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# The Emergence of the Literatures of the United States

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## Multicultural Origins

In 1820 in the *Edinburgh Review*, the Scottish critic, Sydney Smith took aim at the budding culture of the United States with these snide questions: “Who reads an American book? Or goes to an American play? Or looks at an American picture or statue?” (Elliott, 2002: 170). His implication, of course, was that no one did because what passed for arts and letters in the United States was unworthy of notice. Over 300 years after the arrival of Columbus, this assertion, even if an exaggeration, only heightened the cultural inferiority complex already felt by many Americans in relation to Europe. But the fact was that a major reason that few people read American books in 1820 was that the lack of copyright regulations allowed American booksellers to print large numbers of English books and sell them cheaply without paying royalties. There was little incentive for publishers to produce books by American writers and pay them the required royalties when pirated British books yielded high profits. When an international copyright law was passed in 1830, American writers like Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper found readerships at home and abroad. By the 1850s, many American writers were being read in Europe.

Still, Smith’s insult resonated with a discomfort that many felt then, and that many modern scholars of American literature and arts have continued to feel, about American culture, especially regarding cultural production before 1850. Until as recently as the early 1970s, a large majority of critics of American literature and the arts shared Smith’s bias, and they formulated a variety of explanations that rationalized such cultural failure. One theory was that the early settlers had been too occupied with establishing farms, trades, and communities to find time for writing and the arts. Another was that the grip of Protestantism, especially New England Puritanism, upon much of the society by the seventeenth century and since had discouraged works of the imagination as idle, if not evil, activities. Yet another widely shared opinion was that materialism and pragmatism, exemplified in a figure like Benjamin Franklin, had

nourished an emerging industrial capitalism that valued time as money that should not be wasted on unprofitable activities. While each of these factors probably did discourage some potential writers and artists, the fact is that many people managed to produce respectable art and writing in spite of such impediments.

Why then was there, for nearly 100 years, a widespread agreement that there was little produced in the arts and letters in America worthy of attention before the American Renaissance of the 1850s? The deeper, unacknowledged reason for such erasure was the compelling desire in the United States between the 1880s and the 1960s to imagine the country to be a homogenous nation of white northern Europeans and their descendants. To acknowledge a literary history of two centuries of abundant texts written in America in Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian, and Dutch, would be to recognize a multicultural national origin and heritage that many in the United States in the twentieth century sought to silence and erase. During those same decades, literary scholars and critics were overwhelmingly white males whose authority, to a degree, relied upon the myth of white male superiority in all endeavors. Before the 1960s, very few women writers appeared on college course reading lists with Emily Dickinson usually being the notable exception.

During the last 30 years, however, dramatic changes have occurred. Sparked by the social and political movements of the 1960s and legal and cultural changes that made colleges and universities more receptive to women and to ethnic diversity, a healthy skepticism about the assumptions of previous generations of scholars inspired critics and researchers at home and abroad to reexamine the archives of American cultural production. The result has been an extraordinary excavation of a wealth of previously excluded writings. Many previously marginalized creative people of minoritized groups have been discovered or rediscovered, including people of color, women, gays and lesbians, those who wrote in languages other than English and in a variety of forms, and the indigenous peoples in the Americas before and after the arrival of Columbus. What has emerged is a wealth of literary texts generated from before 1493 and into the present by a wide array of diverse Americans.

Whereas American literature survey courses before the 1960s usually began with Ralph Waldo Emerson and the early nineteenth century, today many introductory courses begin with the early myths and narratives of Native Americans and then turn to the considerable writings of the early explorers and colonists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While three decades ago, the New England Puritans were nearly always the first authors to appear in American anthologies, now editors include as many as 200 pages of writing produced before the English arrived. As a result of such revisionism, what is now evident is the truly multinational and multicultural beginnings of modern North America. This long multicultural heritage of the United States provides cultural coherence for understanding the diversity that characterizes the contemporary United States. Recognition of this rich heritage is certainly one of the reasons that in the last ten to fifteen years there has been among scholars and students a new interest in the Americas of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. As colonial and postcolonial studies have emerged as a major field of cultural

studies, many researchers have examined instances of first contacts between Europeans and the Native Americans and the processes of colonization and decolonization that ensued in the Americas. Others have begun to study the many different features of the settler societies and the complex roles that religions, nationalism, geo-politics, and economics played in the various colonies as well as the emergence and spread of capitalism and its relationship to Protestantism and Catholicism.

The same skepticism that led scholars to question the literary canon has produced challenges to other cherished assumptions. One problem was the use of the term "America" as synonymous with the term "United States." While people in the United States commonly use "America" and "the United States" interchangeably, people in other countries think of these terms as having different geo-political meanings. They recognize the United States to be one nation among many in the Americas, and they find it to be arrogant, if not imperialistic, for leaders of the United States to speak of "we Americans" as if all of the other people who live in the Americas were somehow subsumed under the United States. The editors of the *Columbia Literary History of the United States* (1988) resisted the proposed title "History of American Literature" unless the volume included discussions of the literatures of all the countries of the Americas as is the case with the *Columbia History of the American Novel* (1991) that contains essays on Canadian, Latin American, and Caribbean fiction.

