

A Course in the History of American Literature

for Literature and civilization Master

Dr. Dib Fatima Zohra

Department of English

Faculty of Letters and Languages

Larbi ben M'hidi University, Oum El Bouaghi

dibmaram4@gmail.com

Description:

The course of the History of American Literature is designed to the students of first year Master Literature and Civilization. It is divided between lectures presented by the teacher and students' contribution in terms of presentations. Students are supposed to submit a written format of their presentation about the most influential representatives of each literary period weekly in every TD session. The TD sessions are designed in a way that permits the students the ability to assess and evaluate their understanding and comprehension of the diverse literary periods. They are also supposed to provide a well detailed analysis of the well known literary of representative authors. In doing so, the lecturer can evaluate their grasp of the course material.

Objectives:

The aim of this course then is to familiarize the students with the major developments of American literatures, features, themes, literary techniques, writers and their representative works. It seeks to provide them with a pertinent background about the chronological growth of American literature beginning with colonial period until the modern times in the twentieth century.

Chapter One: the Literature of the colonial period (1492-1700)

The history of American literature stretches across more than 400 years. It can be divided into five major periods each of which has unique characteristics, notable authors and representative works. Natives Americans, the first inhabitants of the continent did not develop anything we can call literature. Their stories and poems were spread orally, which means the American literature begins with the age of colonialism. The character of early American literature is strongly influenced by different factors:

- It was the era of colonizing the nation. Since not only the English explored and claimed the region, the beginnings of American literature are more or less connected with the French, Spanish or Dutch literatures as well.
- The first writers brought mainly English ideas and ways of writing, which means that early American literature, is based on the literature of England.
- Religion played an important role in the writers' lives. Many writings of the period were sermons and theological books. The fact that the pilgrims landed in Massachusetts Bay in 1620 has an immense impact on the culture of the newly developed colonial system.
- The topics common in the early colonial period were connected with the issues of living in the new land (agriculture, exploration, relations with the natives, and travelling).

The earliest writers were Englishmen describing the English exploration and colonization of the new world. Thomas Hariot's **Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia** (1589) was only the first of many such works. Back in England, people planning to move to Virginia or New England would read the books as travel guides. But this was dangerous because such books often mixed facts with fantasy. People could read them as tales of adventures and excitement. Like modern readers of science fiction, they could enjoy imaginary voyages to places they could never visit in reality.

Almost from the beginning, as the English settled along the Atlantic coast of America, there were important differences. In the south, which is mainly dependent on plantation and slavery, the rich and powerful slave owners were slow to develop a literature their own. They preferred books imported from England. But in new England , the puritan settlers had come to the new

world in order to form a society based on Christian beliefs, like the puritan in England, they believed in that society should be based on the laws of God. They had a stronger sense of unity and a shared purpose. This was one of the main reasons why culture and literature developed much faster than in the South.

The most interesting works of New England Puritan literature were histories. To the Puritans, history developed according to God's plan. In their early New England histories, they saw New England as the "promised land" of the Bible. The central drama of history was the struggle between Christ and Satan.

Major Representatives:

John Smith: is considered to be the first American writer. He was an explorer and colonist; he helped found Jamestown in 1607. His *A True Relation of Virginia* is said to be the first American book written in English. It described the problems of the colonizing area.

William Bradford: was a puritan writer who described life in the early settlements. His book of *Plymouth Plantation* is full of religious topics and depictions of a difficult life in the colony.

Chapter Two: the Revolutionary Period (Age of Reason or Enlightenment 1700-1800)

Dissatisfaction with the colonial system and relations with Britain grew; the literature gradually changed its shape. The writers became more politically, anti-British and revolutionary oriented, rationalism and enlightenment prevailed. Essays speeches, pamphlets became more important. The Puritan religious poetry fell out of favor as man was not considered naturally sinful any longer.

The 18th century, is an epiphanic and eventful century for Europe and America. It was the age of paradigm shift in human perception which has its roots in Europe. In Europe, important 17th century precursors included the Englishman Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes, Rene Decartes and the key natural philosophers of the scientific revolution including Galileo. Its roots are usually traced back to 1680, England where in the span of three years Isaac Newton published his “Principia Mathematica” and John Locke’s essay concerning human understanding. These two works provided the scientific, mathematical and philosophical ground for the Enlightenment major advances. The enlightenment also known as the “Age of Reason”, was an intellectual and cultural movement in the 18th century that emphasized reason over superstition and science over faith. Central to the Enlightenment thought were the use and celebration of reason, the power by which people understand the universe and improve their own conditions.

The most memorable writing in the 18th century America was done by the founding fathers, the men who led the Revolution of 1775-1783 and wrote the constitution of 1783. None of them were writers of fiction. Rather they were political philosophers and their most typical product was the political pamphlet. They both admired and were active in the European “Age of Reason” or Enlightenment. They shared the Enlightenment belief that human intelligence or reason could understand both nature and man. The ideas of the Enlightenment were the main motivating reasons for the American Revolution. They inspired the Americans to rise and to rebel against the British monarchy and to declare their own independence from the mother country.

Representative Authors:

Benjamin Franklin: is one of the most important figures of the period. He can be considered as what we call “the renaissance man”, a person of many skills. He was a politician, scientist philosopher, inventor, and writer. His famous works: the Autobiography, Poor Richard Almanac, Silence Dogood, and a Way to Wealth.

Thomas Paine: English-born essayist, pamphleteer. His pamphlet “Common Sense” is a sharp critique of the colonial system and explains why the Americans should rise against the English.

Thomas Jefferson: was an architect, essayist, playwright, politician, and the third president of the U.S. He was the author of the Declaration of Independence which was adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4th 1776.

Anne Bradstreet: (1612–1672) wrote lyrical, religious and personal poetry. She is the author of **To My Dear and Loving Husband**. **MARY ROWLANDSON** (1637–1711) gives us the image of a woman’s life in the colonial period. Her **A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson** tells her story of being kidnapped by Native Americans. The book became a bestseller.

Chapter Three: Romanticism (1800-1880)

Introduction:

Very early in his *Autobiography*, Benjamin Franklin describes in a great detail an important American journey: a personal quest in which a young Ben leaves his home in Boston to Philadelphia. Franklin's journey is a declaration of independence; a move away from the constraints of his family toward a city where he might prosper. We can see in this an expression of both his personal goals and goals of the revolution: a reaching for independence, prosperity, commerce, and urban civilization.

In 1779, Charles Brockden Brown described a very different journey to Philadelphia in his romantic novel *Arthur Murvyn*. In this tale a young boy leaves his hometown in the country for Philadelphia. Instead of finding a place of promise where he can make his dreams come true, however, the boy is plunged into a plague-ridden urban world of decay, corruption, and evil. The Philadelphia of this novel is no city of promise; it is an industrial hell that devours all hope and ambition.

The journeys described in these two works make clear the difference between the views of the rationalists and those of the romantics. To Franklin, the city was a place to find success and self-realization. To the romantics, however, the city was a place of moral ambiguity and of corruption. The characteristic journey is to the country side which the romantics associated with independence, moral clarity, and heart full living. In fact American romanticism can be described as a journey away from the corruption of civilization and the limits of rational thought toward the integrity of nature and the freedom of imagination. Washington Irving, America's first truly popular writer is known for an immortal story about an escape from civilization and responsibility.

