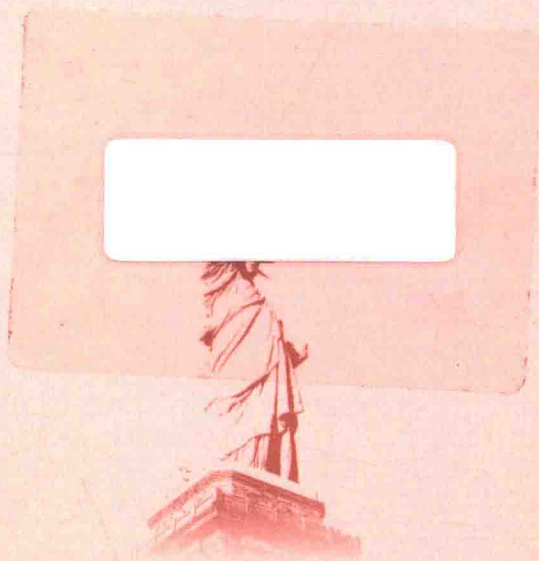


新编 美国文学史及选读

朱玉英 / 主 编
许晓萍 / 副主编



NEW AMERICAN LITERATURE:
A SHORT HISTORY AND SELECTED READINGS

Preface

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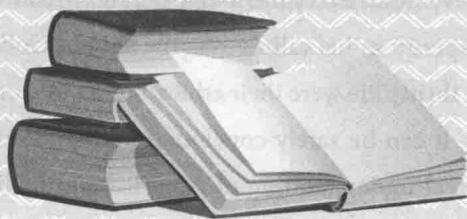
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Part One

The Literature of Colonial America



Historical Background

Christopher Columbus, an Italian explorer, made a famous voyage in 1492. Afterwards many European settlers came to American continent to escape religious persecution and to build a new Garden of Eden. Finally the first permanent English settlement in North America was established at Jamestown, Virginia in 1607. In the early period, American literature began with the orally transmitted myths, legends, tales and lyrics (always songs) of Indian cultures. The Indians also made a contribution to American vocabulary. Some Indian words are still used in everyday American English today such as “canoe,” “tobacco,” “potato,” “moccasin,” “persimmon,” and “totem.”

American Puritanism Puritans was the name given in the 16th century to the more extreme Protestants who thought the English Reformation had not gone far enough. They wanted to purify their national church. In the 17th century many Puritans emigrated to the New World, where they sought to found a holy Commonwealth in New England. Puritanism remained the dominant cultural force in that area into the 19th century. Puritans believed in the doctrine that John Calvin, the great French Theologian preached in Geneva.

- Predestination: God decided everything before it occurred.
- Original sin: Human beings were born to be evil and this original sin can be passed down from generation to generation.
- Total depravity: Man is completely depraved.
- Limited atonement: Only the “selected” can be saved.

Puritans were convinced that human beings were predestined by God before they were born. Some were God’s chosen people while others were predestined to be damned to hell. They also believed that everyone had a calling, which was given by God. The success of one’s work or the prosperity in his calling was the sign of God’s elect. Therefore, working hard and living a moral and thrifty life were their ethics.

It can be safely concluded that without some understanding of Puritanism, there can be no real understanding of America and its literature. Optimistic puritans have exerted a great influence on American literature. The Puritans dreamed of living under a perfect order and worked with indomitable courage and confident hope toward building a new Garden of Eden in America. Fired with such a sense of mission, the Puritans looked at even the worst of life in the face with tremendous optimism.

American Puritanism contributes to the development of symbolism^[1], a widely used

Note [1] symbolism: the use of symbols in literary works. A symbol refers to something that represents or stands for abstract idea and deep meaning.

technique. To the pious Puritans the physical, phenomenal world was nothing but a symbol of God. Besides, Puritans thought that all the simple objects existing in the world connoted deep meaning.