Another question that led to an important change was when did "American literature" or "the Literature of the United States" actually begin? For decades, anthologies opened with the Pilgrims in Massachusetts in 1620, but some scholars challenged this starting point by noting the arrival of English settlers in Jamestown in 1607 and the early writings of explorer John Smith. Once that change had been made, other scholars, especially Werner Sollors at Harvard, argued that the determination of what counts as literature in the United States should not be limited to texts in the English language alone since many important works produced in the United States have been composed in other languages (Sollors, 2000). So the starting date of American literature was moved back to 1492, and anthologies opened with the writings of Columbus and other European explorers. Before long, other scholars noted that oral literature is a legitimate form of literary expression and thus the first works of American literature would be the poetry, songs, and narratives of the indigenous peoples who were the "first Americans" and whose oral literature circulated for centuries before the arrival of Columbus. Thus, in the most recent anthologies, the words of American Indians precede those of Columbus, and students now may read substantial selections of Native American poetry and songs, oral narratives, such as the trickster stories, and examples of oratory, origin myths, history, argumentation, and religious expression. Not only do such indigenous texts open American literature anthologies now, but Native American writing appears throughout subsequent historical periods.

Among the many changes to the canon of United States literature that have resulted from the new inclusiveness of recent decades, however, the presence of Native American literature presents perhaps the greatest challenge for readers. As Andrew Wiget and other scholars have noted, each of the American Indian nations and tribes possesses

different cultures and assumptions from each other, and all of them are very different from those of the European cultures with which most non-Indian Americans are familiar. As Wiget observes: “Aesthetic values emerge from rather than transcend specific cultural contexts, and we quickly discover the limits of our own assumptions and knowledge in encountering literatures from outside the more familiar Euro-American traditions” (Lauter, 2002: 23). For such reasons, the early Native American texts are necessarily presented within the framework of information about the cultural traditions, values, and community social systems in which each text was produced. At the same time, there are many poems and narratives that speak powerfully to any audience, such as this poem written soon after the Spanish conquest of the Mayan people of Central America in 1541 and later transcribed from Mayan hieroglyphs:

*They Came From the East*

They came from the east when they arrived.  
 Then Christianity also began.  
 The fulfillment of its prophecy is ascribed to the east . . .  
 Then with the true God, the true Dios,  
 Came the beginning of our misery.  
 it was the beginning of tribute,  
 the beginning of church dues,  
 the beginning of strife and purse snatching,  
 the beginning of strife with blow guns;  
 the beginning of strife with trampling on people,  
 the beginning of robbery with violence,  
 the beginning of forced debts,  
 the beginning of debts enforced by false testimony,  
 the beginning of individual strife,  
 a beginning of vexation.

(Elliott, 1991b: 25)

## **New Spain and New France: A Literature of Conquest and Survival**

Between 1500 and 1800, the Spanish, French, Portuguese, and, after 1607, the English also, competed vigorously to gain control of vast areas of the Americas. The Portuguese discovered the extraordinary potential for mining gold and other precious stones and metals in the territories that under their rule became Brazil. The French established colonies in what would become Canada and New England, the Great Lakes regions, Florida, and the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. The Spanish established their presence in South and Central America, Mexico, and formed the colonies of New Mexico (1598), Texas (1683), Arizona (1687), and California (1769). Since all three of these nations were Catholic monarchies, the Papacy and the Catholic Church were heavily invested spiritually and materially in the European conquest of the Americas, and thus missionaries worked closely with the military in supplanting the indigenous religions with Christianity. In the beginning, converting the natives to Christianity and saving their

souls was the avowed humanitarian motive for taking control of their lands. But, of course, fissures in the rhetorical fabric of their benevolent arguments reveal the materialistic drive fueling the brutal conquest.

For example, the text that usually occupies the first place among the works of European writers in most new anthologies of American literature is the entry for October 12, 1492 in *The Journal of the First Voyage of Christopher Columbus* (1492–3). The passage opens almost casually: “At two hours after midnight appeared the land, at a distance of 2 leagues.” Columbus explains that they “lay-to waiting until daylight Friday, when they arrived at an island of the Bahamas that was called in the Indians’ tongue *Guanabani*.” After immediately renaming the island San Salvador, the Spanish “took possession of the said island for the King and Queen, their Lord and Lady, making the declarations that are required, as is set forth in the testimonies which were there taken down in writing” (Elliott, 1991b: 33). With this action, the violent physical conquest began, and in this short piece of writing a more subtle rhetorical and “legal” process was also begun that would characterize much of the writing produced by the Europeans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Americas. Within a framework of assumed religious and national superiority over the indigenous peoples, the Europeans would use their written languages to construct arguments that would rationalize and justify the blatant theft of natural resources, gold, silver, spices, foods, animals, and people from the Americas. In this short journal entry, Columbus establishes a paradigm in which “declarations” and “testimonies” are employed to transfer and rename property from the native people to the Spanish monarchy.

