope / or screw who flushed our dry mouths out with soap" it begins. The last has poems about his family and the well-known "Memories of West Street and Lepke" and "Colonel Shaw and the Massachusetts' 54th."

"Waking Early Sunday Morning" (1965) A public denunciation of the condition of the country, where "our children ... fall / in small war on the heels of small / war – until the end of time / to police the earth,..."

Topic 67: Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000)

Overview: The first African American to win the Pulitzer Prize (1949), Gwendolyn Brooks grew up on the Chicago South Side. Her mother had been a school teacher; her father had wanted to be a doctor, but was a janitor; and they gave her a secure childhood and good education. While in high school she published scores of poems in the *Chicago Defender*, the city's African-American newspaper. Her first book, *A Street in Bronzeville*, was recommended to Harper & Row by Richard Wright and won her a Guggenheim Fellowship. In the civil rights era she became active in the Black Arts Movement and taught in writing programs. In the 1980s she was Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress and won the Frost Medal from the Poetry Society of America, honoring her life-long contributions to American poetry.

A Street in Bronzeville (1945) Poems describing the people, places, and feelings of a characteristic black neighborhood, such as the South Side. Popular poems are "kitchenette building," "a song in the front yard," and "the preacher: ruminates behind the sermon." They invite comparison with poems written or that might be written about a white neighborhood.

Annie Allen (1949) Annie is an African American girl. The first part describes her birth, her mother, and her reaction to racism, killing, and death. "The Anniad," the second part, is a mock epic in which she dreams of a lover who goes to war, returns, marries her, leaves, returns, and dies. The last part shows Annie as a mature woman. How has she grown? What has changed her?

"We Real Cool" (1960) Perhaps her best known poem, subtitled "The Pool Players Seven at the Golden Shovel." A lot of the meaning depends on the voice, tone, and manner in which it is recited.

Report from Part One (1972) and *Report from Part Two* (1987) are her two volumes of autobiography, describing her own development over a long and eventful life.

Topic 68: Richard Wilbur (1921---)

Overview: Richard Wilbur is a very elegant, witty, graceful, down-to-earth poet. He is also a very successful translator of classical French dramatist, especially Moliere, and has won many prizes. He was born in New York City, the son of the artist Lawrence Wilbur, but grew up, he wrote, on a farm in North Caldwell, New Jersey, "among woods, orchards, corn-fields, horses, cows, and hay-wagons." This upbringing shows up in his sharp images of the things of this world, while his education at Amherst College and Harvard also acquainted him with idealist philosophy – a combination or tension that recurs in many poems. On March 1, 2011, he celebrated his 90th birthday.

The Beautiful Changes and Other Poems (1947) Does the title poem, which is often anthologized, illustrate Wallace Stevens' line "Death is the mother of beauty"? Or is there no connection? (See "Sunday Morning.")

Ceremony and Other Poems (1950) Contains "Love Calls Us to the Things of This World," "Beasts," "The Death of a Toad," "Still, Citizen Sparrow," and the four line "Epistemology":

I
Kick at the rock, Sam Johnson, break your bones:
But cloudy, cloudy is the stuff of stones.
II
We milk the cow of the world, and as we do
We whisper in her ear, "You are not true."

Advice to a Prophet and Other Poems (1961) "Junk" imitates Old English alliterative verse, to great effect. "The Fire Truck" improves on W.C. Williams' imagist poem by being onomatopoeic as well. What makes the title poem different from other anti-war poems?

Walking to Sleep: New Poems and Translations (1969) Has translations of Borges, Akhmatova, and Voznesensky. "Playboy" brings many smiles.

Wilbur's other books of poetry are *The Mind Reader* (1976), *New and Collected Poems* (1987), *Mayflies* (2000), and *New Poems* (2004). He also wrote lyrics for the musical *Candide*, with music by Leonard Bernstein and book by Lillian Hellman.