During the first half of the 19th century, the U.S. was transformed from an infant republic into a large, self-confident nation, despite a nation divided and eventually torn apart by the issue of slavery. The population more than trebled, from nine to thirty one million. The rapid expansion of railroad and manufacturing industry began shifting the national economic basis and

the population from country to town. The U.S. itself expanded from its eastern seaboard base of sixteen states to assume continental dimensions. As the nation grew so did the opportunities for writers. During this period, the American saw the need to institute their own separate identity from England. Their literature depicts the socio-economic, political, and cultural dynamics of the country. As such, it becomes an obligation for them to establish themselves as Americans and write their own issues from England. These circumstances usher the beginning of new literary period which is **Romanticism**.

In general, romanticism is the name given to those schools of thought that value feeling and intuition over reason. The romantic period refers to literary and cultural movement in England, Europe, and America roughly from 1770 to 1860. The first rumbling of romanticism was felt in Germany in the second half of the eighteenth century with the publication of Goethe's **Sorrow of Young Werther** and the emergence of various idealist philosophers who believed that mental processes are the main source of ultimate reality, as opposed to empiricists which see the mind shaped by what it perceives. It had a strong influence on literature, music, and painting. It came relatively late in the U.S., and it took different forms. It develops as a reaction against the principle of age of reason, rationalism, and logic. With the industrial revolution and its impact—squalid cities, and wretched working conditions, people had come to realize the limits of reason. The romantics come to believe that the imagination was able to apprehend truths that the rational mind could not reach. These truths were usually accompanied by powerful emotion and associated with nature. To the romantics, sensibility, the imagination, spontaneity, individual feelings, and wild nature were of greater value than logic, reason, planning, and civilization. To the romantic mind, poetry was the highest and the most sublime embodiment of the imagination. They often contrasted poetry with science which they saw as destroying the very truth it claimed to seek.

Romanticism Defined:

The 19th Century is often called “the romantic era.” Romanticism describes a movement in the history of culture, an aesthetic style, and an attitude or spirit. As a movement, romanticism involved a revolt against convention and authority and a search for freedom in personal, political, and artistic life. The romantics reacted against the rationalism of

Enlightenment culture and the impersonality of growing industrialism. They worked to revive their nations' history and to liberate the oppressed peoples of the earth.

- In art, romanticism was a reaction against the neoclassical quest for order and intellectual control in favor of free expression of the imagination and the liberation of the emotions.
- Subjective and spontaneous outpouring of feeling; emotions equally important as reason. Sentimentality, nostalgia, melancholy, longing were the attitudes of mind.
- Glorified the self by way of intuition and the senses.
- Heroes and visionaries, they freed themselves from the Church and state, and tended to pursue fiercely individualistic paths to creativity - paths that often alienated them from society and lead to frustration, despair and even early death.

The Romantic View of Nature

- Estranged from traditional religious beliefs, the romantics looked upon nature as the dwelling place of God. God and the natural universe were one and the same.
- Perceived nature as a metaphor for the sublime: the power and mystery of forces that inspired awe, solace, and self-discovery.
- With Rousseau, the romantics held that humans were by nature good but were corrupted by society. "Natural man" was one who was close to nature and unspoiled by social institutions.
- Nature was the font of divine ecstasy and the medium of the mystical bond that united God with the human soul.

Basic Characteristics of Romanticism:

- The movement was a shift from faith and belief in science and reason to the faith in emotion, feelings and nature.
- Goodness of humanity
- Individuality is the absolute power that human beings need.

- Romanticism affects people's faith in God. God was the supreme power that governs the universe. This belief changed by the romantics who saw God as a part from the universe and not separated from it.
- Focus on imagination as a door that helped writers as well as readers to escape from their reality.
- The Romantic era in America lasted from about 1830 to 1870; it was a time when America witnessed the industrial revolution, a period of a great and huge development and expansion in all fields of life.
- Ideas of freedom and self-reliance and their passion to create a new life that is completely different from the age before, made them revolt against the age by focusing more on imagination, intuition, and individualism.
- They were looking for new identity that has nothing to do with European beliefs. Though being influenced by the European romanticism, American romanticism is considered as the first full-fledged literary movement that developed in the U.S. The U.S unique history and landscape influenced the movement. They were preoccupied with questions of democracy and freedom which were rooted in the American Revolution (the abandonment of the natural landscape and the frontier).
- Imagination is one of the characteristics that differentiate American romanticism from English. The American society at that time were experiencing the industrial revolution, people were living in a time of good progress. This lead people to escape the situation they are living in. they escape their unsatisfying reality into a better world. Characters in the American romantic literature escaped the civilization and modern life and went to nature looking for freedom and purity.
- The Americans were anxious to be free from the European values that are why individualism appeared in their writings. They stressed the importance of the individual and put a lot of interest in his relationship with nature.

In brief, these characteristics can be summed up as follows:

- ✓ American romanticism values feeling over reason
- ✓ Places faith in inner experience and the power of the imagination
- ✓ Shuns the artificiality of civilization and seeks unspoiled nature

- ✓ Prefers youthful innocence to sophistication
- ✓ Champions individual freedom and worth of the individual
- ✓ Contemplates nature's beauty as a path to spiritual and moral development
- ✓ Looks backward to the wisdom of the past
- ✓ Finds beauty and truth in exotic locales, the supernatural realm
- ✓ Sees poetry as the highest expression of imagination
- ✓ Finds inspiration in myth, legend, and folk culture.

American Novel and the Wilderness Experience:

During the Romantic period, the big question about American literature was: would American writers continue to imitate the English and European models, or would they finally develop a distinctive literature of their own? America provided a sense of limitless frontier that Europe simply did not possess. Thus, the development of American novel coincided with the westward expansion, with the growth of the nationalist spirit, and with the rapid spread of the cities. All these factors tended to reinforce the idealization of the frontier life.

James Fenimore Cooper in his writings shows that eternal truths were waiting to be discovered not in crowded cities but in the American wilderness. The development of the American can be seen in Cooper's writings. For instance, in his two early novels he followed the British model. In his third novel, he finally broke free of European constraints. In his novel; *The Pioneers*, Cooper explored uniquely American setting and characters: the frontier communities, American Indians, backwoodsmen, and the wilderness of western New York and Pennsylvania. Most of all, he created the first American heroic figure: Natty Bumppo. The latter was quite different from the hero of the Age of Reason; the rationalist hero –exemplified by a real life figure such as Ben Franklin–was worldly, educated, sophisticated, and bent on making a place for himself in civilization. The typical hero of American romantic fiction on the other hand, was youthful, innocent, intuitive, and close to nature.

The romantics wanted to rise above the dull realities to a realm of higher truth. They did this in two principles:

The romantics searched for exotic settings and more natural past or in a world far removed from the grimy and industrial age. Sometimes they find this world in the supernatural

realm; or in old legends and folklore. Second, they tried to contemplate the natural world until dull reality fell away to reveal the underlying beauty and truth. The gothic genre seemed an unlikely transplant to the new nation where they were seemingly no places old enough. But even writers in America, notably Edgar Allan Poe, were attracted to the exotic. In his works, the gothic took a turn toward the psychological exploration of the human mind.