Not surprisingly, most of the writing of the European explorers consisted of journals, histories, and reports on experiences, places, and events in which they were both participants and observers. In many cases, the authors eloquently expressed great wonder at the beauty of the people and at the strangeness of unfamiliar plants, animals, and landscapes. Although they frequently describe the people as handsome, the fact that the Indians were most often naked, had no weapons, and appeared to the Europeans to practice no recognizable religion, provided ample justification to assume them to be their intellectual and cultural inferiors. On that Friday on *Guanabani*, Columbus observed that the first native people he saw “ought to be good servants of good skill” and “would easily be made Christians” (Elliott, 1991b: 34). He recognized that to convert them to Christianity would be to bring them under the Spanish systems of law and government and to place them on their proper rung on the Great Chain of Being where they would dutifully serve their Spanish superiors as God intended. Before the end of the sixteenth century, the Spanish occupiers would learn a great deal more about the mental and physical powers of resistance of indigenous Americans, and a great many on both sides would die in the process.

One remarkable text that exemplifies the suffering, survival, and success among the Spanish colonists is the *Relacion* of Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca (1542). Cabeza de Vaca was a member of an expedition to Florida and eastern Mexico that left Spain in 1527. The 300 members of the expedition were rapidly reduced by disease, starvation, exposure, and conflicts with the native peoples. Cabeza de Vaca was one of a small group

cast ashore on the island of Malhado in the Gulf of Mexico. He survived there for five years by trading with the natives and healing the sick, and eventually he and three other survivors were able to get passage to the mainland of Florida. Then they traveled along the Gulf Coast for eight more years seeking rescue, reaching Mexico City in 1536. Cabeza de Vaca was able to return to Spain and publish his extraordinary story in 1542. As Juan Bruce-Novoa has observed, during these years, Cabeza de Vaca himself became transformed from being a Spaniard to becoming an immigrant and then *mestizo*, a hybrid who had to acculturate to the new world culture and learn new languages in order to survive. In this case, the American book that he produced was an autobiographical report to the Spanish people and his own superiors in government that served the dual purpose of sharing his knowledge of the Americas with the public and demonstrating to the leaders his skills and learning that enabled him to survive. He eventually was commissioned Governor of Paraguay (Lauter, 2002: 129).

Unlike the Portuguese and the French, who were far more tolerant of difference and willing to allow for a blending of their own religious and cultural forms with those of the indigenous people, the Spanish, and later the English, strongly resisted the pull toward cultural hybridity. Although many Spanish soldiers did take indigenous women for wives, resulting in a *mestizo* population throughout Spanish Latin America, the principles of the Spanish culture were traditional and rigid, and thus they resorted more often to violent containment and suppression of resistance and policing of acculturation rather than to negotiation or compromise. On the other hand, Brazilian Catholicism, its art, music, dance, food, and dress became a rich blend of Indian, African, and European forms and traditions.

Taking the trouble to learn the languages and cultures as well as the economic and social circumstances of the people, many of the French trappers and soldiers took Indian wives and adopted the food, clothing, and customs of the people with the expectation of staying in America and raising their families. While the French retained their Catholicism, the French clergy effectively converted a far higher number of the Indians than did the Spanish or the English clergy. Initially, many of the French Jesuits, called "Black-Robes" by the Indians, were tortured and killed, but eventually significant numbers of Native people accepted Christianity, probably because of the willingness of the French to accept many of their cultural forms and customs and the desire of many Indian women to please their French husbands. With the cooperation of the Indians, the French developed successful trade, trapping, and hunting enterprises and established a network of outposts and forts along the waterways of the territories of New France. As the result of the ways that the French and the Indians integrated their efforts, they also stood in battle together during the long French and Indian War (1755–63) which they fought against the forces of England and New England for control of the territories along what became the Canadian border. In the long term, however, the English forces in the North and the Spanish armies in the South reduced the amount of territory that the French controlled considerably, leaving only Quebec and Louisiana in French hands. In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson negotiated the Louisiana Purchase with Napoleon, and the territory became part of the United States.

Like the Spanish, the French also produced a considerable number of histories, personal narratives, and captivity narratives. An exceptional contribution to early American cultural literary history is the 73-volume work, the *Jesuit Relations*, in which the clergy of the Jesuit missions described in great detail their interaction with the Indians. These works were designed to be an official record of the work of the missionaries among the Native people and as a narrative epic of the suffering and heroism of those who saved souls for God and produced wealth for their country.