Topic 69: Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007)

Overview: Vonnegut was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, the son of free-thinking German-American parents. His father and grandfather were architects, and at Cornell University he majored in chemistry while also working on the campus paper. During the War he was sent to Carnegie Institute of Technology and the University of Tennessee to study mechanical engineering but then sent to Europe as a private. He was captured by the Germans in the Battle of the Bulge in December, 1944, and imprisoned in Dresden. There, in February, 1945, he and his fellow prisoners survived the horrific bombing and fire-bombing that killed over 100,000 people because they were deep underground in a former slaughterhouse. After the War he started graduate school in anthropology, but soon went to work in public relations for General Electric in Schenectady, New York, where he started writing science fiction. His later work, which has been widely read, combines science fiction and utopian satire.

Early Books: *Player Piano* (1952) is set in a world where automated machines have replaced human labor, leading to a conflict between the wealthy capitalists and their engineers and the unemployed. *The Sirens of Titan* (1959) is about free will and omniscience and a Martian invasion. It won a Hugo Award. In *Mother Night* (1961) Howard W. Campbell, Jr., an American who moved to Germany after World War I and became a Nazi propagandist, is writing his memoirs from inside an Israeli prison.

Cat's Cradle (1963), his first popular success, is narrated by "Jonah," a man writing a history of the atomic bomb and Felix Hoenikker, its inventor, who was playing cat's cradle when the bomb was dropped. The book includes the ingenious, apt, and funny vocabulary of Bokkonism, Jonah's religion.

God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater (1965) is about Eliot Rosewater, the heir to a huge family foundation that was set up to enable the Rosewater family to avoid taxes. He goes across the country serving in volunteer fire departments and using his money to help the poor. Norman Mushari, a sinister lawyer, tries to have Eliot declared insane so he can gain control of the money.

Slaughterhouse Five (1969) The hero is Billy Pilgrim, a soldier who is captured like Vonnegut was and survives the Dresden bombing. An example of metafiction, it includes Vonnegut himself, time-travel, and the utopian planet Tralfamadore, and some of the characters from other novels, like Rosewater, the science fiction writer Kilgore Trout, and Howard W. Campbell, Jr. It is Vonnegut's most famous novel, and it became a movie. The novel provokes the question of the relation of post-realism to reality.

Other Works: Vonnegut's stories are collected in *Welcome to the Monkey House* (1968); his essays in *Palm Sunday* (1981), *A Man Without a Country* (2005), and *Armageddon in Retrospect* (2008), edited by his son Mark Vonnegut. His life and work are interesting to compare to Mark Twain's.

Topic 70: Norman Mailer (1923-2007)

Overview: A "towering writer with a matching ego," as the *New York Times* called him in its obituary, Mailer was born into a middle class Jewish family in Long Branch, New Jersey, and grew up in Brooklyn. At Harvard he began by studying aeronautical engineering, but became interested in writing. Drafted into the army in 1943, he served in the Philippines. His war novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, became a best seller and launched him on a long career as novelist, journalist, controversial television personality, and celebrity. Seldom out of the headlines for his divorces, fights, and polemics on many subjects, he nevertheless wrote twelve novels and many other books, directed and acted in a movie, was a founder of *The Village Voice* of Greenwich Village, and engaged in politics (once running for mayor of New York).

The Naked and the Dead (1948) About a reconnaissance platoon on an island in the South Pacific, with chapters alternating between the military action and the histories and personalities of the characters. All have flaws, and there are conflicts between the officers and men, especially Hearn, a former aide to the general, and Croft, the ambitious platoon sergeant. One dated feature is the substitution, insisted on by the publisher, of "fug" for "fuck."

Barbary Shore (1951) is a surreal political novel set in a Brooklyn rooming-house where a former soldier is trying to write a novel. *The Deer Park* (1955) is a Hollywood novel with graphic sex scenes and a surreal description of an atomic bomb test. Neither sold well.

Advertisements for Myself (1959) An important turning point, introducing Mailer the controversialist and unrestrained egotist. Contained his sensational essays, "The White Negro," "Reflections on Hip," and "Hipster and Beatnik."

