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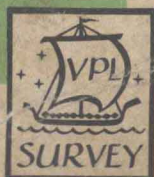


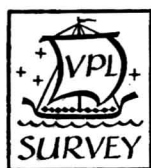
The American Romantics

1800-1860

Prefatory Essay by

VAN WYCK BROOKS





THE
AMERICAN
ROMANTICS

1800-1860



WITH A PREFATORY ESSAY BY

Van Wyck Brooks

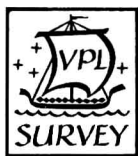
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COLONIAL AND FEDERAL TO 1800

*General Introduction and Preface by
the Editors*



THE AMERICAN ROMANTICS · 1800-1860

Prefatory Essay by Van Wyck Brooks



NATION AND REGION · 1860-1900

Prefatory Essay by Howard Mumford Jones



THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Prefatory Essay by Malcolm Cowley

EDITORS' NOTE



No student of American literature can feel that he has made a reasonably full perusal of the materials unless he has read complete Thoreau's *Walden*, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, and a novel or two each of James, Hemingway, and Faulkner. These authors are most profitably read in full-length works; but before the reading revolution occasioned by inexpensive paperback reprints, anthologists were forced to present these authors in more or less fragmented form. This is no longer necessary. The teacher today can include in his course, in addition to anthologized material, such representative works as those mentioned above without feeling that he is demanding from his students an unreasonable expenditure for books.

In view of this change in the practical realities of teaching courses in American literature, we have felt that it is both wise and necessary to omit from our anthology those authors who would be read under separate cover anyway. Moreover, by deleting such material, we have been able to provide a wider selection than is usual from such authors, for example, as Edward Taylor and Emily Dickinson, who most probably would not be read in separate editions. Given the present textbook situation, we feel that these volumes maintain the proper balance of materials, meeting the widest demands of common practice, flexibility, and usefulness.

Milton R. Stern
Seymour L. Gross

PREFACE

By Van Wyck Brooks



The period of the "American Romantics" corresponds almost exactly with the life and work of Washington Irving, who first ascended the Hudson River in 1800 and who died in 1859. On the Hudson, as a boy of seventeen, he heard from an Indian trader the later well-known legends of the river, and he died at a moment when Hawthorne and Emerson, Melville and Thoreau had published many of the writings for which they are famous. The arch-romantic Irving had not only written the American stories "Rip van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," giving his own country a color of tradition, but he had lived for seventeen years in England, Italy, Germany, and France as what Henry James was to call a "passionate pilgrim." He had signalized the change from the rationalistic eighteenth century, following Sir Walter Scott and the painter Turner in his love for the medieval and the picturesque, for the ancient manor-houses of England, the moldering castles of the Rhine, and the tales of bandits in the Italian mountains. He had lived in the Alhambra, the ruined old palace in Spain where roses and weeds grew wild on the terraces and gates, while beggars hovered in the grottoes and in holes in the walls, and he had written about the conquistadores who had sailed fabulous seas in quest of fountains of youth and golden temples. Then, after returning to America, where he wrote a life of Washington, he had found the picturesque in his *Tour on the Prairies*, when he had seen on the plains the perfect

resemblance of a Moorish castle that might have had gloomy dungeons in its ruins.

As a type of the romantic epoch, Irving had much in common with Fenimore Cooper, Hawthorne, and particularly Poe, who shared his taste for the Gothic style in buildings and in atmosphere, though he had a profound feeling for the "glory that was Greece." At school in England, in a "misty" village, Poe lived in an old Gothic house with pointed windows, gates and ceilings of oak that left traces of shadowy glamour in some of his tales, and there he had almost certainly seen the Elgin Marbles that a friend of his foster father knew so well. In fact, John Galt had sailed with the marbles from Greece. With the black military cloak that Poe wore after he left West Point, he sometimes had the air of a Spanish brigand, and as a romantic, pre-eminently so, he shared, for the stories of Hoffmann and Tieck, the similar congenial feeling of Irving and Hawthorne. Poe's fine essay on Hawthorne's tales sufficiently revealed the traits these two authors had in common, remote as they were from the "toosey-woosey," Fenimore Cooper's phrase for the typically American raptures over ivied ruins. But toosey-woosey might have been, at times, applied to Longfellow in "Outre-Mer" and some of his earlier poems, expressing feelings that resembled Irving's in their love of the picturesque as well as of broken hearts and lovelorn maidens. Longfellow's vigor as a poet was revealed a little later in his sonnets, his translations of Dante, and his ballads of the Vikings.

