The Marvels of Spain—and America

In 1494 a man who had crossed the Atlantic in a large ship returned home to amaze those whom he had left behind with tales of a new world full of "marvels." None of those who listened to him had accomplished anything remotely like this. None had heard of this other world, let alone seen it, and none could begin to comprehend what its discovery might mean for their own familiar universe. As they listened with rapt attention, the voyager told of things undreamed of, plants and animals and most of all strange peoples whose uncanny customs, costumes, and beliefs astonished all who heard him.

The man in question might have been Christopher Columbus or any of the dozens of Europeans who accompanied him on his first voyage, but he was not. In fact, this teller of tales did join in that voyage, but he had not sailed from Palos, Spain, with the other men on August 6, 1492, and had not been with them when, at two in the morning of October 12, they sighted the Bahamian island they named San Salvador. Twice he crossed the Atlantic with Columbus, but in reverse: first to Spain from the Indies and then back again. We do not know his original name, but we know that he was a Taíno Indian from the Bahamas, one of seven natives whom Columbus seized and took to Spain. There he was baptized and renamed Diego Colón, after the son of Columbus himself. (Colón was the Spanish version of the family's name.) Of the other natives, all of whom were similarly rechristened, one remained in Spain, where he died within a few years. Four others died of sickness on the passage back to America with Columbus and Colón. Colón and the sixth man escaped the same fate only "by a hair's breadth," as the fleet's physician, Diego Alvarez Chanca, wrote in his important letter on the second voyage. Returned to the Caribbean, the two served as translators for the much larger party of Spaniards, perhaps fifteen hundred strong, who arrived in seventeen ships early in November 1493. Colón himself already had seen service as an intermediary during the first voyage.

Of the two men, only Colón is reported by the historian Andrés Bermúdez, who knew Columbus and used the mariner's own lost account of the second voyage, to have regaled the other natives with tales of "the things which he had seen in Castile and the marvels of Spain, ... the great cities and fortresses and churches, ... the people and horses and animals, ... the great nobility and wealth of the sovereigns and great lords, ... the kinds of food, ... the festivals and tournaments [and] bull-fighting." Perhaps the other man had died by this point in the second voyage. Perhaps Columbus singled out Colón for special mention because Colón had learned Castilian well enough to speak it and had shown himself to be an intelligent man and a good guide. He was to accompany Columbus on the whole of this voyage, which lasted three years.
The story of Colón catches in miniature the extraordinary changes that were to occur as natives of the Old World encountered natives of the New for the first time in recorded history. His story reminds us first that discovery was mutual rather than one sided. To be sure, far more Europeans voyaged to America than Americans to Europe, and they sent home thousands of reports and letters detailing what they saw and did in the New World. Because many of these European travelers came to America to stay, however, the Indians soon had a colonial imitation of Europe developing before their eyes, complete with fortresses, churches, horses, new foods (on the second voyage, Columbus brought wheat, melons, onions, radishes, salad greens, grapevines, sugar cane, and various fruit trees), and much else that Colón in 1493 could have found only in Europe. Over time the natives of America could discover Europe encroaching on their villages and fields as the imported European landscape vied with their own. Europe was present in the textiles on the colonists’ bodies, in the tools in their hands (for both of which the American Indians traded), and in the institutions of the church and state (slavery being the most obvious example) that had begun to reshape the identities and reorganize the lives of Native American peoples. In such concrete terms a new world was being created in the West Indies. It was not the new world Columbus himself was speaking of near the end of his life when he wrote in 1500 to the Spanish sovereigns Ferdinand and Isabella that he had “brought under [their] dominion . . . another world, whereby Spain, which was called poor, is now most rich.” The new world that mattered was not just an expanse of space previously unknown to Europeans; it was a genuinely new set of social relationships that would evolve over the next centuries as Europe and the Americas continued to interact. With the European introduction of African slaves early in the sixteenth century, the terms of this new world became much more complex. The cultural and social relations of Americans took their origin in a great mixing of peoples from the whole Atlantic basin during the first century and a half after 1492.