With regard to their writing, the style is fresh, simple and direct. The rhetoric is plain and honest, not without a touch of nobility often traceable to the direct influence of the Bible.

William Bradford (1590–1657)

William Bradford, who signed the Mayflower Compact while aboard the *Mayflower* in 1620, was an English leader of the Separatist^[1] settlers of the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts. He was elected to be the Plymouth Colony governor for about thirty years. His journal published as *Of Plymouth Plantation* describes early settlers' life from 1621 to 1646. It can be regarded as a retrospective account of his recollections and observations. In this work, Bradford was mainly concerned with the spiritual pursuit of the Plymouth group. More than once he compared the Puritans in Massachusetts to the Israelites led by Moses in the Old Testament. Bradford is also credited as the first civil authority to designate what popular American culture now views as Thanksgiving in the United States.

John Winthrop (1588–1649)

John Winthrop, born into a wealthy Puritan family, once attended Trinity College, Cambridge. Later he worked as a lawyer, but was forced to resign the position due to a crackdown on Nonconformists under King Charles I. Then Winthrop led the first large wave of migrants from England in 1630 and became one of the leading figures in the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the first major settlement in New England after Plymouth Colony. He had even served as the governor for twelve years. His writings and vision of the colony as a Puritan "city upon a hill" has exerted a great influence on the government and religion of neighboring colonies. He is now known for *A Model of Christian Charity* and *The History of New England*.

Anne Bradstreet (1612–1672)

Anne Bradstreet was the first colonial female poet to be published in the New World. She was both the daughter and the wife of Massachusetts Bay Colony governors. As an accomplished poet, she set a good example for other female writers to follow in an era when women generally tended to family and domestic matters. Through her poetry she eloquently expressed her concerns with Puritans' religious experience, family life and early settlers' lives. Bradstreet's first volume of poetry was published as *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* in 1650. Today she is recognized for

Note [1] separatist: Puritan who wants to break free from the Church of England

her *Contemplations*.

Edward Taylor (1645–1729)

Edward Taylor, born into a nonconformist family in Leicestershire, England, immigrated in 1668 to the Massachusetts Bay Colony after the restoration of the monarchy and the Act of Uniformity under Charles II. Soon she was admitted to Harvard College and upon graduation in 1671 became a pastor and physician at Westfield, on the remote western frontier of Massachusetts, where he remained until his death. Edward Taylor wrote his poetry during the last years of the Puritan theocracy and some are considered the finest poetry written in Colonial America. His poems were concerned with the inner spiritual life of Puritan believers. In his poems, Taylor hoped for a “rebirth” of the “Puritan Way.”

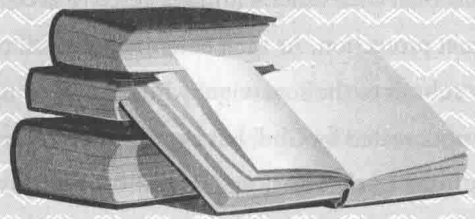
The Witchcraft Trials in the 1690s

In the 17th century, the Puritan community was greatly troubled by witchcraft trials from time to time, since the supernatural could not be explained in a natural way. Gradually many people began to associate some bizarre events with the Devil, thus witchcraft hunting and trials in New England became widespread. Some young girls and lonely old women were arrested and put on trial as witches. A number of these people were even put to death for “selling their souls” to the Devil.

Among these trials, the most notorious might be the Salem witch trials, which involved a series of hearings and prosecutions of people accused of witchcraft in colonial Massachusetts in 1692. When a group of young girls began to have strange behaviors, the bewildered community believed that it must have something to do with Satan. Consequently, some innocent people were condemned to death in these trials. The Salem witch trials showed the psychological environment of the time and the Puritans’ strange beliefs: To many Puritans of the time, witchcraft and other forms of evil were an absolutely real part of everyday life.