### **Literary Production in the English Settlements: The Southern and Middle Colonies**

While the French were advancing their interests in Canada, the upper and central mid-west, Florida, and the Gulf coast, and the Spanish were expanding their territories in Mexico, Latin America, the Southwest, and California, the English were waiting and watching the developments in the Americas. Throughout much of the sixteenth century, the English were occupied with domestic political and religious conflicts. In 1534, King Henry VIII's quarrel with the papacy over his desire to marry Anne Boleyn led him to break with the Catholic Church and establish the Church of England under his own leadership. The Protestant Reformation that began in the early sixteenth century was already causing turmoil and persecutions of both Catholics and Protestants throughout Europe. The accession of Henry's eldest and Catholic daughter Mary to the throne in 1553 generated a reign of terror against English Protestants that earned her the designation Bloody Mary. In his 1554 *Book of Martyrs*, Protestant leader John Foxe portrayed the persecutions and their victims so effectively that his work inspired more Protestant rebels. Mary died in 1558 and her Protestant sister Elizabeth became Queen. In her long reign, she brought political stability, peace, and prosperity to England, and her naval forces defeated the Spanish armada, ending Spain's dominance of the North Atlantic. When Elizabeth died in 1603, England was well positioned to begin its own colonization efforts in the Americas.

Encouraged by the government of James I, those seeking to establish colonies in the Americas formed joint stock companies of investors to cover the costs. Because the religious divisions in England became more volatile after Elizabeth's death, people in these companies tended to belong to the same religious groups: the Catholics founded Maryland as a place of religious refuge; the Anglicans established Jamestown and other colonies in Virginia and in the West Indies; a number of different dissenting groups colonized New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania; and the radical "Puritan" dissenters populated Massachusetts, Connecticut, and other areas of New England. Because the stock company system required that the members invest in the enterprise, many people, especially in New England and the Middle Colonies, joined as families and expected to have a voice in the affairs of the community. As a result, many settlements tended to develop a sense of autonomy and independence from the control of the English government, a characteristic that would eventually support ideas of

independence, states rights, and a federation of distinctive states and regional cultures. Such traditions would emerge at the time of the American Revolution and its aftermath as key elements in the formation of a new form of government and the construction of an American national identity.

Because of the nature of the climate and the lands of the South, colonies from Virginia to the Caribbean struggled to survive in the early decades of the seventeenth century. In the swampy regions, malaria and fevers were endemic and few families traveled together to settle there. Tobacco became the most important cash crop of the region, and the high degree of cheap labor demanded for tobacco plantations quickly led to the use of indentured laborers and the establishment of slavery as prominent features of the economy and culture of the South. What evolved was a society with a relatively small number of wealthy plantation owners with families supported by a population of white male indentured laborers who worked their way to freedom and African slaves who had little hope of gaining freedom.

Such a hierarchical social structure was quite conducive to the establishment of the arts and literature in the South because the property owners thought of themselves as a kind of aristocracy who possessed the leisure and learning to cultivate the arts and letters. The fact that most of the propertied families in the southern colonies also were Anglican was an advantage for literature because, unlike in New England, there were no religious prohibitions against the creative imagination. As with Catholicism, the Church of England encouraged music and elements of performance as a normal part of spiritual expression. There was a rich religious literature consisting of sermons, theological tracts, hymns, personal diaries, and spiritual autobiographies and there was also a large body of secular writing, such as Samuel Davies's important historical analysis, *The State of Religion among the Protestant Dissenters of Virginia* (1751).

Most of the southern aristocrats were trained in the classics and were well read in the literature of the English and European Renaissance. For this reason and because the planters viewed themselves as being connected to their English contemporaries, they saw the American books that they produced as part of English literary culture, designed to please as well as inform educated English readers in America and in England. Virginia's William Byrd II's *The History of the Dividing Line*, which he began writing in 1728 and was first published in 1841, is a detailed, sophisticated, and witty account of plantation life. Robert Beverly's *The History of the Present State of Virginia* (1705) is a serious account of the exploration and settlement of Virginia that also contains satiric reflections on social foibles. Ebenezer Cook's *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1708) is a satiric mock epic that highlights some of the follies and absurdities of life in colonial Maryland, and there is a considerable body of lyric poetry by such fine poets as Benjamin Thompson, Richard Steere, Richard Lewis, Anna Tompson Hayden, Elizabeth Sowle Bradford, and Jane Coleman Turell.

Of the earliest English authors in the South, John Smith continues to command more space in anthologies than his peers because his writings promoted the colonization of America and began what would become a tradition of enticing Europeans with descriptions of the natural abundance of the "New World" and promises of prosperity

that would come to be called the American Dream. His *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles* (1624) contributed to the increasing numbers migrating to New England from 1630 to the 1690s. In a lively and engaging style, Smith also wrote of his many adventures, the most famous of which is his tale of being held captive by Chief Powhatan whose daughter Pocahontas offered to trade her life for Smith's. While many historians dispute this story, it became a valued myth that illustrates the presumed power of the superior European to fulfill his destiny by a variety of means. Although Smith began his American activities in Virginia, he soon moved to New England, which he named, and he wrote extensively about the region to entice more of the English there. Describing the wildlife and the pleasures of hunting and fishing in a land of such abundance, Smith honed an advertising rhetoric that anticipates modern wordsmiths of Boston and New York who would be selling dreams and land two or three centuries after him:

For gentlemen, what exercise should more delight them then, ranging daily those unknown parts, using fowling and fishing, for hunting and hawking? And yet you shall see the wild hawks give you some pleasure, in seeing them stoop (six or seven after one another) an hour or two together, at the schools of fish in the faire harbors, as those ashore at a fowl. . . . For hunting also, the woods, lakes, rivers afford not only chase sufficient for any that delight in that kind of toil and pleasure, but the beasts to hunt that besides the delicacy of their bodies for food, their skins are so rich as may well recompense thy daily labor with a Captain's pay.