Discovery began with wonder—that of Colón’s listeners on his return in 1494 and that of Columbus as he descanted on the green beauty of the islands—evoking a mood that has remained strong in American writing ever since: he saw “trees of a thousand kinds” on San Salvador in November 1492, trees that seemed to “touch the sky . . . as green and as lovely as they are in Spain in May.” But beyond that transcendent moment, discovery entailed a many-sided process of influence and exchange that ultimately produced the hybrid cultural universe of the Atlantic world, of which the English colonies were one small part. Much of this universe came through struggle rather than cooperation. Each people used its own traditions or elements recently borrowed from others to endure or conquer or outwit its opposite numbers, and violence often swallowed up the primal wonder glimpsed in the earliest documents. With gunpowder and steel, Europeans had the technological edge in warfare, and it would seem that—despite centuries of propaganda to the contrary—they took violence more seriously than did the American Indians. The natives at first found the scale of European warfare appalling. In New England, the colonists’ native allies against the Pequot tribe in 1637 complained that the English manner of fighting, as soldier John Underhill noted in his News from America (1638), “[was] too furious, and slay[ed] too many men.” The natives were quick to adopt European weapons and tactics,
however, applying them to their own disputes and to their disputes with the Europeans. The ferocity of what Europeans have called the "Indian wars" was the violent recoil in the face of violence from interlopers who threatened the very life of the native peoples.

Almost literally from 1492, native peoples began to die in large numbers, if not from war then from enslavement, brutal mistreatment, despair, or disease. One of the more insidious forms of "exchange" involved the transfer to the American Indians of the microbes to which Europeans had become inured but to which the Indians had virtually no resistance. Nothing better displays the isolation of the continents and the drama of encounter that began in 1492 than the epidemic disasters that smallpox, measles, typhus, and other Old World maladies unleashed on the Native Americans. Whole populations plummeted as such diseases, combined with the other severe stresses placed on the natives, spread throughout the Caribbean and then on the mainland of Central and South America. The institutional disease of slavery further decimated the native peoples. It is widely agreed that the original population of the island of Hispaniola (estimated at anywhere from one hundred thousand to eight million in 1492) plunged once the Spanish took over the island, partly through disease and partly through the abuses of the encomienda system of virtual enslavement. In the face of this sudden decline in available native labor, Spain introduced African slavery into Hispaniola as early as 1501. By the middle of the sixteenth century the native population had been so completely displaced by African slaves that the Spanish historian Antonio de Herrera called the island "an effigy or an image of Ethiopia itself." Thus the destruction of one people was accompanied by the displacement and enslavement of another. By that point, the native "wonder" of discovery was all but unrecoverable.

It would be inaccurate to picture the Indians, however, as merely victims, suffering decline. The natives made shrewd use of the European presence in America to forward their own aims, as Colón reminds us. In 1519 the disaffected natives in the Aztec Empire clearly threw their lot in with Cortés because they saw in him a chance to settle the score with their overlord Montezuma, which they assuredly did. In New England, the Pequot War of 1637 saw a similar alignment on the English side of tribes such as the Narragansetts and the Mohegans, who had grievances with the fierce Pequots, interlopers in the region. Under ordinary circumstances, as among the Iroquois in the Northeast, European technology and the European market were seized on as a means of consolidating advantages gained before the arrival of the colonists. The Iroquois had begun to organize their famous League of the Five Nations before European settlement, but they solidified their earlier victories over other native peoples by forging canny alliances with the Dutch and then the English in New York. In the Southeast, remnant peoples banded together in the early eighteenth century to create the Catawba, a new political group that constructed what one historian has called a "new world" for itself. No longer known by a bewildering diversity of names, the former Naskapi and Suttiri and Chagra and Sacka peoples banded together with several others in an attempt to deal more effectively with the encroaching Euro-Americans of Charleston and the Low Country. This hardly was a case of diminishment or reduction. Even as fewer and fewer of the original millions remained, they showed themselves resourceful in resisting, transforming,
and exploiting the exotic cultures the Europeans were imposing on their original landscape.

NATIVE AMERICAN ORAL LITERATURE

When Columbus sailed from Europe in 1492, he left behind him a number of relatively centralized nation-states with largely agricultural economies. Europeans spoke some two or three dozen languages, most of them closely related; and they were generally Christian in religious belief and worldview, although many groups had had contact—and conflict—with adherents of Judaism and Islam. A written alphabet had been used by Europeans to preserve and communicate information for many centuries and Gutenberg’s invention of moveable type in the mid-1400s had shown the way to a mechanical means of “writing”; by 1492, Europe was on its way to becoming a print culture.