The second approach is evident in many lyric poems. This contemplative process is similar to the way the puritans drew moral lessons from nature. The difference is one of emphasis and goal. The puritan's lessons were defined by their religion. In nature they found the God they knew from the Bible. The romantics on the other hand found in nature a more generalized spiritual awakening.

American Romantic Poetry:

Unlike the novelists who looked for a new subject matter and innovative themes, American poets worked solidly with the literary tradition rather than crafting a different and unique American voice. Even when they constricted poems with American settings and subject matter, they used typically English themes, meter, and imagery. Fireside poets were the most popular poets America had ever produced. They attempted to create new American literature relied heavily on the literature of the past. They furthered the revolution of American poetry by introducing uniquely American subject matter: description of the American landscapes, American Indian culture.

Major Representative Authors:

Washington Irving's (1783–1859) *A History of New York, by Diedrich Knickerbocker*. Irving was America's first professional writer and the founder of short story in the USA, "Rip Van Winkle" being one of his most famous short stories. It follows a henpecked husband who falls asleep in a forest and wakes up many years later after the colonies have become an independent country. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is about a headless knight who terrorises the inhabitants of a settlement.

James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851) was interested in life in wilderness and among the native inhabitants. He wrote a series of five novels, together called the *Leatherstocking Tales*.

They concentrate on Natty Bumppo, a white man living in the forests of New York, and his friend Chingachgook, a Mohican chief. There are five books in the series: *The Deerslayer*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Pathfinder*, *The Pioneers* and *The Prairie*.

Edgar Allen Poe (1809–49) is one of the most important figures of the American literary tradition. His life was filled with sorrow and suffering. After unsuccessful studies he became an editor. He drank alcohol and misfortune had a notable impact on his work. His writings are gloomy and bizarre; his characters are murderers, alcoholics, desperate lovers and tortured prisoners. Poe is the founder of modern American horror story and detective story. His short stories often describe the darkest states of human mind and mysteries solved by logic. The most famous short stories by Poe include: “The Tell-Tale Heart”, “The Black Cat”, “The Pit and the Pendulum”, “The Mask of the Red Death” or “The Gold-Bug”. He is not less famous for his melancholic poems such as “Annabel Lee”, “Eldorado” or “The Raven”, which expresses the idea of vanity²⁷ through the eyes of a man asking a mysterious raven about his dead love while the raven’s only answer is “nevermore”:

Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism was a group of new ideas in literature, religion, culture, and philosophy that emerged in New England in the early to middle 19th century. It is sometimes called American transcendentalism to distinguish it from other uses of the word transcendental.

Transcendentalism began as a protest against the general state of culture and society, and in particular, the state of intellectualism at Harvard and the doctrine of the Unitarian church taught at Harvard Divinity School. They were quite critical of conformity, or forcing one’s behaviour to match social expectations and standards. They were non-conformist-people who don’t conform to generally accepted pattern of thought or action. They rejected common practices, particularly organized religion. Among transcendentalists' core beliefs was an ideal spiritual state that 'transcends' the physical and empirical and is only realized through the individual's intuition, rather than through the doctrines of established religions. Prominent transcendentalists included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Orestes Brownson, William Henry Channing, James Freeman Clarke, Christopher Pearse Cranch, Convers Francis,

Margaret Fuller, Frederick Henry Hedge, Sylvester Judd, Elizabeth Peabody, George Ripley, Amos Bronson Alcott, and Jones Very.

The publication of Emerson's 1836 essay *Nature* is usually taken to be the watershed moment at which transcendentalism became a major cultural movement. Emerson wrote in his essay "The American Scholar": "We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds ... A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men." Emerson closed the essay by calling for a revolution in human consciousness to emerge from the new idealist philosophy.

In the same year, transcendentalism became a coherent movement with the founding of the Transcendental Club in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on September 8, 1836, by prominent New England intellectuals including George Putnam, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Frederick Henry Hedge. From 1840, the group published frequently in their journal *The Dial*, along with other venues. The movement was originally termed "Transcendentalists" as a pejorative term, suggesting their position was beyond sanity and reason.

The practical aims of the transcendentalists were varied; some among the group linked it with utopian social change and, in the case of Bronson, it joined explicitly with early socialism, while others found it an exclusively individual and idealist project. Emerson believed the latter. In his 1842 lecture "The Transcendentalist", Emerson suggested that the goal of a purely transcendental outlook on life was impossible to attain in practice.

You will see by this sketch that there is no such thing as a transcendental party; that there is no pure transcendentalist; that we know of no one but prophets and heralds of such a philosophy; that all who by strong bias of nature have leaned to the spiritual side in doctrine, have stopped short of their goal. We have had many harbingers and forerunners; but of a purely spiritual life, history has afforded no example. I mean, we have yet no man who has leaned entirely on his character, and eaten angels' food; who, trusting to his sentiments, found life made of miracles; who, working for universal aims, found himself fed, he knew not how; clothed, sheltered, and weaponed, he knew not how, and yet it was done by his

own hands. ... Shall we say, then, that transcendentalism is the Saturnalia or excess of Faith; the presentiment of a faith proper to man in his integrity, excessive only when his imperfect obedience hinders the satisfaction of his wish.

By the 1850s, Emerson believed the movement was dying out, especially after the death of Margaret Fuller in 1850. "All that can be said", Emerson wrote, "is, that she represents an interesting hour & group in American cultivation".

Transcendentalism was rooted in the transcendental philosophy of Immanuel Kant (and of German Idealism more generally), which the New England intellectuals of the early 19th century embraced as an alternative to the Lockean "sensualism" of their fathers and of the Unitarian church, finding this alternative in Vedic thought, German idealism, and English Romanticism.

The transcendentalists desired to ground their religion and philosophy in transcendental principles: principles not based on, or falsifiable by, sensuous experience, but deriving from the inner, spiritual or mental essence of the human. Immanuel Kant had called "all knowledge transcendental which is concerned not with objects but with our mode of knowing objects." The transcendentalists were largely unacquainted with German philosophy in the original, and relied primarily on the writings of Thomas Carlyle, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Victor Cousin, Germaine de Staël, and other English and French commentators for their knowledge of it. In contrast, they were intimately familiar with the English Romantics, and the transcendental movement may be partially described as a slightly later, American outgrowth of Romanticism. Another major influence was the mystical spiritualism of Emanuel Swedenborg. Thoreau in *Walden* spoke of the debt to the Vedic thought directly, as did other members of the movement:

In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagavat Geeta, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions. I lay down the book and go to my well for water, and lo! there I meet the servant of the Brahmin, priest of Brahma, and Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges

reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water-jug. I meet his servant come to draw water for his master, and our buckets as it were grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges.