(Lauter, 2002: 193)

## Literature in Early New England

Contrary to the less fervent English who settled the Middle and Southern Colonies, the initial settlers in New England were zealous reformers who viewed themselves as exiles forced to flee religious persecution at home. They were Protestants who believed that the Church of England was the product of a corrupt arrangement, often called "The Elizabethan Compromise." In her efforts to maintain political stability, Elizabeth encouraged the Anglican Church to retain the externals of the Catholic liturgy in order to comfort former Catholics who wanted to return to their old faith. The more radical Protestants were appalled because they believed that everything connected to Catholicism was from Satan, and they were outraged that Elizabeth's government ignored or persecuted their clergy and theologians, who sought to return Christianity to the "pure" austere forms of the early Church. Thus, these reformers were scornfully called "Puritans."

These reformers embraced the theology of John Calvin, who developed a strict dualistic either/or logic, and held that God is sovereign and all knowing so everything that has and will happen in the universe has already been fully planned by God. Thus, God has predestined each individual soul to be saved or damned even before birth, and no human possesses the free will to change that fate. All that people can do is to hope that they will receive grace and have a conversion experience bringing them assurance

of their salvation. With Calvin, they also held that the Old Testament contains the words of God and should be read literally and that those who received God's grace and had a valid conversion experience thereby possessed heightened powers to distinguish good from evil and saints from sinners. To insure that the congregation would be pure with only saints among the members, they developed rigorous procedures for deciding who was saved. When a person reported his or her conversion experience, the details had to fit a prescribed pattern that modern scholars have called "the morphology of conversion" (Elliott, 2002: 48,101). With confidence that they were God's Chosen, the Puritans soon gained the reputation in colonies and in England of being narrow persecutors of outsiders and of dissenters within their midst.

Among those who held such beliefs, there was general agreement that the true church of Christ was the individual congregation. A congregation was formed when a group of Saints came to recognize each other as saved and formed a brotherhood of the elect. Then, in a process that anticipates democratic elections, they selected a minister upon whom they could all agree, wrote a church covenant, and worked with their minister to support each other. They were opposed to church hierarchies or synods of bishops meant to guide individual ministers. In a congregational church, the pastor is only beholden to the parishioners, who can dismiss him if they disapproved of his teachings or behavior.

Among the growing body of Congregationalists in England in the late sixteenth century, there were two distinct groups, the Separatists and the non-separating Congregationalists. While the Separatists believed that the Church of England was a lost cause, the less radical group believed that they still belonged to the Church of England and were standing apart from it only until the Church completed its reform and purged itself of the trappings of Catholicism. A group of about 100 Separatists left England in 1608 and traveled to the Netherlands, where they resided in Leyden, known as a haven for religious freedom, until 1620, when they departed on the *Mayflower* to Plymouth, Massachusetts. William Bradford became their governor and during his lifetime wrote his history of the colony, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (written 1630–50; published 1865). In 1630, a second, much larger group of 1,000 non-separating Congregationalists under the leadership of John Winthrop founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony that included Boston, Salem, and several other communities. In spite of some theological differences between these groups, they did work together, especially in relation to the native peoples. They shared the beliefs that they had a sacred mission to preserve the pure Christianity, and they hoped to return to England one day with that pure faith. Initially, both groups felt an obligation to teach their faith to the Indians with the prospect that they might discover some saved Christian saints among them. In 1637, their plans to convert the Indians were temporarily set aside when a dispute over territory led to the Pequot War, involving the English, the Narragansetts, and the Mohegans, against the Pequots. One night in Mystic, Connecticut, the English and the Narragansetts killed 400 Pequots, mostly women and children who were sleeping in their tents. In spite of some resistance by Bradford and the Separatists, the two colonies eventually grew closer together, becoming increasingly diverse and secularized and finally merging in 1692.