Part Two

The Literature of Reason and Revolution



Historical Background

Enlightenment Movement The 18th-century American Enlightenment was a movement marked by an emphasis on rationality rather than tradition, scientific inquiry instead of unquestioning religious dogma, and representative government in place of monarchy. Enlightenment thinkers and writers were devoted to the ideals of justice, liberty and equality as the natural rights of man. The colonists who would form a new nation were firm believers in the power of reason. They were ambitious, inquisitive, optimistic, practical, politically astute and self-reliant.

Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727) Due to the great achievement of Sir Isaac Newton, Newtonian ideas can be seen as a general symbol of world outlook in Enlightenment thinking. Through the Newtonian prism, the universe is seen as a mechanism operated by a rational formula. Mankind is supposed to have the ability to discover and unfold all “Nature’s Laws.” Newtonian assumptions also help to shape a new image of God, different from that of Puritanism. This God is revealed in nature, not in the Bible. Besides, he argued that man can be perfected through education. In this religious thinking, all men are created equal. This idea would eventually appear in *The Declaration of Independence*.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and John Locke (1632–1704) Revolting against the intuitive philosophy of medieval scholasticism, both Thomas Hobbes and John Locke continued to influence people in the 18th century. Thomas Hobbes, an English philosopher, is best known today for his work on political philosophy. His *Leviathan* (1651) established social contract theory, the foundation of later Western political philosophy. To Hobbes, men are by nature enemies and at war with each other. Humans agree to accept certain laws of nature out of fear and the need for mutual protection. As men enter into a social contract to escape the state of war and to keep peace, they submit to the sovereign, whose power must be absolute. Hobbes also argued that government was not created by God, but by men themselves.

John Locke, an English philosopher, is widely regarded as one of the most influential Enlightenment thinkers. Apart from his contribution to epistemology following the tradition of Sir Francis Bacon, he also exerted a great influence on political philosophy. Locke believed in man’s natural rights of life, liberty and property. His observation of human nature is somewhat different. He argued that every person was born with a blank slate, upon which experience inscribed its lessons. In addition, men are equal and they enter into a social contract by reason. Here Locke’s understanding of social contract also differs fundamentally from that of Hobbes. Locke argued that the institution of government must be established with the consent of those who subject themselves to government. He further emphasized that the social contract must

involve the individual's consent to submit to the will of the majority. Some of these ideas are finally reflected in *The Declaration of Independence*.

Deism Deism, a natural religion, prevails during the Age of Enlightenment. Deists believe in the existence of God, on purely rational grounds, without any reliance on revealed religion or religious authority or holy text. They reason that God is indeed the creator of the universe, “the maker of the clock.” The best way to worship God is to study his handiwork, namely, the natural world and the human world, and to do good things to mankind. This is a new concept of the universe which was radically different from the dominating Christian position of original sin and predestination. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), a French deist, declared to a bewildered world that man is by nature good and free in his famous *Social Contract* (1762) for example. Deism simplified the Christian religion in such a way that the rights of religion became consistent with the rights of government and rights of the individual. Thus deism was an integral part of the American Constitution and was embraced by the American Founding Fathers, especially Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.

American Revolution—The Independence War (1775–1783) By 1733 Great Britain had established 13 colonies in North America, but strict rules made by English government hampered the economic development of the colonies. The British wanted the colonies to remain politically and economically dependent on the mother country, which led to the colonies' intense strain with England. The conflict became fiercer, after Britain began to impose more and more taxes on the colonies to pay the cost of fighting the Seven Years' war while refusing to offer them a seat in British Parliament. Consequently the colonists united together to protest with the slogan “no taxation without representation.” The Boston Tea Party in 1773 was the culmination of the resistance movement against the Tea Act passed by the British government. The first shots were finally fired in Lexington, when some British soldiers went to Concord to search for weapons and “rebels” in 1775. Thus broke out the American War of Independence.