An American Dream (1965) is about Stephen Rojack, a war-hero, ex-congressman, and talk-show host who murders his society wife, and becomes involved in the Mafia. He has an affair with a night-club singer who is a mobster's girlfriend, and goes through twenty-four hours of violence, imagined messages from the moon, and exposure of political intrigue. It was praised for its poetic style, but sharply criticized by feminists for its misogamy.

The Armies of the Night (1968) and *Miami and the Siege of Chicago: An Informal History of the Republican and Democratic Conventions of 1968* (1968) Personal accounts of the March on the Pentagon in 1967 and the two party conventions of 1968. Major works of the "new journalism."

The Executioner's Song (1980) Mailer's non-fiction novel about the crimes and execution of Gary Gilmore by a firing squad in Utah in 1977. Winner of a Pulitzer Prize in 1980.

Topic 71: James Baldwin (1924-87)

Overview: Born and raised in Harlem, James Baldwin was a preacher's son who became a "boy preacher" himself. The rhetoric of the storefront church remained a powerful force in his work. Moving to Greenwich Village, he was helped by Richard Wright and began writing magazine reviews and essays. In 1948 he went to Paris, trying to escape, he said, the "fury of the color problem" in the U.S. There he finished *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, an autobiographical novel about religion in a black family. In his essays he combines the urgent messages and styles of apocalyptic religion with subtle analysis of his personal experience of race relations. The most famous, *The Fire Next Time*, created a sensation. Other books were also about homosexuality.

Go Tell It on the Mountain (1953) Takes place on John Grimes' fourteenth birthday, as he wrestles with religious conversion, sex, family history, and anger at his domineering minister father.

Notes of a Native Son (1955) The first collection of Baldwin's essays. Particularly important is "Everybody's Protest Novel," attacking Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Richard Wright's *Native Son* for being simplistic and ineffectual in solving racial problems.

Giovanni's Room (1956) The complicated sexual affairs and feelings of a gay young American, David, living in Paris.

Nobody Knows My Name (1961) Personal essays on Baldwin's experiences as an American Negro in Paris, New York, the South, and with Africans. There are also essays on Faulkner, Wright, and other authors. "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy" recounts his friendship with Norman Mailer and answers "The White Negro."

Another Country (1962) Baldwin's third and longest novel, set in New York and dealing with the homosexual and heterosexual affairs of a group of young artists and musicians of different races.

The Fire Next Time (1963) Contains two essays. The first is a short "letter" to his nephew on the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. The second reprints his "Letter from a Region in My Mind," which first appeared in the *New Yorker*. It is notable for many reasons, including its sympathetic account of Elijah Muhammad and the Black Muslims.

Baldwin's other works include the play *Blues for Mister Charlie* (1964); a collection of stories, *Going to Meet the Man* (1965); two more novels, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968) and *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974); and *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (1985) about the Atlanta murders of 28 black children by Wayne Williams, 1979-1981.

Topic 72: Flannery O'Connor (1925-64)

Overview: O'Connor is one of the greatest American short story writers. Born in Savannah, Georgia, where her parents were prosperous Roman Catholics, she spent most of her life in Milledgeville, Georgia, after her father's business failed in 1938. In 1941 he died of Lupus. She went to the nearby Georgia State College for Women and then to the University of Iowa, where she became a star pupil in the Writers Workshop. She continued writing, at Yaddo (the writers' colony in Saratoga Springs, New York); in New York City, and Connecticut, publishing in prestigious quarterlies like *The Partisan Review* and *The Sewanee Review*. But in 1950 she was found to have Lupus, too, like her father, and she remained in Milledgeville till her death, publishing in all two novels, thirty-two short stories, and many book reviews.

Stories: Her story collections are *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955), *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1965), and *Complete Stories* (1971). They are often tense, with the threat of violence and cruelty hovering over them, and with many violent endings. The settings are the small towns and farms of the South. For this reason they have been called "grotesque" and "Southern gothic," although O'Connor once answered such categorization by saying that "anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic." She is also a very religious writer, although not didactic. Rather, her stories can be read as subtle allegories of Catholic theology. Characters speak in clichés and southern idioms. Familiar phrases are used ironically.