Between 1620 and 1649, however, political changes in England greatly affected the American colonies. The numbers of Protestant dissenters in England grew and became more powerful until Civil War erupted in the 1640s resulting in the execution of King Charles I in 1649 and the establishment of a Parliamentary government under Oliver Cromwell. Many New Englanders returned to England during Cromwell's "Protectorate," but they soon discovered that feuds between the Presbyterians, who wanted a hierarchy of bishops and synods to govern the church, and the Congregationalists were tearing the government apart. In 1660, the Protectorate ended when the exiled son of Charles I, who had fled to France, returned to be crowned King Charles II. At that point, the American Puritans knew that they must accept America as their permanent home, but they hoped to remain independent from the new English government. Under Charles II's reign, they did manage to retain a high degree of autonomy, but when the Catholic James II became King in 1685, he appointed a royal governor to Massachusetts and demanded that all the colonies practice religious toleration. Then, with the "Glorious Revolution" of 1689, Parliament appointed the Protestants William, Prince of Orange, of the Netherlands and his wife Mary II (daughter of James) to be the new heads of state with a much stronger role given to Parliament. Under their rule, religious toleration became a permanent feature of the English government at home and in the colonies.

For the flourishing of literature and the arts, New England Puritanism was especially unsupportive. Within Calvinist logic, the only important book was the Bible, and the words of humans were of little consequence except to explicate the truths of the scriptures and instruct others in Calvinist theology. Puritan ministers were taught to use a "plain style" in speaking and writing because to employ ornate or subtle language or wit was to commit the sins of pride and presumption by daring to compete with the artistry of God. During the Puritan Protectorate in England, all of the theaters were closed because indulgence of the imagination and the creation of fictional worlds and characters without a strictly religious purpose were viewed as sinful arousal of dangerous passions. Except for sermons, religious tracts, conversion narratives, and spiritual autobiographies, the only legitimate use of literary expression should be in religious instruction, as in the famous allegorical Puritan work, *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) by the English Puritan John Bunyan, or the long narrative poem for children, *The Day of Doom* (1662), by the New England poet Michael Wigglesworth.

While the sheer volume of written works produced in New England in the seventeenth century was considerable, most of the texts were of a religious nature. Even the large number of autobiographies and dairies were focused upon the spiritual life and growth of their authors, and histories and captivity narratives were also "spiritualized" in that events and characters are imbued with religious significance so that the reader may perceive the hand of God and the role of his grace in every development. Indeed, because they believed that God conveyed His truths to mankind not only through the Bible but also via acts of nature and historical events, they read the entire world symbolically and explicated everything that might have meaning, such as a sparrow falling to earth or a sudden storm. For example, in her *Narrative of Captivity and Restoration*,

Mary Rowlandson tells of the death of her six-year-old daughter Sarah who was shot during the initial assault but whom she carried for eight days of a forced march. When the child dies, Rowlandson did not tell her captors for several hours for she feared they would discard the body in the forest without a burial. As she lay with Sarah's body all night, she says that she reflected "upon the goodness of God to me, in preserving me in the use of my reason and senses in that distressed time, [so] that I did not use wicked and violent means to end my own miserable life." Through a process of spiritualizing her narrative, she transforms this personal tragedy and her strength in dealing with it into a lesson for others on the power of God's grace.

Of great significance for the Puritans was how they read their own communal errand or mission into the wilderness of New England. Identifying themselves with the Old Testament Hebrews in such works as Edward Johnson's *Wonder-Working Providence* (1654), Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), they identified their leaders with Biblical figures, the Atlantic with the Red Sea, and the American wilderness as the howling deserts of Egypt. In such elaborate associations, the Puritans were drawing upon the system of biblical hermeneutics known as typology. Using typology, the interpreter connects types – people and events of the Old Testament – to their antitypes – events in the life of Christ that fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. Even in his satirical attack upon the Puritans, *New English Canaan* (1631), Thomas Morton used typology in order to expose and mock it. Morton critiqued the Puritans' expansion of this system to perceive their own experiences to be antitypes of Biblical types. In sermons and in every other genre, Puritan ministers and authors assumed these parallels between the New England Saints and the biblical Chosen People.

In spite of the religious impediments against the imagination and the arts and the emphasis upon the need that writing serve a didactic purpose, a number of Puritan writers produced works of moving expression and beauty. Those who did so shared with their English counterparts in the middle and southern colonies an artistic alliance with their contemporaries who were part of the English literary renaissance. Remarkably, Anne Bradstreet, one of a small number of English women writers in the seventeenth century, was colonial America's first published poet and remains one of its most admired. Her book, *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America* (1650) was published in London and contains a wide range of forms and subjects that demonstrate her remarkable intelligence, wit, and learning. While most of her poems focus upon religious subjects, many are personal, dealing with family, love, marriage, and everyday life. Some of her works even express discontent with her position as a Puritan woman and with the unwillingness of the Puritan patriarchy to acknowledge that women could be as intelligent and as clever as men. Although she was not an outspoken reformer like Anne Hutchinson, who suffered excommunication and exile for challenging the Puritan clergy in the 1630s, Bradstreet, by her life and achievements, helped to undermine false assumptions about women that were widely shared in her community.

