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# 美国文学概况

*Sketches of American Literature*

总主编 范纯海 主 编 黄 嵘



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主 编 黄 嵘 副主编 邓 华 编 者 刘冬宁



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# 前言

相比历史悠久、丰富的英国文学,美国文学是年轻的,但同样是丰富的。美国文学是一朵奇葩,一个历史不过200多年的国家,能够拥有大批世界文学名著,复杂、多元的文学体系和众多诺贝尔文学奖获得者,这本身就是一个奇迹。美国文学的故事涵盖关于“美国人”身份的确立和认同、个人主义和冒险精神、扩张和探索、移民和种族关系、个人自由与社会制约等主题,通过一本作品选读欲叙述其概况,不是一件容易的事情。

本书是《英国文学概况》的姊妹篇,编排体系与之一致。各章以综述开始,介绍本时期的历史背景和文坛动态;后按体裁分节:诗歌、戏剧、散文、小说。这样作家出场不以绝对的时间为序,而是以历史进程和流派为经,以文体分类为纬,纵横交错,编织作家方队,描述美国文学在各历史时期的独特景观。每位作家以生平、作品、评论及章节选读勾勒。叙述作家、作品力求客观,但诗无达诂,评论作品难有终极的解释,编者尽量避开不同文学批评流派的观点,提供一种较为共识的解读,一种与广大读者的对话和互动。

本教材可作为大专院校英语专业本科生教材,及同等程度的美国文学爱好者的读本。本书配备教师用书,提供教材对应章节的补充资料,如作品的详细注释及解读、汉语翻译、更多作品选读以及每章后练习的参考答案等。

本书是集体智慧的结晶。第一章由大连医科大学的刘冬宁老师编写,第六章由辽宁对外经贸学院公共外语教研部的邓华老师编写,第二、三、四、五章由武汉轻工大学的黄嵘老师完成。本书在编写过程中,曾查阅参考了国内外许多书籍资料,在此一并向作者致谢。在此特别感谢系列教程的总主编范纯海老师,没有他的信任、鼓励和宝贵的建设性意见,本书难以成形。由于编者水平所限,书中难免存在纰漏之处,恳请读者和专家们批评指正。

编者

2015年2月

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# **The Colonial Literature**

## **(1607—1775)**

### **1.1 Overall View**

#### **1.1.1 Historical Context**

When Christopher Columbus discovered the American continent in 1492, there were more than two thousand independent tribes of about one million natives. As he mistook them for Indians, they have been called American Indians since then. At the beginning of the 17th century, the vast continental area that was to become the United States had been probed only slightly by English and European explorers. The earliest settlers included the Spanish, the Dutch, the Swedes, the Germans, the French, the Italians, and the Portuguese. While the Spanish were the first North American colonists, by 1650, however, England had established a dominant presence on the Atlantic coast.

When England established her first permanent settlement in 1607 in present-day Jamestown, Virginia, and in 1620, Plymouth, Massachusetts, her primary motives are: the monarchical desire to expand their empires and commerce through trade; the people's longing for land, adventure, and glistening gold; the nation's efforts to be rid of surplus populations such as debtors, prisoners, and unemployed youths; and religious controversy. Over the next century or so, Virginia and the Massachusetts Bay Colony were joined by other colonies. By the 1760s, England and its 13 American colonies were quarreling over settlement, government, and taxes.

#### **The Puritans and Puritanism**

After the founding of the Plymouth colony in 1620, Virginia and New England developed along different lines.

During the period from 1620 to 1640, large numbers of English people migrated to that part of America now known as New England. These emigrants were not impelled



by hope of wealth, or ease, or pleasure. They were a group of serious, religious people who advocated strict religious and moral principles. They were called Puritans because they wished to purify the English Church and to restore church worship to the “pure and unspotted” condition of its earlier days. They opposed the elaborate rituals of the English Church. They believed that the Bible was the revealed word of God, therefore, people should guide their daily behavior with the Bible.

American Puritanism is a two-fold cultural heritage: being religious and being practical. On the one hand, Puritanism is a highly strict religious doctrine. These Puritans thought they were “the selected few”, chosen by God to reestablish a Commonwealth based on the teachings of the Bible, to build the wilderness into a new Garden of Eden. The journey to the New World was a new Exodus, ordained by God and foretold in the Bible, just as the Bible promised the creation of a New Jerusalem, in America. They accepted the doctrine of predestination, original sin and total depravity, and limited atonement through a special infusion of grace from God, all that John Calvin, the great French theologian who lived in Geneva, had preached. On the other hand, Puritanism also has its practical aspect. Their struggle for survival and the movement of pushing the frontier with them as they moved further and further westward made them more and more preoccupied with business and profits. Hard work, thrift, piety and sobriety were the dominated Puritan values.