By contrast, in 1492 in North America, native people spoke hundreds of languages, belonging to entirely different linguistic families (e.g., Athapascan, Uto-Aztecan, Chinoakan, Stouan, and Algonquian) and structured their cultures in extraordinarily diverse economic and political forms. In the Great Basin of the West, small, loosely organized bands of Utes eked out a bare subsistence by hunting and gathering, while the sedentary Pueblo peoples of the Southwest and the Iroquoians of the Northeast had both highly developed agricultural economies and complex modes of political organization. In spite of some common features, religious and mythological beliefs were also diverse. Among North American peoples alone, eight different types of creation stories have been documented, with wide variations among them. All of these differ substantially from the creation stories of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Also unlike European cultures, North American peoples did not use a written alphabet. Theirs were oral cultures, relying on the spoken word—whether chanted, sung, or presented in lengthy narratives—and the memory of those words to preserve important cultural information. The term literature comes from the Latin littera, “letter.” Native American literatures were not, until long after the arrival of the Europeans, written “litera-tures.” Indeed, as the phrase oral literature might appear to be a contradiction in terms, some have chosen to call the expressions of the oral tradition orature.

These expressions were, like the languages, political economies, and religious beliefs of Native American peoples, extremely various. Europeans in 1492 could name the tragedy, the comedy, the epic, the ode, and a variety of lyric forms as types of literature. In Native America there were almost surely (almost, because we have no actual records that predate 1492) such things as Kwakiutl winter ceremonies, Winnebago trickster tale cycles, Apache jokes, Hopi personal naming and grievance chants, Yaqui deer songs, Yuman dream songs, Piman shamanic chants, Iroquois condolence rituals, Navajo curing and blessing chants, and Chippewa songs of the Great Medicine Society, to name only some of the types of Native American verbal expression.

That there are many such types is unquestionable, but are these literary types? This question would not make sense to traditional native peoples, who
do not have a category of language use corresponding to our category of
literature. From a Western perspective, however, the types of native verbal
expression could only be considered as literature after that late-eighteenth-
and early-nineteenth-century revolution in European consciousness known
as Romanticism. In that period the concept of literature shifted away from
being defined by the *medium* of expression (all language preserved in letters)
to the *kind* of expression (those texts that emphasized the imaginative and
emotional possibilities of language). With this shift in the meaning of liter-
ature, many Native American verbal types could quite comfortably be con-
sidered literary.

We read these forms on the page, but it bears repeating that traditional
Native American literatures originate as oral performances. They are offered
to audiences as dramatic events in time, language for the ear, rather than
objects in space for the eye. And in performance, a pause, a quickening of
pace or a sudden retardation, a gesture, or a lowering of the voice affects
meaning. Not surprisingly, scholars differ about the best way to transfer
performance to the page. Some have opted for a stylized typography where
type size and arrangement seek to convey something of the feeling of what
an actual performance might have been like. Others, acknowledging that
black marks on a white page cannot reproduce a living voice, have left it to
the reader to imagine these words in performance.

This matter of translating the words effectively is controversial. When we
know that the original performance used archaic and unfamiliar terms,
should we use archaic and unfamiliar terms in the translation, even though
they may appear stiff and old-fashioned on the page? What would the con-
temporary reader think of the following excerpt from J. N. B. Hewitt’s ren-
dition of the Iroquois creation story: “Through the crafty machinations of
the Fire Dragon of the White Body, the consuming jealousy of the aged
presiding chief was kindled against his young spouse.” Should we instead
opt for the nonstandard English, the Red English, or Reservation English as
it has been called, of native collaborators in the translation process—even if
it may strike some readers not as lively and colloquial but illiterate? Here are
a few lines from a contemporary translation in Red English of a folktale from
the Northwest: “He told the chief: ‘Yes, I remember, I thought of it, I have
a worker[,] a boy, and I asked him [to come] but no, he didn’t want to leave
his work and his eatings.’” Of course, if we translate these texts into stan-
dard, or “literary,” English, we may have substantially misrepresented verbal
expression that, in the original, would surely strike us as strange. Consider
the following translation:

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You have been falling
Have you fallen from the top of the salmon-berry bushes falling falling
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This is attractive by contemporary standards, but, for the sake of aesthetics, it gives up a good deal of fidelity to the original, which never appeared on the page.

While the question of how best to translate Native American verbal expression must remain open, reading the words of native oral literature conveys some sense of indigenous literary expression as it may have been before the coming of the Europeans.