Another surprising literary talent is Reverend Edward Taylor, who spent much of his life writing poetry that demonstrated that art was not antithetical to religion but who knew that his fellow clergy and many of the members of his own congregation would

not agree. Few if any of his contemporaries ever read his poems and his manuscripts remained undiscovered until 1939. Born in England, Taylor studied at Cambridge before coming to America and completing his degree at Harvard. He accepted a call to be the minister in remote Westfield, Massachusetts, where he remained until his death in 1729. He was a devout, conservative Puritan who spoke out and wrote against the liberalizing tendencies that began in the 1680s. His rich and complex poetry, however, reveals him to have been strongly influenced by the English Renaissance and most likely by the Metaphysical poets such as John Donne and George Herbert. Taylor used typology for poetic as well as religious purposes. Like the Metaphysical poets in England, he had a delightful wit and clearly took pleasure in his play with language. With Bradstreet, Taylor remains one of the most read and studied of early American writers.

With the tragic events of the Salem Witchcraft trials in 1692 followed by years of confessions of regret by church and community leaders and payments of compensation to the families of the victims, Puritanism suffered a fatal blow that put an end to what was one of the most influential religious movements in the history of colonial America and the United States. Although the extraordinary Puritan theologian, Jonathan Edwards and the remarkable religious revivals of the First Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s briefly gave Calvinism new life, the colonies had become religiously, politically, and ethnically diverse, and the growing influence of Enlightenment thought would lead the educated classes to perceive Mankind and Nature, rather than God, to be the subjects of serious thought and writing.

Because the Puritans had come to identify their position in the world as the “City on a Hill,” in John Winthrop’s resonant phrase, a model for all to follow, and because they came to identify that mythical city with America as a geographical place, the Puritans began to shape some key components of what came to be called “American identity.” One key feature of that identity remains a tendency to think in terms of either/or options and to seek the “bottom line” – are we damned or saved? Another key idea that Calvin developed was that every individual was given a material and spiritual calling in life, and the person had to search his or her heart to discover these. For one who receives grace and has the conversion experience, the spiritual calling is salvation, and for the elected saint, the temporal calling was linked to the spiritual. Thus, the Puritans quickly came to accept the notion that a member of the elect would also be a serious, law-abiding, sober, dedicated, hard worker who would likely be successful in a material calling. Since God predetermined all things, it only makes sense, they reasoned, that the elect were not meant to be failures in the world. For these reasons, many scholars, most notably Max Weber in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1920), have recognized that this form of Protestantism was quite conducive to the rise of capitalism and that the leap is short from the Reverend Cotton Mather’s emphasis on “doing good” to Benjamin Franklin’s advice to rise early and “be healthy, wealthy, and wise.” Many features of Puritanism, such as Bradford’s emphasis upon private rather than communal plots of land and Winthrop’s treatise on democratic governance, came to be seen in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as elements of American identity.

## Enlightenment, Revolution, and the First Professional Writers

The eighteenth century brought many changes to the colonies such as a dramatic increase in the population, the establishment of an extensive system of slavery, a major war involving the French and the Indians against the English, and the political turmoil of the 1760s and early 1770s that would lead to the Revolutionary War and the founding of the United States. During these decades, the Enlightenment ushered in many important intellectual developments, and the philosophical works of John Locke, Sir Isaac Newton, René Descartes, and others, shifted the focus of thought from theology and religion to reason and science. The Enlightenment, sometimes called the Augustan Age, also inspired Neoclassicism, and the young men in the universities in the 1770s and 1780s enthusiastically embraced classical traditions. More liberal religious and political ideas began to emerge that would shape the thinking of men like Franklin, Jefferson, and Thomas Paine and women like Mary Wollstonecraft, Mercy Warren Otis, Judith Sargent Murray, and Abigail Adams. American literature became much more imitative of English literature of the same period. The poetry of Alexander Pope, the essays of Addison and Steele, the plays of Shakespeare and of the Restoration dramatists, and eventually the fiction of Fielding and Richardson were widely read and performed in the colonies and their influences were evident in the works of American writers. While Franklin was an original and was respected abroad for his writing as well as for his inventions and his key leadership during and after the Revolution, most of the writers between 1720 and 1780 who are anthologized today were minor figures, with the other exceptions being Jefferson, Paine, and John Adams. With the reassessment that has come about in the last two decades, a number of previously obscure authors have come to the center of the literary study, such as the slave author Phillis Wheatly, William Bartram, Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur, and Olaudah Equiano (Gustavus Vassa), whose slave narrative, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, is the most important work of its kind before the nineteenth century.

During the years after the Revolution, there was a significant rise in literacy that accompanied the development of print culture, and the first daily newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Packet*, appeared in 1784. With so much information to be had and so many issues being debated, people felt that they needed to read in order to make sensible political and economic decisions. Magazines began to be published in greater numbers while broadsides and newspaper editorials appeared regularly. Following the classical tradition, many writers used pseudonyms, as did James Madison, John Jay, and Alexander Hamilton, the writers of *The Federalist* (1787–8).