Basic Characteristics of American Transcendentalism:

- Transcendentalism, essentially, is a form of idealism.
- The transcendentalist "transcends" or rises above the lower animalistic impulses of life (animal drives) and moves from the rational to a spiritual realm.
- The human soul is part of the Oversoul or universal spirit to which it and other souls return at death; therefore, every individual is to be respected because everyone has a portion of that Oversoul (God).
- This Oversoul or Life Force or God can be found everywhere - travel to holy places is, therefore, not necessary.
- Transcendentalists believed in intuitive thought, which is the ability to know something through instinctive feeling rather than conscious reasoning. They believed that the flashes of intuition were the most fundamental form of knowledge. Intuition should have precedence over the intellect.
- They valued self-reliance, or reliance on one's own powers and resources rather than those of others, and trust one's own heart and thoughts.
- God can be found in both nature and human nature (Nature, Emerson stated, has spiritual manifestations).
- Jesus also had part of God in himself - he was divine as everyone is divine - except in that he lived an exemplary and transcendental life and made the best use of that Power which is within each one.
- "Miracle is monster." The miracles of the Bible are not to be regarded as important as they were to the people of the past. Miracles are all about us - the whole world is a miracle and the smallest creature is one. "A mouse is a miracle enough to stagger quintillions of infidels." – Whitman

- More important than a concern about the afterlife, should be a concern for this life - "the one thing in the world of value is the active soul." – Emerson
- Death is never to be feared, for at death the soul merely passes to the Oversoul.
- Emphasis should be placed on the here and now. "Give me one world at a time." – Thoreau
- Evil is a negative - merely an absence of good. Light is more powerful than darkness because one ray of light penetrates the dark.
- Power is to be obtained by defying fate or predestination, which seem to work against humans, by exercising one's own spiritual and moral strength: emphasis on self-reliance.
- Hence, the emphasis is placed on a human thinking.
- The transcendentalists see the necessity of examples of great leaders, writers, philosophers, and others, to show what an individual can become through thinking and action.
- It is foolish to worry about consistency because what an intelligent person believes tomorrow, if he/she trusts oneself, tomorrow may be completely different from what that person thinks and believes today. "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." – Emerson
- The unity of life and universe must be realized. There is a relationship between all things.
- One must have faith in intuition, for no church or creed can communicate truth.
- Reform must not be emphasized - true reform comes from within.

Major Authors:

RALPH WALDO EMERSON (1803–82) is the author of “The Nature” – an essay expressing Transcendentalist ideas. His friend **HENRY DAVID THOREAU** (1817–1862) wrote *Walden*, a philosophical book about his new birth near Walden Lake, where he spent two years alone.

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE (1804–63) wrote *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), one of the most famous and important books in the American literary history. It tells the tale of Hester Prynne, a woman who is sentenced to wearing the letter A on her clothes (A for “adultery”). She lives with her daughter Pearl and evolves into a strong character. The book criticises Puritan morals, prejudice and intolerance.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW (1817–82) is known for his romantic poems written in simple language. He wrote “The Song of Hiawatha”, a poem about the Indian chief Hiawatha inspired by the Finnish epic *Kalevala*.

WALT WHITMAN (1819–92) is considered as one of the best American poets of all time. He introduced free verse – no metrical pattern and no rhymes appear in his poems. This influenced many poets to come – the Chicago Renaissance or the Beat Generation. *Leaves of Grass* (1855) is a collection of poems where he compares freedom to grass – it should grow everywhere. “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” is a long poem about the death of Abraham Lincoln.

EMILY DICKINSON (1830–86) is another poet considered as one of the greatest in American history. She rarely left her house, her poems were scarcely published during her life, they are personal and lyrical. They do not have any titles.

HERMAN MELVILLE (1819–91) spent a part of his life at sea. *Moby-Dick* is a long novel about a young sailor called Ishmael, who joins the crew of the *Pequod*, a ship under the command of captain Ahab, who is trying to hunt a giant whale which once bit off his leg. The clash between Ahab and *Moby-Dick* is the allegory of man’s struggle against nature.

Chapter Four: Realism (1860–1930)

Definitions

Broadly defined as "the faithful representation of reality" or "verisimilitude," realism is a literary technique practiced by many schools of writing. Although strictly speaking, realism is a technique, it also denotes a particular kind of subject matter, especially the representation of middle-class life. A reaction against romanticism, an interest in scientific method, the systematizing of the study of documentary history, and the influence of rational philosophy all affected the rise of realism. According to William Harmon and Hugh Holman, "Where romanticists transcend the immediate to find the ideal, and naturalists plumb the actual or superficial to find the scientific laws that control its actions, realists center their attention to a remarkable degree on the immediate, the here and now, the specific action, and the verifiable consequence"

Many critics have suggested that there is no clear distinction between realism and its related late nineteenth-century movement, [naturalism](#). As Donald Pizer notes in his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism: Howells to London*, the term "realism" is difficult to define, in part because it is used differently in European contexts than in American literature. Pizer suggests that "whatever was being produced in fiction during the 1870s and 1880s that was new, interesting, and roughly similar in a number of ways can be designated as *realism*, and that an equally new, interesting, and roughly similar body of writing produced at the turn of the century can be designated as *naturalism*" (5). Put rather too simplistically, one rough distinction made by critics is that realism espousing a deterministic philosophy and focusing on the lower classes is considered [naturalism](#).

In American literature, the term "realism" encompasses the period of time from the Civil War to the turn of the century during which William Dean Howells, Rebecca Harding Davis, Henry James, Mark Twain, and others wrote fiction devoted to accurate representation and an exploration of American lives in various contexts. As the United States grew rapidly after the Civil War, the increasing rates of democracy and literacy, the rapid growth in industrialism and urbanization, an expanding population base due to immigration, and a relative rise in middle-

class affluence provided a fertile literary environment for readers interested in understanding these rapid shifts in culture. In drawing attention to this connection, Amy Kaplan has called realism a "strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change"

Realism was a movement that encompassed the entire country, or at least the Midwest and South, although many of the writers and critics associated with realism (notably W. D. Howells) were based in New England. Among the Midwestern writers considered realists would be Joseph Kirkland, E. W. Howe, and Hamlin Garland; the Southern writer John W. DeForest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* is often considered a realist novel, too.

Characteristics

- Renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail. Selective presentation of reality with an emphasis on verisimilitude, even at the expense of a well-made plot
- Character is more important than action and plot; complex ethical choices are often the subject.
- Characters appear in their real complexity of temperament and motive; they are in explicable relation to nature, to each other, to their social class, to their own past.
- Class is important; the novel has traditionally served the interests and aspirations of an insurgent middle class. (See Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*)
- Events will usually be plausible. Realistic novels avoid the sensational, dramatic elements of naturalistic novels and romances.
- Diction is natural vernacular, not heightened or poetic; tone may be comic, satiric, or matter-of-fact.
- Objectivity in presentation becomes increasingly important: overt authorial comments or intrusions diminish as the century progresses.
- Interior or psychological realism a variant form.
- In *Black and White Strangers*, Kenneth Warren suggests that a basic difference between realism and [sentimentalism](#) is that in realism, "the redemption of the individual lay within the social world," but in sentimental fiction, "the redemption of the social world lay with the individual" (75-76). The realism of James and Twain was critically acclaimed in twentieth century; Howellsian realism fell into disfavor as part of early twentieth century rebellion against the "genteel tradition."