In "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" she takes that familiar slogan promoting safe driving to apply to a drifter who repairs an old car belonging to a widow and her handicapped daughter, then marries the daughter to get the car and drive away.

In "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" the "good man" is a murderer called the Misfit.

Novels: Her two novels are *Wise Blood* (1952), about a religious fanatic who seeks to promote the new popular Church Without Christ, and *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), about the fanatical effort of a boy to baptize his younger brother.

Topic 73: Allen Ginsberg (1926-97)

Overview: The most famous American poet of his generation, Allen Ginsberg was born in Patterson, New Jersey, the son of Louis Ginsberg, a poet and high school teacher, and Naomi Levy Ginsberg, a Russian immigrant. At Columbia University, where he received a scholarship, he preferred the poetry of mystics and bards, like William Blake and Walt Whitman. He made friends with William Burroughs, Neal Cassady, Jack Kerouac, and others who would later be known as the "Beat Generation" or "Beats," a term sometimes meaning "beaten," sometimes "beatific," and sometimes referring to jazz rhythms. In San Francisco, in 1955, he read his long poem, "Howl." It created a sensation and made him a Beat leader, along with Kerouac, whose *On the Road* appeared in 1957. Later he declared himself a Buddhist, traveled to India, and became a leading opponent of the Vietnam War, participating in demonstrations and poetry readings all over the country.

Howl and Other Poems (1956) Dedicated to Karl Solomon, who had been a fellow patient with Ginsberg at the Columbia Psychiatric Institute, "Howl" can be described as a rant that turns into a prayer. Lines have repetitive beginnings, providing a chant-like rhythm. Read aloud, it can be mesmerizing. It is also a protest poem against materialism, waste, and false values, especially in the lines addressed to "Moloch!" (To be sure we understand, Ginsberg added a note saying that Moloch is the "Canaanite fire god, whose worship was marked by parents burning their children as propitiatory sacrifice.")

Ginsberg can also be funny and fun. A gay, he ends "America" with an unexpected pledge, "America, I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel." "A Supermarket in California" is a playful address to Walt Whitman, using his long lines and making "enumerations" like him but of a different scene. What Whitman would have thought of a supermarket!

Ginsberg, Kerouac, and the Beats espoused spontaneity. Thus his poems are numerous and often named for the time or place where written. Is this a virtue or defect?

Kaddish and Other Poems (1961) The Kaddish is the Hebrew prayer for the dead, usually said for men. Ginsberg's "Kaddish" is for his mother. It frankly describes her mental illnesses, her often disheveled appearance, her politics, his relations with her, and much of his own character. It has been called his most immortal poem.

Topic 74: Edward Albee (1928--)

Overview: Edward Albee is the leading American playwright of the absurd, the post-modern genre pioneered in Europe by Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, and Eugene Ionesco. He was born in Washington, D.C., to a single mother and then adopted by Reed and Frances Albee, who lived in Larchmont, New York. Reed Albee was the owner of vaudeville theaters, and through them Albee met many actors. But he did not like his parents and refused to accept their life style. So after being dismissed from two boarding schools and Trinity College, Hartford, he went to Greenwich Village, where he took odd jobs and tried writing. His first play to be produced was *The Zoo Story*, which was performed in translation in Germany in 1959 and in New York in 1960. It was followed by four more short plays and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf* in 1962. The movie version, starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor won five Academy Awards.

The Theater of the Absurd differs radically from the realistic theater by introducing impossible and even outlandish characters and situations. In Albee's *Seascape* (1975) a retired American couple picnicking on a beach is suddenly joined by a pair of human-size male and female iguanas. At first they fear each other, but they soon talk together and turn out to have similar or complementary likes and dislikes. The absurdity has its dramatic and comic values but also emphasizes the difficulties and barriers to human understanding and communication.