During the Revolution, the writers held vitally important places in the movement for American independence. The 13 original American states were persuaded to become a single nation by the arguments of statesmen and men of letters. Freedom was won as much by their fiery and inspiring speeches and writings as by the weapons of Washington and Lafayette.

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790)

Benjamin Franklin, America's “first great man of letters,” embodied the Enlightenment ideal of human rationality. When Franklin died, one of his fellow Americans said, “His shadow lies heavier than any other man's on this young nation.”

Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston, Massachusetts. At the age of twelve, he started as an apprentice with his older brother. Ten years later, he opened his own printing shop. His

newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* became very popular and profitable. A few years later, *Poor Richard's Almanac*^[1] was released and soon became the best selling book in the colonies. Soon he became the most active printer and was appointed the official printer of Pennsylvania. Afterwards Franklin and some fellow printers, known as the Leather Apron Club (because most of them wore leather aprons) started a lending library that was open to everyone. They would pool their money and buy books, which people could borrow. In 1731 the first lending library in America opened. And other towns began to imitate the library, until reading became fashionable. When he was forty-two, Franklin retired from printing to explore his other interests. He was not only devoted to inventing but also experimenting, of which the most fascinating one is how he got electricity with a kite.

During the fight for independence, Franklin, as a statesman, was sent to Europe to represent the colonies. He signed *The Declaration of Independence* in 1776 and the *Treaty of Alliance with France* in 1778. When the colonists won their independence in 1781, Franklin helped negotiate the peace with England and signed what ultimately became known as the *Treaty of Peace with Great Britain* in 1782.

Franklin published *Poor Richard's Almanac*, an annual collection of proverbs continuously from 1732 to 1758. Its main features are as follows:

- practical and useful
- interesting by creating the character "Poor Richard"
- continuation of simple but realistic story about Richard, his wife and family
- including many "sayings" about saving money and working hard, some of which are known to most Americans today:

God helps them who help themselves.

Early to bed, and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.

Diligence is the mother of good luck.

Autobiography is an introduction of his life to his own son, including four parts written in different times. It is the first success story of self-made Americans.

Apart from his literary achievement, Franklin played an important role in establishing the University of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Hospital and the American Philosophical Society. He was also called "the new Prometheus who had stolen fire (electricity in this case) from heaven." Everything seems to meet in this one man—"Jack of all trades." Herman Melville thus described him as "*master of each and mastered by none.*" In many ways, Franklin's life illustrates the impact of the Enlightenment on a gifted individual. Self-educated but well-read in John Locke, Joseph

Note [1] Almanac: a popular form of practical literature containing much useful information for farmers and sailors

Addison and other Enlightenment writers, Franklin learned from them to apply reason to his own life and to break with tradition, in particular the old-fashioned Puritan tradition, when it threatened to smother his ideals.

As an author, Franklin's style is quite modern, and his works show a return to their "plain style." At the same time, there is something "anti-literary" about Franklin. He had no liking for poetry and felt that writing should always have a practical purpose. In the language of his writing, Franklin admirably reflects both Locke's psychology and Locke's political theory, and influences other writers in their choices of language, subject matter and worldview.

Selected Reading

The Autobiography

An Excerpt from Part Three

I had begun in 1733 to study languages. I soon made myself so much a Master of the French as to be able to read the Books with ease. I then undertook the Italian. An Acquaintance, who was also learning it, used often to tempt me to play Chess with him. Finding this took up too much of the time I had to spare for Study, I at length refus'd to play anymore, unless on this Condition, that the Victor in every game should have a Right to impose a Task, either in Parts of the Grammar to be got by heart, or in Translations, etc., which Tasks the Vanquished was to perform upon Honor, before our next Meeting. As we play'd pretty equally, we thus beat one another into that Language. I afterwards with a little Pains-taking, acquired as much of the Spanish as to read their books also.

Thomas Paine (1737–1809)

As a pamphleteer, Thomas Paine supported the American War of Independence with his powerful writings.