Practitioners

- [Mark Twain](#)
- [William Dean Howells](#)
- [Rebecca Harding Davis](#)
- John W. DeForest

- [Joseph Kirkland](#)
- E. W. Howe
- [Hamlin Garland](#)

- [Henry James](#)

Other Views of Realism

"The basic axiom of the realistic view of morality was that there could be no moralizing in the novel [. . .] The morality of the realists, then, was built upon what appears a paradox--morality with an abhorrence of moralizing. Their ethical beliefs called, first of all, for a rejection of scheme of moral behavior imposed, from without, upon the characters of fiction and their actions. Yet Howells always claimed for his works a deep moral purpose. What was it? It was based upon three propositions: that life, social life as lived in the world Howells knew, was valuable, and was permeated with morality; that its continued health depended upon the use of human reason to overcome the anarchic selfishness of human passions; that an objective portrayal of human life, by art, will illustrate the superior value of social, civilized man, of human reason over animal passion and primitive ignorance" (157). Everett Carter, *Howells and the Age of Realism*

"Realism sets itself at work to consider characters and events which are apparently the most ordinary and uninteresting, in order to extract from these their full value and true meaning. It would apprehend in all particulars the connection between the familiar and the extraordinary, and the seen and unseen of human nature. Beneath the deceptive cloak of outwardly uneventful days, it detects and endeavors to trace the outlines of the spirits that are hidden there; tho measure the changes in their growth, to watch the symptoms of moral decay or regeneration, to fathom their histories of passionate or intellectual problems. In short, realism reveals. Where we thought

nothing worth of notice, it shows everything to be rife with significance."

"Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material."

"Realism, n. The art of depicting nature as it is seen by toads. The charm suffusing a landscape painted by a mole, or a story written by a measuring-worm."

Context and Controversy

In its own time, realism was the subject of controversy; debates over the suitability of realism as a mode of representation led to a critical exchange known as the realism war. The realism of James and Twain was critically acclaimed in the twentieth century. Howellsian realism fell into disfavor, however, as part of early twentieth century rebellion against the "genteel tradition." For an account of these and other issues, see the [realism bibliography](#) and essays by Pizer, Michael Anesko, Richard Lehan, and Louis J. Budd, among others, in the *Cambridge Guide to Realism and Naturalism*.

Twain and James

Mark Twain (the pen name used by [Samuel Langhorne Clemens](#), 1835–1910) was the first major American writer to be born away from the East Coast – in the border state of [Missouri](#). His regional masterpieces were the memoir [Life on the Mississippi](#) and the novels [Adventures of Tom Sawyer](#) and [Adventures of Huckleberry Finn](#). Twain's style – influenced by journalism, wedded to the vernacular, direct and unadorned but also highly evocative and irreverently humorous – changed the way Americans write their language. His characters speak like real people and sound distinctively American, using local dialects, newly invented words, and regional accents. Other writers interested in regional differences and dialect were [George W. Cable](#), [Thomas Nelson Page](#), [Joel Chandler Harris](#), [Mary Noailles Murfree](#) ([Charles Egbert Craddock](#)), [Sarah Orne Jewett](#), [Mary E. Wilkins Freeman](#), [Henry Cuyler Bunner](#), and William Sydney Porter ([O. Henry](#)). A version of local color regionalism that focused on minority experiences can be seen in the works of [Charles W. Chesnutt](#) (African American), of [María Ruiz de Burton](#), one of the

earliest [Mexican American](#) novelists to write in English, and in the [Yiddish](#)-inflected works of [Abraham Cahan](#).

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

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

Realism also influenced American drama of the period, in part through the works of Howells but also through the works of such Europeans as Ibsen and Zola. Although realism was most influential in terms of set design and staging—audiences loved the special effects offered up by the popular melodramas—and in the growth of [local color](#) plays, it also showed up in the more subdued, less romantic tone that reflected the effects of the Civil War and continued social turmoil on the American psyche. The most ambitious attempt at bring modern realism into the drama was [James Herne's Margaret Fleming](#), which addressed issues of social determinism through realistic dialogue, psychological insight and symbolism; the play was not a success, as critics and audiences alike felt it dwelt too much on unseemly topics and included improper scenes, such as the main character nursing her husband's illegitimate child onstage.

Chapter Five: American Modernism and the Literature of the First Half of the 20th Century

Modernism, in its broadest definition, is modern thought, character, or practice. More specifically, the term describes the modernist movement, its set of cultural tendencies and array of associated cultural movements, originally arising from wide-scale and far-reaching changes to Western society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Modernism was a revolt against the conservative values of realism. Arguably the most paradigmatic motive of modernism is the rejection of tradition and its reprise, incorporation, rewriting, recapitulation, revision and parody in new forms. Modernism rejected the lingering certainty of Enlightenment thinking and also rejected the existence of a compassionate, all-powerful Creator God.

In general, the term modernism encompasses the activities and output of those who felt the "traditional" forms of art, architecture, literature, religious faith, social organization and daily life were becoming outdated in the new economic, social, and political conditions of an emerging fully industrialized world. The poet Ezra Pound's 1934 injunction to "Make it new!" was paradigmatic of the movement's approach towards the obsolete. Another paradigmatic exhortation was articulated by philosopher and composer Theodor Adorno, who, in the 1940s, challenged conventional surface coherence and appearance of harmony typical of the rationality of Enlightenment thinking. A salient characteristic of modernism is self-consciousness. This self-consciousness often led to experiments with form and work that draws attention to the processes and materials used (and to the further tendency of abstraction). The modernist movement, at the beginning of the 20th century, marked the first time that the term "avant-garde", with which the movement was labeled until the word "modernism" prevailed, was used for the arts (rather than in its original military and political context). Surrealism gained fame among the public as being the most extreme form of modernism, or "the avant-garde of modernism".

Goals of the movement

Rejection and detournement of tradition: Many modernists believed that by rejecting tradition they could discover radically new ways of making art. Arguably the most paradigmatic motive of modernism, is the rejection of the obsolescence of tradition and its reprise,

incorporation, rewriting, recapitulation, revision and parody in new forms. S. Eliot's emphasis on the relation of the artist to tradition. Eliot wrote: "[W]e shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of [a poet's] work, may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously." Literary scholar Peter Childs sums up the complexity: "There were paradoxical if not opposed trends towards revolutionary and reactionary positions, fear of the new and delight at the disappearance of the old, nihilism and fanatical enthusiasm, creativity and despair." These oppositions are inherent to modernism: it is in its broadest cultural sense the assessment of the past as different to the modern age, the recognition that the world was becoming more complex, and that the old "final authorities" (God, government, science, and reason) were subject to intense critical scrutiny.

Challenge to false harmony and coherence: A paradigmatic modernist exhortation was articulated by philosopher and composer Theodor Adorno, which in the 1940s, invited to challenge conventional surface coherence and appearance of harmony: "Modernity is a qualitative, not a chronological, category. Just as it cannot be reduced to abstract form, with equal necessity it must turn its back on conventional surface coherence, the appearance of harmony, the order corroborated merely by replication." Adorno would have us understand modernity as the rejection of the false rationality, harmony, and coherence of Enlightenment thinking, art, and music. But the past proves sticky. Arnold Schoenberg rejected traditional tonal harmony, the hierarchical system of organizing works of music that had guided music making for at least a century and a half. He believed he had discovered a wholly new way of organizing sound, based in the use of twelve-note rows. Abstract artists, taking as their examples the impressionists, as well as Paul Cézanne and Edvard Munch, began with the assumption that color and shape, not the depiction of the natural world, formed the essential characteristics of art. Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, and Kazimir Malevich all believed in redefining art as the arrangement of pure color. The use of photography, which had rendered much of the representational function of visual art obsolete, strongly affected this aspect of modernism. However, these artists also believed that by rejecting the depiction of material objects they helped art move from a materialist to a spiritualist phase of development.

