**19th Century American Literature**

Dong A University, Department of Humanities

Professor Joseph Carrier

**Timeline of 19th Century American Literature**

**Overview**

PRECURSORS:

Puritan/Colonial “Age of Faith” (1650-1750)

Enlightenment “Age of Reason” (1700-1820)

19TH CENTURY LITERARY MOVEMENTS

Romanticism (1800-1860)

Transcendentalism (1840-1860)

Realism and Naturalism (1855-1900)

**The Age of Faith** (1650-1750)

OVERVIEW OF PURITAN/COLONIAL PERIOD: “The Age of Faith”.

Genre/Style : Sermons, religious tracts, diaries, personal narratives, religious poems. It was written in plain style.

Effect/Aspects : Instructive, reinforces authority of the Bible and the church. Very little imaginative literature was produced.

Historical Context : Puritan settlers fled England where they were being persecuted for their religious beliefs, and came to New England to have religious freedom.

Philosophical Emphasis: The Bible is the only source of truth. The physical world around us is not real. Only the spiritual world is real. Believed that mankind is essentially evil.

1. Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672) The first published compilation of poems by an American was also the first American book to be published by a woman, Anne Bradstreet. Born and educated in England, Anne Bradstreet was the daughter of an earl's estate manager. She emigrated with her family when she was 18, and she lived in Boston.

2. Cotton Mather (1663-1728) A historian and minister Mather wrote over 500 books and pamphlets. His writings covered a large variety of topics but his most important work was a history of New England, titled *Magnalia Christi Americana* (The History of Christ’s Work in America).

**Age of Reason** (1750-1800)

Overview of the Enlightenment: the “Age of Reason.”

Genre/Style : Political Pamphlets, Travel Writing, and highly ornate persuasive writing.

Effect/Aspects : Patriotism and pride grows, creates unity about issues, and creates American character.

Historical Context : The enlightenment was brought about because of the printing press. In America, enlightenment thinkers encouraged Revolutionary War support.

Philosophical Emphasis: It promoted science and intellectual effort and opposed superstition and blind adherence to religious teachings. Encouraged individual freedom and democracy. Believed that mankind is essentially good.

1. Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)

Benjamin Franklin, “practical yet idealistic, hard-working and enormously successful,” was a second-generation immigrant who lived in Boston Massachusetts. Writer, printer, publisher, scientist, philanthropist, and diplomat, Mr. Franklin was the most famous and respected private figure of his time. *“Money has never made man happy, nor will it, there is nothing in its nature to produce happiness. The more of it one has the more one wants.”*

2. Thomas Paine (1737-1809) Thomas Paine published a political pamphlet titled Common Sense in 1776. It inspired many people and contained ideas that led to the Declaration of Independence and the Revolutionary War. He believed that all men are equal and that monarchy is a suppressive and evil institution. Advocated freedom and democracy. “My country is the world, and my religion is to do good.” “Society in every state is a blessing, but government, even in its best stage, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one.”

Comparing Ideas: Puritanism vs. Enlightenment

**Romanticism** (1800-1860)

Overview of Romanticism:

Genre/Style : Character Sketches, Slave Narratives, Poetry, and short stories.

Effect/Aspects : Integrity of nature and freedom of imagination.

Historical Context : Publishing expands and industrial revolution brings new ideas. Romanticism begins in England and Germany.

Philosophical Emphasis: Romanticism is a reaction against the “reason” of the Enlightenment. They believe that truth is found in human emotion, especially through experiences in nature (Awe).

1. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) One of the most important Boston poets was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Longfellow, a professor of modern languages at Harvard, was the best-known American poet of his day. He was responsible for the sentimental, historical and legendary sense of the past that joined American and European traditions.

2. Washington Irving (1783-1859) He was the youngest of 11 children, born to a wealthy New York mercantile family. Washington Irving became a cultural and diplomatic ambassador to Europe, like Benjamin Franklin and Nathaniel Hawthorne. His stories are funny caricatures of well-known New England stereotypes.