Thomas Paine was born in Thetford, England. At the age of 37, he came to America, with a letter of introduction from Franklin. In his adopted country, the United States, Paine stood on the side against his native country. He studied pamphlets Americans had written in opposition to British policies in the colonies and soon established himself as a revolutionary journalist and pamphleteer. Paine went to France to participate in the French Revolution in the 1790s. It was Paine who famously declared: "Where liberty is, there is my country."

Published in 1776, *Common Sense* helped to inspire the nation to support the war. Many at the beginning were still uncertain about the need for independence. *Common Sense* persuaded many to support the revolution in their own way. Paine made these points in it: He denounced

monarchies as outdated and advocated a new form of government called republicanism; he argued that the colonists were not English and should not want to be considered English; he encouraged Americans to build a new country where freedom prevails and where immigrants are welcome.

The American Crisis (1776) was a collection of articles written by Thomas Paine during the American Revolution. After the shots were fired at Lexington, Massachusetts, Paine shouldered a gun and joined the army. But after a series of losses of battles, desertions from the Revolutionary Army increased. George Washington retreated across the Delaware and a defeat seemed imminent. A week before Christmas, he said in a letter to his brother: "I think the game is very near up." Paine, however, faced up to the situation. On December 19, he published the first of the *Crisis* papers. The paper boosted the morale. Enlistment in the army increased. Washington ordered that the paper be read to every regiment.

In defense of the French Revolution Paine wrote and published *The Rights of Man* (1791). In it, Paine advocated four key rights: *liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression*. Paine also assumed that the right to engage in revolution is inalienable. He made his argument for democracy from the state of nature and from the Bible. To see God and Nature as Reason, as we remember, is a legacy of Enlightenment.

The Age of Reason (1794–1795) systematically criticized the organized religions (the Church of England) and many of their doctrines and beliefs, promoted deism as "the one true religion," and emphasized philosophy and scientific study as the only source of true knowledge.

Paine's approach to writing is pragmatic. He responds to contemporary events in order to inspire, not to be original. His style may be simple but powerful.

Selected Reading

The American Crisis

An Excerpt

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: It is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated. Britain, with an army to enforce her tyranny, has declared that she has a right (not only to TAX) but "to BIND us in ALL CASES WHATSOEVER" and if being bound in that

manner, is not slavery, then is there not such a thing as slavery upon earth. Even the expression is impious; for so unlimited a power can belong only to God.

Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826)

Thomas Jefferson served as the third President of the United States. As one of the Founding Fathers, Jefferson advocated democracy, republicanism and individual rights, which motivated American colonists to break from Great Britain and form a new nation.

Thomas Jefferson was born on the Virginia frontier and graduated from William and Mary College. He read widely in the classics. Like Franklin, Jefferson exemplified the ideals of his time. He accepted the main tenets of deism. And he believed in natural rights, political equality and natural altruism. He was deeply interested in science and agricultural experiments. He was also an architect, a scholar and an educator. Indeed, he established the University of Virginia and even drew the architectural plans. In his political thinking, he believed that the best government was the government that governed least. Early in his life, he had an interest in poetry and novels, which he later gave up.

The Declaration of Independence, drafted in June, 1776, was at once a national symbol of liberty and a monument to Jefferson as a statesman and author. Embedded in the political philosophy which Locke and the continental philosophers had expressed, Jefferson summarized this philosophy as “self-evident truths” and set forth a long list of grievances against King George III in order to justify the separation of the colonies from Britain.

It consists of 5 sections: the introduction, the preamble, the indictment of George III, the denunciation of the British people and the conclusion. On July 4th, 1776, the *Declaration* was officially adopted by Congress “...We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...”

Selected Reading

The Declaration of Independence

An Excerpt

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness^[1]. —That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just power from the consent of the governed.

Note [1] Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness: based on the natural rights as those to “life, liberty and property” identified by John Locke in *Second Treatise of Government*