American Puritanism is one of the most enduring and shaping influences in American thought, culture, education and literature. Puritanism was the very thing that provided a firm foundation for American democracy. Philosophies such as the “divine right” of kings gave way to individual liberties and the recognition of the rights of the common man. The “Yankee work ethic” came about because of the belief that a man’s work is done first for God’s approval. The belief in public education comes from the Puritans, who founded America’s first school, Boston Latin School (1635), and the first college, Harvard College (1636), so that people would be able to read the Bible for themselves.

### 1.1.2 Literary Trends

#### 1.1.2.1 The Virginia Colony: The Narrative of Colonial Establishment and Exploration

The first permanent English colony at Jamestown, Virginia in 1607 was founded

for commercial reasons, to secure profits from colonization. The writings of colonial era have a much greater importance as history than as literature. The growth of colonial America into the United States is recorded in personal literature that began as diaries, journals, letters, sermons, travel books, autobiographies reporting of exploration and colonization.

American literature is widely considered to begin with Captain John Smith's *A True Relation of Virginia* (1608). John Smith (1579?—1631) was the president of Jamestown colony from 1608 to 1609 who helped the colony survive that difficult year. In *True Relation* Smith detailed his exploration of the land and involvement with different tribes and tribal leaders, which resulted in trading practices that sustained the colony. Smith also described in this book the famous story of the Indian maiden, Pocahontas, the favorite daughter of Chief Powhatan, who saved his life when he was a prisoner of the chief. Whether fact or fiction, the tale is ingrained in the American historical imagination.

Among others, Robert Beverly (1673—1722), Clerk of the Council of Virginia, published in London in 1705 *The History and Present State of Virginia*, a readable account of the colony and its people. The following selection shows that in those early days Virginians were noted for what has come to be known as southern hospitality:

*The inhabitants are very courteous to travellers, who need no other recommendation, but the being human creatures. A stranger has no more to do, but to inquire upon the road where any gentleman or good housekeeper lives, and there he may depend upon being received with hospitality. This good nature is so general among their people, that the gentry, when they go abroad, order their principal servant to entertain all visitors with everything the plantation affords. And the poor planters who have but one bed, will very often sit up, or lie upon a form or couch all night, to make room for a weary traveller to repose himself after his journey.*

### 1.1.2.2 The New England Colony: The Puritan Ideas and Its Literary Presentation

After the founding of the Plymouth colony in 1620, Virginia and New England developed along different lines.

#### Puritanic Literature

Owing to the large immigration to Boston, Massachusetts in the 1630s, the high

articulation of Puritan cultural ideals, and the early establishment of a college and a printing press in Cambridge, the New England colonies have often been regarded as the center of early American literature.

The religious disputes that prompted settlement in America were topics of early writing. *Of Plymouth Plantation: 1620—1647* (1856), written by William Bradford (1590—1657), a founder and long-term governor of Plymouth Colony, was a clear and compelling account of the colony's beginning, and one of the first histories of European settlement in the New World. In his journal *The History of New England* (two volumes, 1825—1826), John Winthrop (1587/1588—1649), the governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, accounted of the religious foundations of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. And it has been acknowledged as the “central source for the history of Massachusetts in the 1630s and 1640s”. Edward Winslow also recorded a diary of the first years after the Mayflower's arrival. Others like Roger Williams (1603—1683) and Nathaniel Ward (1578—1652) fiercely argued state and church separation. And still others like Thomas Morton (1579?—1647), cared little for the church; Morton's *The New English Canaan* (1637), mocked the religious settlers and declared that the Native Americans were actually better people than the British.

Of the second generation of New England settlers, Cotton Mather (1663—1728), the author of over 400 works, stands out as a theologian and historian. His works were filled with classical allusions and aimed at reinvigorating the waning Puritanism of his day. His best-known works include *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), and *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693). Jonathan Edwards (1703—1758) and George Whitefield (1714—1770) represented the Great Awakening, a religious revival in the early 18th century that asserted strict Calvinism.