The Sandbox (1960) is a one-act play involving a couple in their late fifties –early sixties and their relationship with "Grandma," a tiny 86-year old whom they cannot manage and eventually treat like a little child.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf (1962) Albee said the title came from graffiti he saw on men's room in a bar. "'Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf' means who's afraid of the big *bad* wolf . . . who's afraid of living life without false illusions. And it did strike me as being a rather typical, university intellectual joke." George and Martha are an older university couple who invite a younger couple, Nick and Honey, to come back to their house after a faculty party. They amuse themselves with games, while all getting very drunk. The games become increasingly mean and frightening, until the differences between games and reality are lost.

Topic 75: Adrienne Rich (1929--)

Overview: One of the foremost contemporary feminist poets, the progress of Adrienne Rich's poetry closely parallels the development of the modern women's movement. She grew up in Baltimore, the brilliant daughter of a Johns Hopkins professor of pathology and a mother who had given up a career as pianist and composer. She graduated from Radcliffe, and W.H. Auden chose her first book, *A Change of World*, for the Yale Younger Poets series. She married Alfred Conrad, a Harvard economics professor, and they had three children in four years. The demands of balancing motherhood and poetry, plus the issues of the Vietnam War, radicalized her. When the family moved to New York City in 1966, she began teaching, eventually in the open admissions and remedial programs at City College, where she became very sympathetic with her mostly black students. Her husband died in 1971, she became a lesbian, and in 1984 she and her partner moved to California, where she became a professor at Stanford.

"Storm Warnings." is a subdued but powerful poem from *A Change of World* (1951), comparing the dangerous unpredictability of outward weather and the "weather in the heart."

"Face to Face" (1965) also is concerned with personal relationships, but reaches back to those of Puritans, pioneers, and a man and woman meeting after a winter apart, each "burning under the bleached scalp; behind dry lips / a loaded gun." (Note the echo of Emily Dickinson.)

"Planetarium" (1971) and "Power" (1978) are poetic contributions to women's history. The first celebrate Caroline Herschel, sister of the great astronomer William Herschel, whose own contributions to astronomy have been little remembered. The second contemplates the mystery of Marie Curie:

She died a famous woman denying
her wounds
denying
her wounds came from the same source as her power

"Diving Into the Wreck" (1972) describes the pursuit of personal and social history in a brilliantly developed extended metaphor of Scuba diving.

"The Burning of Paper Instead of Children" (1968) and "Frame" (1981) are protest poems. The "paper" is the books that we reflexively insist must not be burned; the children may be the victims of American napalm in Vietnam. "Frame" is a bold attempt to describe the unseen arrest and beating of a black woman college student for going inside an unfinished college building to innocently wait for a bus.

Topic 76: Gary Snyder (1930--)

Overview: Born in San Francisco, Snyder grew up on an old logging camp near Lake City, Washington, where during the Depression his parents had a small dairy farm. In 1942 his parents separated, and his mother took him and his sister to Portland, Oregon, where he became a lover of mountains and hiking and went to Reed College. Afterwards he did graduate work in Asian languages at UC Berkeley, working in the summers as a fire lookout and on trail crews in Yosemite National Park. In 1955 he was one of the poets who read at the Six Gallery in San Francisco when his friend Allen Ginsberg read "Howl." He went to Japan, studied Buddhism, worked on a tanker, and published his first book, *Riprap*, in 1959. He continued his travels and study of Buddhism, publishing more books, and becoming known for his combination of poetry and advocacy of wilderness. He won the Pulitzer Prize for *Turtle Island* (1974) and the Bollingen Prize for *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (1996).

Poems: In 1966 Snyder wrote, "I've come to realize that the rhythms of my poems follow the rhythm of the physical work I'm doing and life I'm leading at any given time—which makes the music in my head which creates the line. *Riprap* is really a class of poems I wrote under the influence of the geology of the Sierra Nevada and the daily trail-crew work of picking up and placing granite rocks in tight cobble patterns on hard slab [called riprapping]." His poem "Riprap" expands locally and cosmically on this.