Formal/Stylistic Characteristics Of Modernism

Irony, comparisons, juxtaposition and satire are some common elements found in modernist writing. Modernistic works are often written in first person and are quite different from traditional styles. In modernism, the content of the writing is represented as a long stream of consciousness, just like a rant, that often does not have a proper beginning, middle and/or end. Hence, the readers may get slightly confused as to what the writer is trying to communicate to them. Juxtaposition usually represents something which is unusual, for example, a cat and mouse sharing a good friendship. Modernist writers use irony and satire as tools that aid them in making fun of something and point out faults, usually, problems within their society.

Thematic Characteristics

Modernist writing, for a first-time reader, can be a frustrating experience, requiring a big effort to understand the concept. This is because of the fragmentation and lack of conciseness of the writing, which are main characteristics of modernism. The plot, theme and the characters are not necessarily linear. Modernist writings usually focus more on representing the writer's ideas, opinions and thoughts and presenting them to the public at as high a volume as possible. It could be an opposition to the existing social structure, a social practice or a prevailing ideology. Some past modernist writers were also known to create stylistic and artistic texts using different fonts, symbols, colors etc. in their writing.

General Characteristics

- Modernism is marked by a strong and intentional break from the traditional way of rendering a theme or a thought.
- The concept of modernism denies the existence of truth. According to this school of thought, everything is relative.
- Modernists believe that the world is what we perceive or, in other words, the world is what we say it is.
- Modernism maintains absolutely no connection with history or historical institutions.
- According to this concept, life is unordered.
- Modernism emphasizes on the importance of companionship between individuals and celebration of inner strength.

New Sense Of Reality

- Modernism believes in relative, provisional truths and hence, it replaced the concept of absolute, knowable truth with the awareness of "reality".
- Modernists refused to follow the teleological ways of thinking in which phenomena are explained on the basis of their ends or purposes. It suggested a development in the sense of time as we experience it; a shift from linear time to "moment time". Living in the moment was an underlying theme of modernism.
- Modernism emphasized more on an art's ability to affect the mind, rather than emphasizing on external reality. Let's take an example from an art form to make the concept more decipherable; paintings were "representational" in Victorian painting, which presented narrative scenes. On the other hand, in Impressionism, there was an attempt to paint the quality of the sensations stimulated by the scenes. Moving on to Post-Impressionism, you can see an attempt to portray the pure elements of color and form, an attempt to represent the perceiving mind and the aesthetic consciousness.
- Modernism focuses more on epistemological concerns like 'how do we know' and 'what we know' and it inquires how the way of thinking is inseparable from the form of thinking.
- Modernism is a reaction against the dominance of rational and logical discourse.

New Approaches In Modernist Writing

Character: The character summary disappears in modernism. It is characterized by the representation of 'self' as diverse, contradictory and ambiguous.

Style: The style changed into an imagistic way rather than one giving logical connections.

Plot: Modernism doubts linear plots that come with sudden, unexpected turning points. Alternatively, it uses 'moment time' contrapuntal multiple plots and open unresolved endings.

Focalization: Modernism rejects the single, authoritative, omniscient point of view that comes from the consciousness of one character. Instead, it takes on multiple points of view simultaneously held by one character.

Causes Of Development Of A New Thought

Modernism is a result of a sense of a changing world, stimulated by radical developments like:

- escalation of warfare to a global level.
- new development in the anthropological studies and religion.
- new insights from newly developing fields like psychology and sociology.
- scientific development of new theories of electromagnetism and quantum physics.
- rising criticism against British imperialism and the ideology of empire
- emergence of "city consciousness".
- shifting power structures like women entering the work force.
- development of information technologies like radio and cinema.
- new concepts like mass democracy and the rise of mass communication.
- fin-de-siècle or "end-of-the-century" consciousness.

Modernism gained popularity as a protest to the existing society, social institutions and the way they functioned. However, in literature, it declined after a period as the works concentrated more on the writer's line of thought in an abstract manner, which made them difficult to understand. However, there are some writers who find this style more comfortable for presenting their ideologies and follow this school of thought even now.

Major Representatives:

EZRA POUND (1885–1972) was one of the most influential poets of the 20th century. He was born in the USA but he spent a long time in Europe, he also spoke many languages. He is one of the most complex writers in the American history. He was involved in pioneering new styles and movements – imagism (words provoke pictures in the reader's mind) or vorticism. His most important work is called Cantos.

T. S. ELIOT (1888–1965) lived in Britain and wrote "The Waste Land", a very complicated modernist poem. E. E. CUMMINGS (1894–1962) was an experimental poet. His poems often played with form:

The Chicago Renaissance was a movement consisting of Illinois poets. CARL SANDBURG (1878–1967) was optimistic about America's future; he expressed his passion for the rhythm of a modern city in his Chicago Poems. The Lost Generation is a term invented by Gertrude Stein to refer to a group of writers who felt alienated to the world. They wrote about young people who

do not find any pleasure in everyday life or becoming rich. The group included Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, John Dos Passos and William Faulkner.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY (1899–1961) is probably the most famous representative. His writing style is very plain, however, his stories and novels are sometimes compared to an iceberg (you only see its one eighth; the rest is hidden below the surface). His novelette *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) earned him the Nobel Prize for literature. It shows the struggle between a fisherman called Santiago and the natural world. The moral of the story can be summed up as “a man can be destroyed, but not defeated”. *The Sun Also Rises* is about a group of young people who drink, have love affairs and attend bullfights, all these without any mental satisfaction. *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* are Hemingway’s accounts of war in Europe.

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD (1896–1940) is well known for *The Great Gatsby* (1925). It is a short novel about Nick Carraway, who meets a mysterious rich man named Jay Gatsby. Gatsby spends time throwing lavish parties; however, this does not make him feel happy. The book shows the negative aspects of high society in the roaring twenties. “*The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*” is a short story about a man suffering from reverse ageing.

WILLIAM FAULKNER (1897–1962) is one of the most important writers of the American South. He situated his writings in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi. In his books, he concentrates on the fall of the Southern aristocracy. His texts are often very demanding, the reader does not know who says what. He wrote *The Sound and the Fury*, *Light in August* or *Absalom, Absalom!*. SINCLAIR LEWIS (1885–1951) was a satirist from the American Midwest. He is the first American writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. His best novel is *Babbitt*, which tells the story of a typical middle class man.

JOHN STEINBECK (1902–68) is one of the best known socially critical writers of all time. His style is very realistic, he wrote about exploited people who fall to the bottom of the society. *Of Mice and Men* is a novel about two homeless farm workers. *The Grapes of Wrath* is probably his most famous novel it is the story of the Joad family moving from Oklahoma to California to work there on fruit farms in terrible conditions. *East of Eden* is another of his great works.

Chapter Six: Postmodernism

The authors of the 2nd half of the 20th century followed in the tradition developed by their predecessors. More movements appeared (the Beat Generation, Hippies), ethnic writers (African-American, Asian, Native American, Jewish) became more involved and some of the authors may be called “post-modernist”. New topics became popular (the revolt against the system, ethnic and racial issues, the holocaust), new genres flourished (comic books, fantasy novels, sci-fi, horror stories). American drama was going through its best times.