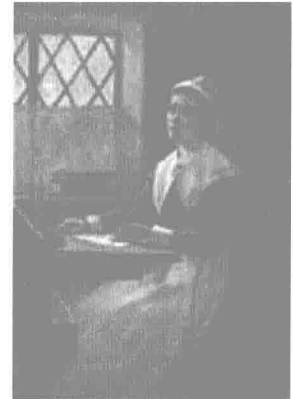
Puritan poetry was highly religious in nature. One of the earliest books of poetry published was the *Bay Psalm Book* (1640), a set of translations of the biblical Psalms by Richard Mather (1596—1669); however, the translators' intention was not to create great literature but to create hymns that could be used in worship. Among lyric poets, the most important figure is Anne Bradstreet (1612—1672), who wrote personal poems about her family and homelife from a religious point of view, as in her well-known *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America* (1650). Michael Wigglesworth (1631—1705) produced the popular long narrative poem *The Day of Doom* (1662), describing the time of

judgment. Edward Taylor (1642—1729), a metaphysical poet and pastor, filled his poems with vivid imagery and was much concerned about how his splendid and exotic images spoke for God.

Puritanic literature formed a distaste for art and for any manifestations of sensual beauty, therefore, the style of their writing was fresh, simple and direct, the rhetoric plain and honest, words simple and spare. The use of metaphors was only to explain their opinions rather than to decorate. They wrote non-fictional prose instead of novels.

## 1.2 Anne Bradstreet (1612–1672): The Tenth Muse

Anne Bradstreet, the first notable poetess in colonial America, was born in Northampton, England, in 1612 into a sturdy Puritan family. Her father, Thomas Dudley, was a steward of the Earl of Lincoln. She grew up in cultured circumstances and was tutored in history, several languages and literature. At the age of sixteen she married Simon in 1628. Anne and Simon, along with Anne's parents, emigrated to America as part of the Winthrop Puritan group in 1630. Both Anne's father and husband were later to serve as governors of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.



A dutiful Puritan wife who had eight children, she, despite poor health, nevertheless found time to write poetry. In 1650, her first book of poetry *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America* was published in London, and its second edition, her self-revised *Several Poems*, was posthumously published in 1678 in the New Continent, making Anne the first female poet ever published in both England and the New World.

Much of Anne's poetry focuses heavily on domestic and religious themes. *Contemplations*, which was not published until the mid-19th century, portrays her religious experiences. Her finest works, focusing on personal experience and everyday life, serve as a document of the struggles of a Puritan wife and mother against the hardships of New England colonial life, as in her best-known *To My Dear and Loving Husband*, *Before the Birth of One of Her Children*, and *Upon the Burning of Our House*, etc..

There was no doubt that the true happiness came from her family life, from the love for her husband, and children.

Anne's style is deceptively simple, yet speaks of a woman of high intelligence and ideals who was very much in love, and had unconditional faith. Her rich vocabulary and use of metaphors, brought a lyrical, yet logical quality to her work which made it pleasant for anyone to read.

Anne Bradstreet was imperfect: she wrote many poems on familiar British themes and imitated British forms. But her talent to capture the colonial experience in poetry established her place as one of America's most outstanding early writers.

### Selections

#### *To My Dear and Loving Husband*<sup>1</sup>

If ever two were one, then surely we<sup>2</sup>.  
If ever man were lov'd by wife, then thee;  
If ever wife was happy in a man,  
Compare with me ye women if you can.

I prize thy love more than whole Mines of Gold,  
Or all the riches that the East<sup>3</sup> doth hold.  
My love is such that Rivers cannot quench<sup>4</sup>,  
Nor ought<sup>5</sup> but love from thee, give recompence.

Thy love is such I can no way repay,  
The heavens reward thee manifold<sup>6</sup> I pray.  
Then while we live, in love let's so persevere,  
That when we live no more, we may live ever.