"Milton by Firelight" (1959) juxtaposes Milton's account of the Fall in *Paradise Lost* with Snyder's life in the Sierras and vision of their future. Compare the different meanings and uses of "O hell" and "Oh Hell!"

"Beneath My Hand and Eye the Distant Hills, Your Body" (1965) is a love poem to an unnamed person and the Uintah mountains of northeastern Utah.

"I Went into the Maverick Bar" (1974) addresses "America—your stupidity." It seems in the same genre as Allen Ginsberg's "America."

"Axe Handles" (1979) starts as a poem about teaching his son Kai how to throw a hatchet, then turns into a reflection on the teachings of Ezra Pound and Snyder's Buddhist master about craftsmanship and tradition.

"Ripples on the Surface" (1992). The lines "Nature not a book, but a *performance*, a / high old culture" and "No nature / Both together, one big empty house" make a stunning contrast and summary of Snyder's environmental vision.

Topic 77: N. Scott Momaday (1934--)

Overview: Although Momaday is the most celebrated of contemporary Native American authors, he has described himself as of mixed ancestry and living in two worlds. He was born in Lawton, Oklahoma, and his father was a Kiowa. His mother had come from Kentucky and Tennessee and was, he says, "a Southern belle." Later his parents taught on the Navajo reservation at Shiprock, New Mexico. In 1958 he graduated from the University of New Mexico, and in 1963 received his Ph.D. in English at Stanford, writing a dissertation on the New England poet, Frederick Goddard Tuckerman. His novel, *House Made of Dawn* won the 1969 Pulitzer Prize. He has since published poems, essays, and his memoir, *The Names*, and taught at many prestigious universities.

House Made of Dawn (1969) The story of Abel, a Navajo war veteran, and his alienation from his tribal traditions and people, his dissipation, and his attempt to reintegrate himself. The style is Faulknerian, the structure complex.

The Way to Rainy Mountain (1969) A unique book, presenting the Kiowa through their mythic oral history, their recorded history, and Momaday's own retracing of their route from the Rocky Mountains onto the Great Plains. Short paragraphs from each perspective come in that order, in three sections: "The Setting Out," "The Going On," and "The Closing In." Very insightful on the relations between myth and history and the ways in which stories and legends create personal and societal identity.

The Names: A Memoir (1976) One of the best memoirs of his generation, because it both tells his and his family's history and creates his persona. Similarly, his mother had a fractional Indian ancestry, but she chose to emphasize it, because "it enabled her to assume an attitude of defiance,...it became her. She imagined who she was. This act of imagination was, I believe, among the most important events of my mother's early life, as later the same essential act was to be among the most important of my own."

Other Works: Momaday's other important books are *Angle of Geese and Other Poems* (1974) and *The Man Made of Words: Essays, Stories, Passages* (1997).

Topic 78: Maxine Hong Kingston (1940--)

Overview: Born in California in 1940, the first American-born child of Chinese immigrants, Kingston did not learn English until she went to school. But she won a scholarship to the UC Berkeley, and later got a teaching certificate. In 1962 she married Earl Kingston, an actor. In 1976 she published *Woman Warrior*, which won a National Book Critics Circle Award. It and her second book, *China Men*, have established her as both a prominent Chinese-American author and an innovative modern memoirist. In 1997 Pres. Clinton presented her with the National Humanities Medal. For many years she had worked with returning veterans, and in March, 2003, she was arrested during a protest against the Iraq War. In 2007 she received an award for *Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace* (2006), an anthology of veterans' stories.

The *Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976) fuses her own history with the stories her mother told her, some of which were family stories and some of which were traditional Chinese tales and legends, "talk story." Many stories are frightening. Some are humiliating. Girls are "maggots." But others instill courage, training her to be a "woman warrior." Is this a true memoir? Or is it more than a memoir? Is it part fiction? Perhaps it is a story of how stories create people.