Style:

Magical Realism

Magical realism is not Latin American perse, rather, it is an international movement. Magical realism is an evolving mode or genre. The mode is effective in that it transgresses boundaries, whether these boundaries are political, ontological, geographical, or generic. Magical realism may be considered an extension of realism in its concern with the nature of reality and its representation, at the same time it resists the basic assumptions of post-enlightenment rationalism and literary realism. Contemporary magical realist writers depart from the conventions of narrative realism in that it challenges realism’s version of the world as a singular vision, objective representation of natural and social realities. It questions the already established realistic convention of causality, materiality and motivation. Magical realist texts draw upon myths, legends, rituals, from the collective practices that bind communities together. The boundaries between mind and body, spirit and matter, life and death, real and imaginary, self and other, male and female are erased, transgressed, blurred, brought together, or otherwise, fundamentally refashioned in magical realist texts. Magical texts are subversive, their in betweenness encourages resistance to monological political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode the particularly useful to writers in postcolonial cultures, and increasingly to women. Hallucinatory scenes and events, fantastic/ phantasmoric characters are used in several of the magical realist works to indict recent political and cultural perversions. It is a significant contemporary international mode to encourage attention contrasts, to cultural and political divergences.

The essays describe the interactions among magical realist writers and the various formal and thematic interactions among texts. The challenge of these essays is to articulate differences

between current literary manifestations of magical realism and their many magical predecessors. The essays address the synchronic relations of a particular realist text within its cultural context and borders, as well as diachronic relations of the texts that comprise an-ongoing generic tradition. Together, they allow us to evaluate the formal capacities of magical realism to express a variety of historical and cultural conditions.

In his article “Magical Realism in Spanish American fiction,” Angel Flores defines magical realism as “the amalgamation of realism and fantasy” and traced the current back to European writers such as Marcel Proust and particularly Kafka, with his “difficult art of mingling his drab reality with the phantasmal world of his nightmares.” According to Flores, realism and the magical had their appearance separately in Latin America: realism since the colonial period and magic since the earliest writing (in the letters of Columbus, etc). However, it was through the influence of Kafka on Jorge Louis Borges (who had translated Kafka’s short fiction into Spanish) that magical realism entered Latin America. Flores thus signalled 1935, the year of the appearance of Borges’s *Historia Universal de la Infamia* (*A Universal History of Infamy*), as the point of departure in this new phase of Latin American Literature in magical realism.

Flores considers a number of Argentine works belonging to magical realism and their characteristics. He pointed out that one of the distinguishing features of magical realism is its ability to transform “the common and the everyday into the awesome and the unreal” (114). Flores found in their narrative a certain distinctive features: time exists in a kind of fluidity, the plots are logically conceived, there is repudiation and rejection of sentimentalism and the unreal happens as part of reality. He alludes to Gregor Samsa (Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*), whose transformation into a cockroach or a bedbug is accepted “as an almost normal event” (115). This fusion, for Flores, would create ambiguity and confusion. Moreover, the practitioners of magical realism “cling to reality as if to prevent literature from getting in their way, as if to prevent myth from flying off, as if in fairy tales, to supernatural realms”. Flores concludes that this mode of writing, magical realism, allows a new, distinctive and unique Latin American fiction stating that “Latin America now possesses an authentic expression, one that is uniquely civilized, exciting and, let us hope, perennial” (116)

On the other hand, in *Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature*, **Luis Leal** shows his disagreement with Flores' definition of magical realism and with the list of authors he mentioned. He explains that it is too inclusive, he includes authors who do not belong to the movement. He contends that the term does not derive from Kafka's work and Borges cannot be counted among its practitioners. Instead, he theorizes that the term was first coined by the art critic Franz Roh to denote "the pictorial output of the post Expressionist period beginning around 1925. Roh asserts that magic realism is not a mixture of reality and fantasy, but a way to uncover the mystery hidden in everyday reality. It is the Venezuelan Arturo Uslar Pietri who first adopted the term in his book *Letras y hombre de Venezuela (The Literature and Men of Venezuela)*: and Alejo Carpentier has more promoted it by noting the existence of the marvelous in Latin American art. According to Leal, magical realism comprises neither the fantastic nor the psychological, neither oneiric nor "hermetic" literature, nor even surrealism, and cannot therefore be traced back to the influence of Kafka. It does not use neither dream motifs nor create imagined worlds. Above all magical realism is "an attitude towards reality that consists of the discovery of the mysterious relation between man and his circumstances". In order to perceive the mysteries of reality, the magical realist faces reality and attempts to discover the mystery which exists in objects, in life, and in human conditions. The writer, Leal argues, "heightens his senses to an extreme state that allows him to intuit the imperceptible subtleties of the external world, the multifarious world in which we live". He adds that in magical realism, the main events have no logical or psychological explanation. In this vein he distinguishes between magical realism and the fantastic: the magical writer "does not need to justify the mysterious nature of events, as the writer of fantastic stories has to. In fantastic literature the supernatural invades a world by reason."

Stephen M. hart's "Magical Realism: Style and Substance"

By the 1990's, magical realism becomes the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world. It transforms into the main strategic trope used by postcolonial writers which could best depict the political tensions that accompanied the movements toward nationhood (mainly during the 1980s and 1990s magical realism its peak). As the pioneers of magical realism, Latin American writers combine the supernatural with the local legend and imagery derived from colonialist cultures to represent cultures which have been destroyed by invasion,

occupation, and political corruption. In other words, Magic effects are used to indict the follies and atrocities of both empire and its aftermath. It has been so successful in migrating to various cultural shores mainly postcolonial nations because Latin American cultural reality is fundamentally unique and special. Through examining the works of Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, the critic sets out the main characteristics and functions of magical realism as postcolonial trope. Magical realism is born in the gap between the belief systems of two very different groups of people. What for the inhabitant of the "first world" is magical is real and unremarkable for the inhabitant of the third world and vice versa. Marquez draws out a political allegory of injustice in Latin America. He shows how North American capitalism destroys Macondo as well as the indifference of the local authorities. He portrays how the military shoot defenseless workers, how the authorities deny that anything wrong has been committed.. Both Carpentier and Marquez work portrayed a world divided between the realm of the powerful and the world of powerless. The most common characteristic among those works is a similar blend of postcolonial rhetoric, magic and politics. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* combines both magical realism and postcolonialism. The novel as well treats time as cyclical instead of linear. Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, for instance, masterfully portrays a new African vision out of magical realism. The novel is full of magic which continues to disrupt the ordinary logic of cause and effect. What characterizes Okri's text is the fusion of the magical with the real, the animal with the human, the spiritual with the material, and the natural with the supernatural, without losing its political relevance. It functions as an allegory of the trauma of the Nigerian nationhood, and the political disempowerment.

Historiographic Metafiction:

In her essay "Historiographic metafiction: Parody and Intertextuality of History," Linda Hutcheon defines historiographic metafiction as a postmodern mode of expression which "when used in fiction, should, by analogy, best be reserved to describe fiction that is at once metafictional and historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past." Similarly, historiographic metafiction blends history and fiction rendering it a doubled nature. She adds:

“historiographic metafiction works to situate itself within historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as fiction.”