## Notes

1. The short poem, written between 1641 and 1643, was from *Several Poems*. Anne Bradstreet wrote on the everlasting theme of love to eulogize the true love between her husband and her. It is written in iambic pentameter, rhyming aa, bb, cc, dd, ee, ff. In other words, it is written in couplet.
2. we: Anne and her husband Simon Bradstreet
3. the East: East Indies
4. quench: put out (a fire)
5. ought: anything
6. manifold: abundantly

## List of Works

John Smith (1579?—1631) 约翰·史密斯

*A True Relation of Virginia* (1608) 《关于弗吉尼亚的真实叙述》

Robert Beverly (1673—1722) 罗伯特·贝弗利

*The History and Present State of Virginia* (1705) 《弗吉尼亚的历史与现状》

William Bradford (1590—1657) 威廉·布拉德福德

*Of Plymouth Plantation: 1620—1647* (1856) 《普利茅斯种植园史》

John Winthrop (1587/1588—1649) 约翰·温斯罗普

*The History of New England* (two volumes, 1825—1826) 《新英格兰史》

Thomas Morton (1579?—1647) 托马斯·莫顿

*The New English Canaan* (1637) 《新英格兰迦南》

Cotton Mather (1663—1728) 科顿·马瑟

*Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702) 《基督在北美的辉煌》

*Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693) 《无形世界之奇迹》

Richard Mather (1596—1669) 理查德·马瑟

*Bay Psalm Book* (1640) 《马萨诸塞海湾地区赞美诗篇》

Anne Bradstreet (1612—1672) 安妮·布拉德斯特里特

*Contemplations* 《沉思集》

*The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America* (1650) 《最近在北美出现的第十位缪斯》

## Sketches of American Literature

*Several Poems* (1678) 《布拉德斯特里特诗集》

(*Several Poems Compiled with Great Variety of Wit and Learning*

《一些风格各异、充满智慧的诗歌》)

*To My Dear and Loving Husband* 《献给我亲爱的丈夫》

*Before the Birth of One of Her Children* 《写在孩子出生之前》

*Upon the Burning of Our House* 《家居被焚之后所作》

### **Exercises**

#### **Questions for discussion.**

What is the significance of American Puritanism in American literature?

# The Revolutionary Period (1776—1820)

## 2.1 Overall View

### 2.1.1 Historical Context

#### The Emergence of a Nation

The Battle of Lexington, in 1775, served as a preface to the American Revolution. In 1776, *The Declaration of Independence* was signed, legally marking the United States as an independent nation. England officially recognized American independence in 1783; the colonists began to call themselves Americans, distinguishing their identity from their European ancestors. The American Revolution was the result of a series of social, political, and intellectual transformations in early American society and government, collectively referred to as the American Enlightenment.

Many fundamental issues of national governance were settled with the ratification of the United States Constitution in 1788, followed by The United States Bill of Rights (1791). The American shift to liberal republicanism, and the gradually increasing democracy, caused an upheaval of traditional social hierarchy and gave birth to the ethic that has formed a core of political values in the United States.

#### American Enlightenment

The American Enlightenment is the intellectual thriving period in the United States in the mid-to-late 18th century, especially as it relates to American Revolution on the one hand and the European Enlightenment on the other. Influenced by the scientific revolution of the 17th century and the humanist period during the Renaissance, the Enlightenment took scientific reasoning and applied it to human nature, society, and religion.

Politically, the age is distinguished by an emphasis upon liberty, republicanism and



religious tolerance — culminating in the drafting of the United States Declaration of Independence and Constitution. Religiously, attempts to reconcile science and religion resulted in a rejection of prophecy, miracle and revealed religion, often in preference for Deism. And religious freedom for minority denominations was fought for and eventually attained: according to the founding fathers, the United States should be a country where peoples of all faiths could live in peace and mutual benefit. The most important leaders of the American Enlightenment include Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and James Wilson.

### Deism

Deism is a theological position concerning the relationship between “the Creator” and the natural world. Deistic viewpoints emerged during the scientific revolution of the 17th century Europe and came to exert a powerful influence during the 18th century enlightenment.

Deism holds that God does not intervene with the functioning of the natural world in any way, allowing it to run according to the laws of nature. For Deists, human beings can only know God via reason and the observation of nature, but not by revelation or supernatural manifestations (such as miracles). Deism is related to naturalism because it credits the formation of life and the universe to a higher power, using only natural processes. Deism may also include a spiritual element, involving experiences of God and nature.

Deism greatly influenced the thought of intellectuals and Founding Fathers of America, including John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, perhaps George Washington and, especially, Thomas Jefferson. The most articulate exponent was Thomas Paine, the author of *The Age of Reason*.

### 2.1.2 Literary Trends

Cultural revolutions, unlike military revolutions, cannot be successfully imposed but must grow from the soil of shared experience. Revolutions are expressions of the heart of the people; they grow gradually out of new sensibilities and wealth of experience. It would take 50 years of accumulated history for America to earn its