Years before Longfellow, Fenimore Cooper had achieved universal fame and Audubon was well known as a draftsman and a writer, the "American woodsman," so called in England, where he also spent three years and found a fine engraver for his colored drawings. Audubon, with his wolf-skin coat and his long flowing frontiersman's locks, represented fully the romance of the forest, which covered in his time most of the country, and, as he grew up near Philadelphia, he suggested the old French *voyageurs* in his daring and dash, sometimes dressing in dungarees, with a red handkerchief round his neck, rings in his ears, and a long mustache. He lived at a time when statesmen were actors, when real actors like Junius Brutus Booth played up and down the Western rivers, and when the American pupils of Benjamin West in London painted one another in

Highland dress and Spanish costume. Looking at times like a missionary priest, with the hair that flowed over his shoulders, Audubon had hunted once with Daniel Boone, and he lived for years in woodland cabins, or in Labrador, or on the Missouri River, or in Florida with the frigate pelicans and the sandhill cranes. Scott, with his scenes of Scottish mountains, romanticized for Audubon, if they had needed romanticizing, the forests of the West; for readers were so pleased with the Waverley novels, at this early nineteenth-century time, that they put them under their pillows to dream about. Years before even Audubon, William Bartram's *Travels* had described the Southern woods and mountains, leaving in the minds of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the French Chateaubriand images that appeared in *Les Natchez*, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Ruth."

The many-sided Cooper, who was a social critic too, and who was often called the American Scott, had all of Irving's love of the picturesque and found it, as Audubon found it, in the forest. Cooper's *Pathfinder*, as Balzac said, was the "school of study for literary landscape-painters," and "he would have uttered the last word of our art" if his painting of character had equaled his painting of nature. Natty Bumppo, the tall, gaunt hunter with his shirt of forest green and his foxskin cap and buckskin leggings, the most authentic character that Cooper ever drew, stood for the romantic belief in the natural man. This "myth," so called in later times, which Audubon embodied, this core of Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*, was the core also of the Utopian hope of the Western American frontier and all the contemporary dreams of a wilderness Eden. Nearly two hundred communities were built on a faith in the American Adam, the best-known of these being Brook Farm, and even Bishop Berkeley had come to America looking for another golden age in the westering course of empire. William Blake had faith in it, and there were many Brook Farmers who saw the golden age just round the corner. This was the basis of Emerson's "self-reliance" and Thoreau's philosophy of Walden. Fenimore Cooper was well aware of all that was absurd in some of the phases of the romantic movement, and one of his characters was "Ione S.," the pen-name of Miss Phoebe Jones who wrote the poem addressed

to her spirit-husband. This was the masculine essence, all soul and romance, whom she was to find in the regions of space and with whom she would finally soar to their native star. But no one had more than Cooper of the real romantic feeling; no one knew better the "pleasure in the pathless woods" or Byron's "rapture on the lonely shore."

The romantic movement, the romantic feeling characterized an expansive age, confident, with a belief in human nature, an age of exploration when Americans were bent on discovering the West, the Indians, the birds, the native fauna and flora. Bryant freed the country from the "faded fancies of an elder world" and gave his readers the bobolink and the fringed gentian. George Catlin lived on the Missouri River among the Sioux and Mandans there, John Lloyd Stephens uncovered the ruined Central American cities, Herman Melville voyaged among the Polynesian islands, and Whitman scanned with an affectionate eye the America of the present. The general confidence in man and the faith in his possibilities created the movement to liberate the slaves, a movement that was best expressed in the poems of Whittier and in the *Biglow Papers* of James Russell Lowell. The time of the American Romantics was a time of diastole when the chambers of the heart were filled with blood, when life was at high tide and literature came into being in almost every corner of the young republic.



THE AMERICAN ROMANTICS
1800-1860

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WASHINGTON IRVING

(1783–1859)



America's first internationally acclaimed writer of fiction and polite letters was born in New York City, the son of a substantial and rather rigidly pious hardware merchant. The son turned out to be neither mercantile about his goals nor grim about his values. Given a random education because of his delicate health as a youth, Irving early developed an aristocratic dilettante's taste for the theater, for travel, for sophisticated company, and for light literature. His temperament remained the trademark of his existence in his conservative politics, in the generally easy qualities of his life, and in the good-natured, detached tolerance with which he genially infused his writing. The masters he loved were Addison, Fielding, Goldsmith, Hoffman, Scott, Sterne, Swift, and Tieck. Despite the fact that he consciously worked hard at writing, he always maintained the outward attitude that literature was the casual leisure amusement of a gentleman. Had he been born half a century earlier, he might well have been a mild and amusing Loyalist macaroni.

When he was nineteen he wrote the "Jonathan Oldstyle" papers for his brother Peter's *Morning Chronicle*. Then he traveled in Europe (1804–1806), where he became a friend of the famous American painter, Washington Allston. When he returned to New York, he became an attorney (to the surprise of his friends in the fashionable younger set), but his immediate work was not the practice of law so much as it was writing *Salmagundi* (1807–1808) with his brother, William, and a literary friend, James Kirke Paulding (1778–1860). In 1809 he moved yet closer to literature as a career with the delightful