China Men (1980) Similar in technique to *Woman Warrior* but about the men in her family, near and distant and mythical. The two books were originally intended to be one. One book was thought to be too long. Was it wise to break them up?

Topic 79: Marilynne Robinson (1943--)

Overview: Robinson was born and grew up in Sandpoint, Idaho, a small town near the Canadian border. There she read voraciously, preferring, she says, "books that were old and thick and dull and hard." From the local high school she went on to the Pembroke College, the women's affiliate of Brown University, and from there to the University of Washington, where she received her Ph.D. in English in 1977. Her first novel, *Housekeeping*, received the PEN/Hemingway award for 1981. Her second novel, *Gilead*, did not appear until 2004, and won the Pulitzer prize. In between she raised a family, wrote many essays and reviews, and held numerous positions as a writer-in-residence and visiting professor. She is currently a professor in the Writers Workshop at the University of Iowa.

Housekeeping (1981) is set in Fingerbone, a small town in the Pacific Northwest "chastened by an outsized landscape and extravagant weather and chastened again by an awareness that the whole of human history had occurred elsewhere." It is the story of Ruth and her younger sister Lucille who are orphaned and raised by a sequence of older women relatives, ending in Sylvie, an eccentric whose house is filled with piles of junk. Totally un sentimental, it has been praised frequently by feminists and by men. Whether it is "women's fiction" is debatable.

Mother Country: Britain, The Welfare State and Nuclear Pollution (1988) is nonfiction. Sounds the alarm about the dangers from the nuclear reprocessing plant at Sellafield in northern England.

The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought (1998) Includes a scholarly defense of Calvinism, Congregationalism, and the 17th and 18th Century American Puritans. A prelude to her second novel,

Gilead (2004), about three generations of Congregational ministers in a small town of this name in western Iowa. The first came out from Maine to join John Brown's raids in Kansas. The second became a pacifist. The third is the narrator, writing his memoirs in 1956 at age 76 to his ten-year-old son, who would otherwise not know this complex and intense family history.

Home (2008) is a sequel, focusing on Robert Boughton, the close friend of the narrator John Ames of *Gilead*, who is the town's Presbyterian minister.

Topic 80: Alice Walker (1944--)

Overview: The author of the Pulitzer prize-winning *The Color Purple*, which was also made into a popular movie, Walker was born in Eatonville, Georgia, the youngest daughter of sharecroppers. Despite having been accidentally blinded in one eye, she became her high school valedictorian and received scholarships first to Spelman College and then to Sarah Lawrence. In the 1960s she taught at Jackson State College in Mississippi and was active in the civil rights movement. In the '70s she helped rediscover Zora Neale Hurston, placed a marker on Hurston's grave, and edited a collection of her work, *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing*. In later years she has been a controversial opponent of female circumcision, a pioneer "womanist," and an environmentalist.

The Third Life of Grange Copeland (1970) The story of a Georgia sharecropper, his wife, son, and grand-daughter. Loosely based on Walker's own family. Introduces her themes of violence, isolation, sexism, and racism.

In Love and Trouble (1973) A collection of Walker's short stories, including "Everyday Use," which contrasts different kinds of Afro-American women's heritage. It was while doing research for these stories that she learned of Zora Neale Hurston and went to Edenton, Florida.

Meridian (1976) Meridian Hill is a black civil rights worker who has a troubled affair with Truman Held, has an abortion, and continues her commitment to nonviolence. Despite his supposed love for her, he is disloyal and undependable. It is interesting to see her as a model of Walker's image of strong, if not perfect, black womanhood.

You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down (1981) More stories, some very daring.

The Color Purple (1982) An epistolary novel, beginning with the letters that Celie, a poor black girl, writes to God, because she really has no friends, about being raped by her father, her murdered children, her forced marriage, and slowly improving life as she is befriended by Shug Avery, a blues singer who takes life as it comes. The complicated story presents a broad picture of black life in the South in the 1930s from a woman's point of view.

Possessing the Secret of Joy (1992) A novel that takes up the subject of female circumcision.

We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For (2006) Environmental essays.