

Chapter 1 : The American Tradition in Literature, Volume 1(book alone)

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Colonial literature[edit] Because of the large immigration to Boston in the s, the articulation of Puritan ideals, and the early establishment of a college and a printing press in Cambridge , the New England colonies have often been regarded as the center of early American literature. However, the first European settlements in North America had been founded elsewhere many years earlier. During the colonial period, the printing press was active in many areas, from Cambridge and Boston to New York , Philadelphia , and Annapolis. The dominance of the English language was not inevitable. Moreover, we are now aware of the wealth of oral literary traditions already existing on the continent among the numerous different Native American groups. Political events, however, would eventually make English the lingua franca for the colonies at large as well as the literary language of choice. For instance, when the English conquered New Amsterdam in , they renamed it New York and changed the administrative language from Dutch to English. From to , only about separate items were issued from the major printing presses in the American colonies. This is a small number compared to the output of the printers in London at the time. London printers published materials written by New England authors, so the body of American literature was larger than what was published in North America. However, printing was established in the American colonies before it was allowed in most of England. In England, restrictive laws had long confined printing to four locations, where the government could monitor what was published: London, York, Oxford, and Cambridge. Because of this, the colonies ventured into the modern world earlier than their provincial English counterparts. Captain John Smith could be considered the first American author with his works: Topics of early writing[edit] The religious disputes that prompted settlement in America were important topics of early American literature. This work outlined the ideal society that he and the other Separatists would build in an attempt to realize a "Puritan utopia". Other religious writers included Increase Mather and William Bradford , author of the journal published as a History of Plymouth Plantation, " Others like Roger Williams and Nathaniel Ward more fiercely argued state and church separation. Nicholas Noyes was also known for his doggerel verse. John Eliot translated the Bible into the Algonquin language. Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield represented the Great Awakening , a religious revival in the early 18th century that emphasized Calvinism. Less strict and serious writers included Samuel Sewall who wrote a diary revealing the daily life of the late 17th century , [2] and Sarah Kemble Knight. New England was not the only area in the colonies with a literature: The diary of William Byrd and The History of the Dividing Line described the expedition to survey the swamp between Virginia and North Carolina but also comments on the differences between American Indians and the white settlers in the area. At this time American Indian literature also began to flourish. Two key figures were Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine. Major satirists included John Trumbull and Francis Hopkinson. Philip Morin Freneau also wrote poems about the War. During the 18th century, writing shifted from the Puritanism of Winthrop and Bradford to Enlightenment ideas of reason. The belief that human and natural occurrences were messages from God no longer fit with the new human-centered world. Many intellectuals believed that the human mind could comprehend the universe through the laws of physics as described by Isaac Newton. One of these was Cotton Mather. The enormous scientific, economic, social, and philosophical, changes of the 18th century, called the Enlightenment , impacted the authority of clergyman and scripture, making way for democratic principles. The increase in population helped account for the greater diversity of opinion in religious and political life as seen in the literature of this time. In , the population of the colonies numbered approximately , Thirty years later it was more than , By , it reached 1., Even earlier than Franklin was Cadwallader Colden - , whose book The History of the Five Indian Nations, published in was one of the first texts critical of the treatment of the Iroquois in upstate New York by the English. Colden also wrote a book on botany, which attracted the attention of Linnaeus, and he maintained a long term correspondence with Benjamin Franklin. In the post-war period, Thomas Jefferson established his place in American literature through his authorship of the United

States Declaration of Independence , his influence on the United States Constitution , his autobiography, his Notes on the State of Virginia , and his many letters. The Federalist essays by Alexander Hamilton , James Madison , and John Jay presented a significant historical discussion of American government organization and republican values. Fisher Ames , James Otis , and Patrick Henry are also valued for their political writings and orations. Early American literature struggled to find a unique voice in existing literary genre, and this tendency was reflected in novels. European styles were frequently imitated, but critics usually considered the imitations inferior. The First American Novel[edit] In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the first American novels were published. These fictions were too lengthy to be printed as manuscript or public reading. Publishers took a chance on these works in hopes they would become steady sellers and need to be reprinted. This scheme was ultimately successful because male and female literacy rates were increasing at the time. In the next decade important women writers also published novels. Susanna Rowson is best known for her novel, Charlotte: A Tale of Truth, published in London in Charlotte Temple is a seduction tale, written in the third person, which warns against listening to the voice of love and counsels resistance. She also wrote nine novels, six theatrical works, two collections of poetry, six textbooks, and countless songs. Although Rowson was extremely popular in her time and is often acknowledged in accounts of the development of the early American novel, Charlotte Temple is often criticized as a sentimental novel of seduction. Or, the History of Eliza Wharton was published in and was also extremely popular. Eliza is a "coquette" who is courted by two very different men: Unable to choose between them, she finds herself single when both men get married. She eventually yields to the artful libertine and gives birth to an illegitimate stillborn child at an inn. These novels are of the Sentimental genre, characterized by overindulgence in emotion, an invitation to listen to the voice of reason against misleading passions, as well as an optimistic overemphasis on the essential goodness of humanity. Sentimentalism is often thought to be a reaction against the Calvinistic belief in the depravity of human nature. These novels are of the Gothic genre. The first writer to be able to support himself through the income generated by his publications alone was Washington Irving. James Fenimore Cooper was also a notable author best known for his novel, The Last of the Mohicans written in Unique American style[edit] Edgar Allan Poe After the War of , there was an increasing desire to produce a uniquely American literature and culture, and a number of literary figures emerged, among them Washington Irving , William Cullen Bryant , and James Fenimore Cooper. Bryant wrote early romantic and nature-inspired poetry, which evolved away from their European origins.

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