The first authors in the new Republic who thought of themselves as entering the career of letters were groups of young men who had attended university in the early 1770s. While a generation earlier these young men would have become religious ministers, it was evident that religion was no longer at the center of intellectual life

and that writing related to politics and contemporary life would be the wave of the future. They imagined that through the mighty pen they could possess a different form of power available in the growing urban centers where intellectuals met and exchanged ideas and manuscripts, as Alexander Pope and his colleagues in London had done decades earlier. When the young novelist and essayist Charles Brockden Brown of Philadelphia visited his New York friend Elihu Hubbard Smith, a medical student with literary talent and radical philosophical views, Smith introduced him to members of the Friendly Club, a writers' group that included the playwright William Dunlap. Brown then became determined not to become a lawyer, but to dedicate his career to literature. In Philadelphia, Brown attended the *Belles Lettres Club* where he shared his work with other writers, and he went on to publish an extraordinary series of novels in the 1790s that in many ways forecast the literary techniques and themes that later appear in the works of Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville. Joel Barlow of Hartford, Connecticut, joined with a group of young authors, later called the "Connecticut Wits," to produce a series of newspaper articles collected under the title of *The Anarchiad* to celebrate the triumph of political chaos and to try to awaken the politicians to exercise more control and good sense. Later he published perhaps the best comic poem written in the United States before the 1880s, *The Hasty Pudding* (1796), as well as two major epic poems and many political essays. Barlow moved to France in 1788, became close friends with the radical thinkers Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft, and was made an honorary French citizen in 1793. While these authors and others, such as the poet Philip Freneau and novelist Hugh Henry Brackenridge, were being productive but struggling to find an audience, the first women of letters in the United States were reaching large numbers of readers with novels of sentiment concerned with domestic life and with moral issues.

The most successful of the women novelists of the era were Susanna Haswell Rowson and Hannah Webster Foster. Born in England, Rowson moved to America when she was five and grew up in Nantasket, Massachusetts. In 1778, she and her father returned to London where she married William Rowson. As William's business was failing, Susanna began to write poetry and fiction including *Charlotte Temple* (1794), the first American best seller. It is a heart-rending tale of a young English woman who is seduced by a villain, taken to America, becomes pregnant, and is abandoned to die. Rowson returned to the United States with her husband and, in the second half of her life, she had a career on the stage as an actress, dancer, and musician. Forty editions of *Charlotte Temple* were published in Rowson's lifetime. Ironically, because of the lack of international copyright laws, she derived little in royalties from the novel and had to depend upon her own stage performances of it as her best source of income. Following Rowson's example, Hannah Webster Foster published *The Coquette* in 1797. It, too, is a sentimental novel that was made up of 74 letters telling the story of a spirited young woman who makes a serious mistake that leads to her demise. It also was a best seller and with *Charlotte Temple* is one of the two most successful novels in the United States before 1800.

## A Nation and a National Literature Matures

In the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the United States underwent several crises of survival and identity. The war of 1812 nearly resulted in the return of the country to British control. The rapid increase of slavery in the South gave rise to heated debates and to the beginning of the Abolitionist movement in the North that would eventually help to bring about the Civil War. The election of southerner Andrew Jackson as President in 1826 ushered in major changes in American politics. In addition to supporting slavery and states' rights, Jackson's administration passed the Indian Removal Act in 1830 that resulted in the forced relocation of thousands of people to the western territories and generated the Indian Wars that continued throughout the century. The fashioning of what has been called "Jacksonian rhetoric" generated such popular ideas as "Manifest Destiny" that rationalized the annexation of northern Mexico, the creation of Texas, and the Mexican War in 1848 that brought under the control of the United States 500,000 square miles, including what is now New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah. Just as they opposed slavery, many intellectuals and artists of the Northeast opposed the Mexican War, and the rise of radical opposition to many of Jackson's policies helped to generate the women's rights movement and a wide array of utopian communities. Violence and turmoil were common in these decades as anger in the urban centers over poverty, injustice, and unfair labor practices provoked riots, and the hopelessness and rage of slavery produced slave revolts. Such events heightened public awareness of the growing gap between the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and the realities of daily life.

With international copyright laws in place, American authors such as Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and Edgar Allan Poe, found audiences for their works at home and abroad. American literature began to become international with Irving spending 17 years in Europe and Cooper spending seven there, and this trans-Atlantic dimension of American writing continued with Hawthorne, who spent seven years in England and Italy, and with Melville, a world traveler. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and other members of the Transcendentalist movement were well acquainted with members of the Romantic movement in Europe, and many of the other women writers in the United States, such as Lydia Maria Child, Lydia Sigourney, Susan Warner, Fanny Fern, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, were read and toasted in England and on the continent. There was a robust regional literature within the United States led by popular writers of the South and Southwest such as Thomas Bangs Thorpe, Henry Clay Lewis, and George Washington Harris while the authors of another localized genre, the slave narrative, such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, generated considerable interest at home and abroad. Thus, by the 1850s, it could no longer be said that "no one reads an American book," for writers of the United States had established themselves solidly within world literature, and those who would follow in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, such as Henry James, Mark Twain, and Emily Dickinson, would build upon that foundation.

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