Hutcheon states that postmodernism in literature is characterized by self-reflexivity and parodic intertextuality. In other words, the intertexts of both history and fiction ironize and parody both the world and literature. The notion underlying this sort of postmodern parody is that readers can only know the past from its textual traces and can never have access to any sort of real, objective, and authentic account of the past. In this vein, she defies the idea that postmodernism is ahistorical arguing that “to parody is not to destroy the past; in fact to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it.” Therefore, irony and parody create a sense of paradox that would lead to questioning of the facts presented.

Furthermore, she rejects the notion of originality arguing that any text has a relation to prior texts. In other words, intertextuality subverts originality and undermines the modernist notion of closed, singular meaning by acknowledging the presence of multiple meanings instead of a single one. Intertextuality may be referred to as *interdiscursivity* to describe the different modes of discourse used parodically by postmodernists (literature, visual arts, history, biography...). Hutcheon points out how the parodic reformulation of “canonical” texts can contribute to the postmodern project of de-centering the dominant narratives of the “white, male, middle-class, heterosexual, Eurocentric culture”. While postmodern fiction works to contest the literary “canon,” it cannot detach itself from it. The postmodern preoccupation with the Western canon can be seen in the writing of Thomas Pynchon which draws clearly from works like Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and the texts of Jacobean drama.

Hutcheon clarifies that the intertexts of historiographic metafiction are not only drawn from literature and history. On the contrary, it incorporates a wide range of texts including “comic books, fairy tales, almanacs and newspapers.” She also describes how postmodern parodies of conventional story forms and canonical works can serve to satirize myths about American culture (Doctorow’s *Welcome to Hard Times*), highlight racial and class difference (Reed’s fiction). Feminist writers have used parody as a tool to reveal “feminine duplicity” and subvert the male discourse. She concludes by observing that the idea of intertextual relation pertains not just to novels but to works of art (paintings and music).

Linda Hutcheon's "Telling stories: fiction and history" theorizes that postmodern fiction does not offer an escapist, nostalgic version of the past, neither does it merely ironize nor repudiate it, rather, it reveals the past as "ideologically and discursively constructed." In process, it interrogates and deconstructs the making of history and fiction. It questions the ever possibility of knowing the past and whose truth prevails. In addition, Hutcheon's interest is to show the parallels between the process of history writing and fiction writing whereby both of them denaturalize, subvert, de-doxify the conventions of narratives. As literary narratives show the limits of narratives' ability to represent life, historiography as well cannot convey truth because both of them are ideologically oriented. In historiographic metafiction, therefore, historical documents as representations no longer portray the past as objective and absolute. Access to the past then is done through turning its traces- its documents, the testimony of witnesses, and other archival materials- into historical representation, constructing and interpreting facts out of events. Accordingly, historiography becomes subjective due to the historians' interference and selection of events and using fictional devices. Hutcheon asserts that postmodern authors go back to the past in order to comment on it critically, or to demonstrate that the present is the continuation of the past.

In "*Circling the Dawnspout of Empire*": *Post-colonialism and Postmodernism*," Hutcheon discusses the differences and similarities between post-colonialism literature and postmodernism. She maintains that post-colonial "possesses a strong political motivation that is intrinsic to its oppositionality". While the latter is highly political, postmodernism is "politically ambivalent: its critique coexists with an equally real and equally powerful complicity with the cultural dominants within which it inescapably exists."

Despite this difference, Hutcheon identifies three areas of overlapping between the postmodern and post-colonial which are: formal, thematic, and strategic. The formal aspect is concerned with the use of magic realism. The latter refers to the Third World Literatures, especially Latin America, Caribbean, but it has been extended to include other "culturally marginalized contexts." It is a tool of subversion and resistance of the colonial discourse. Postmodern art as well subverts what came before parodically. The thematic part involves history and marginality. Both postmodernism and post-colonialism have been involved in the debate of history and are aware of "the historical, the political and social circumstances." The notion of marginalization or

“ex-centricity” valorizes the Other and contests and challenges centrality and claims of universality. The strategic aspect refers to “the use of the trope of irony as a doubled or split discourse which has the potential to subvert from within.” Irony works within existing discourses and subverts at the same time, in that it challenges the dominant ‘other’ through the use of the existing languages and yet speak through it. Hutcheon adds that irony is a way of resisting yet acknowledging the power of the dominant. She continues her discussion of these points with reference to Canadian art diagnosing the use of irony.

Irony, playfulness, black humor

Irony, along with black humor and the general concept of "play" (related to Derrida's concept or the ideas advocated by Roland Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*) are among the most recognizable aspects of postmodernism. Though the idea of employing these in literature did not start with the postmodernists (the modernists were often playful and ironic), they became central features in many postmodern works. In fact, several novelists later to be labeled postmodern were first collectively labeled black humorists: John Barth, Joseph Heller, William Gaddis, Kurt Vonnegut, Bruce Jay Friedman, etc.

Metafiction

is essentially writing about writing or "foregrounding the apparatus“, making the artificiality of art or the fictionality of fiction apparent to the reader and generally disregards the necessity for "willful suspension of disbelief". It is often employed to undermine the authority of the author, for unexpected narrative shifts, to advance a story in a unique way, for emotional distance, or to comment on the act of storytelling.

Major Authors:

NORMAN MAILER (1923–2007) is best known for his novel *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), which takes place during WWII in the Pacific.

JOSEPH HELLER (1923–99) wrote *Catch-22*, a war novel taking place in the Mediterranean. A group of pilots is added new and new flights to their schedule instead of being laid off.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS (1914–83) wrote psychological plays. He is the author of *A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* or *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The latter is the tragedy of a woman raped by her

brother-in-law. It is one of the most quoted American plays ever written. ARTHUR MILLER (1915–2005) wrote *Death of a Salesman*, the tragedy of a disappointed ageing man who commits suicide to ensure his family money from his life insurance. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by EDWARD ALBEE (1928) is another famous drama of the period. In the 1950s, a group of non-conformist authors emerged, which is now known as the Beat Generation. They refused to fit in the society, revolted against the establishment, experimented with drugs and criticised consumerism. They preferred spontaneity and travelling, San Francisco became their centre. Their literature is still popular and inspirational for many young people. JACK KEROUAC (1922–69) wrote *On the Road*, which became a kind of a Bible for his followers. It tells stories of people travelling across America. LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI (1919) is the best known poet of the generation, together with ALLEN GINSBERG (1926–1997), who wrote “Howl”, a poem expressing the beatniks’ attitudes:

CHARLES BUKOWSKI (1920–94) is well known for his poems and stories full of sex, alcohol and drugs. KEN KESEY (1935–2001) is the author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, a novel taking place in a mental asylum whose patients rebel against the oppressing system represented by nurse Ratched. TRUMAN CAPOTE (1924–84) was a post-modernist writer who combined fiction and non-fiction (e.g. *In Cold Blood*).

African-American literature became more prominent as the struggle for human rights intensified. They followed the so called Harlem Renaissance, a movement of black writers (e.g. the poet Langston Hughes) from the 1920s. JAMES BALDWIN (1924–87) was an essayist and novelist writing not only about black people’s problems, but also about homosexuals’ problems. TONI MORRISON (1931) is famous for her novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970) about a black girl who is raped by her father and becomes pregnant with him. The book criticises black girls’ pursuit of the ideal of beauty embodied by white girls. Jewish American literature draws inspiration from the painful.