3. Herman Melville (1819-1891) Herman Melville was a descendant of an old, wealthy family that fell suddenly into poverty upon the death of the father. At 19 he went to sea. His interest in sailors' lives grew naturally out of his own experiences, and most of his early novels grew out of his voyages. In these we see the young Melville's wide, democratic experience and hatred of tyranny and injustice.

4. Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)Edgar Allan Poe was a southerner with a darkly metaphysical vision mixed with elements of realism, parody, and burlesque. He refined the short story genre and created detective fiction. Many of his stories led to the genres of science fiction, horror, and fantasy so popular today.

**Transcendentalism** (1840-1860)

Overview of Transcendentalism:

Genre/Style : Poetry, Short Stories, and Novels.

Effect/Aspects : Idealists, individualism, and symbolism.

Historical Context : A reaction against the negative teachings at Harvard University and in the church. Highly influenced by Romanticism and Eastern Philosophy (including Buddhism and the Hindu traditions).

Philosophical Emphasis: A belief in the goodness of both man and nature. A belief that society and its institutions - particularly organized religion and political parties - ultimately corrupted the purity of the individual. Man is at his best when truly independent.

1.Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) Father of the Transcendental Movement, Emerson was probably the 19th Century’s most important author. His writings emphasize self-reliance, individuality, and the symbolism of nature influenced Thoreau, Fuller, Melville, Whitman, Dickenson and many others. *“Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”*

2. Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) Thoreau is most famous for his book *Walden*, where he describes living alone in a small house he built by a small lake in the woods near Concord. Thoreau deeply loved nature and was deeply skeptical about the effect of industrialization on human life. He also said that it was right for an individual to disobey the law if he believed that the law was wrong. “*As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind. To make a deep physical path, we walk again and again. To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over the kind of thoughts we wish to dominate our lives.”*

3. Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) Margaret Fuller was a friend of Emerson and Thoreau. She was an important voice in the protest against slavery and one of the earliest proponents of women’s rights. Her book *Woman in the 19th Century* is still considered one of the most important works in the history of women’s suffrage.

4. Walt Whitman (1819-1892) Walt Whitman was a part-time carpenter, whose brilliant, pioneering work expressed the country's democratic spirit. *His Leaves of Grass* (1855), which he rewrote and revised throughout his life, contains "Song of Myself," the most amazingly original poem ever written by an American.

**Realism and Naturalism** (1855-1900)

Overview of Realism

Genre/Style : Novels, Short Stories, Objective Narrator, and does not tell reader how to interpret the story.

Effect/Aspects : Social and Aesthetic realism.

Historical Context : Civil War brought demand for a more true type of literature.

Philosophical Emphasis: Seeks to tell a story that is as much like reality as possible. Focuses on the natural patterns of speech and close observation of individual behaviors. May have a hidden message or lesson, but it is up to the reader to decide what that lesson is and if they believe it.

1. Mark Twain (1835-1910) Samuel Clemens, also known by his pen name of Mark Twain, grew up in the Mississippi River frontier town of Hannibal, Missouri. IT has been said that all of American literature comes from one great book: Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* Twain's style, based on strong, realistic, everyday American speech, gave American writers a new appreciation for their national voice. Twain was the first major author to come from the heart of the country.

2. Jack London (1876-1916) Jack London was a poor, self-taught worker from California. He, also a naturalist, became instantly famous from his first collection of stories, *The Son of the Wolf* (1900), set mainly in the Klondike region of Alaska and the Canadian Yukon. In his stories men fight against nature and nature usually wins.

3. Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914?) Bierce fought in the Civil War. His writings are unique for their detailed descriptions of the horror of battle. His writings inspired later war writers, including Hemingway. His writings often contain both humor and a strong ethical message. He went to Mexico in 1913 to fight in the revolution and disappeared without a trace.