**VOYAGES OF DISCOVERY**

Columbus was still making voyages to America (1492–93; 1493–96; 1498; and 1502–04) as other Europeans, following his example, found their way to the West Indies. Giovanni Caboto (known as John Cabot to the English for whom he sailed) and his fellow Italian Amerigo Vespucci both crossed the ocean before 1500, as did the Portuguese native Pedro Cabral. After that date the voyagers became too many to track. Unlike the Viking invasion of five hundred years before, which had established modest coastal settlements in North America that Native Americans soon wiped out, this second European wave quickly gathered momentum and extended itself far to the north and south of the Caribbean basin that Columbus explored. Cabot was near the mouth of the St. Lawrence in Canada the year before Vespucci found that of the Amazon, nearly five thousand miles away in South America. Soon the Europeans were establishing colonies everywhere. The first colonists lingered on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola following the departure of Columbus in 1493. Although that small settlement of La Navidad was soon destroyed in a clash with Taino natives under the cacique Caonabo of Maguana, the massive second voyage in 1493 came equipped to stay, and from that point on Spain and Europe generally maintained an aggressive presence in the West Indies. The constant battles along vanguard fronts with Native Americans added fuel to the dissension and political in-fighting among the settlers themselves, whose riots and mutinies nearly ruined settlement after settlement. John Smith’s experience during the first Jamestown voyage of 1607 provides probably the most famous example from Anglo-America. Arrested and nearly executed (probably for offending his “betters,” something he had the habit of doing) en route to America in 1607, Smith was released in Virginia when the colony’s sealed instructions were opened, revealing that this apparently modest soldier had been named to the prestigious governing council even before the ships had left England. Columbus himself became the focus of fierce competitions among greedy settlers and officials in Hispaniola by the time of his third voyage and, stripped of his property and powers by a royal official maddened by the uproar, went back to Spain in chains in 1500.

Europe continued to expand in the New World amid the disorder within settlement walls and the great violence outside. Columbus found the mainland of South America in 1498 and Central America in 1502, by which time John Cabot and the Portuguese Corte-Real brothers, Gaspar and Miguel, had been down the coast of North America from Labrador to the Chesapeake, and Cabral and Vespucci had covered the east coast of South America from the Orinoco River in present-day Venezuela to well south of the Río de la Plata on the border of present-day Uruguay and Argentina. Between 1515
and the 1520s, Spain, under the reign of Charles V, aggressively reached out over the Gulf of Mexico, toward the Yucatán peninsula and Mexico and Florida and the Isthmus of Panama, then sent expeditions into the heart of North America from the 1520s to the 1540s, covering a vast region stretching from Florida to the Gulf of California and north as far as Kansas and the Tennessee River. At the same time, other Spanish explorers and conquistadors spread out over South America, especially its west coast, where in imitation of Cortés's Conquest of Mexico a decade earlier Juan Pizarro overcame the Incan Empire, recently beset with violent civil war. In that same period, the Portuguese established their first permanent settlements in Brazil, and the French explorer Jacques Cartier sailed into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, then up its chief river as far as the site of the future Montreal. Within fifty years of 1492, then, the east coasts of much of both continents had been explored, and many of their major regions had been traversed; the most spectacular of their peoples, the Aztecs and the Incas, had been conquered; and Europe had settled in for a long stay.

Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella and their grandson Charles V took the most aggressively expansive role in America. Other European nations, most conspicuously France and England, were more self-absorbed, awakening slowly to what was happening across the sea. Their first explorers enjoyed bad luck and inconsistent support. John and Sebastian Cabot had sailed for English merchants and the monarchs Henry VII and Henry VIII, but the first Cabot was lost on his voyage in 1498, and the second kept his interest in America alive only by entering the service of the Spanish Crown after 1512. A return to his adopted homeland of England and a royal pension from Edward VI came to him only in the 1540s, by which point he had committed himself to the search for an eastward route to China via the seas north of Russia. In France, Cartier enjoyed early support from Francis I, but his failure to find gold and other riches in the St. Lawrence valley and his dispute with the nobleman Roberval, whom the king appointed to command Cartier's third voyage in 1541, led to profound disenchantment in France. Fishermen from both nations continued to harvest the fabulous riches of the shoals off North America and summered on the shore, drying their catch. But not until the 1570s for England and the beginning of the next century for France, as a new generation of adventurers arose and a period of commercial expansion set in, did broad public support and governmental sanction combine to stir lasting curiosity and investment. A series of luckless North American voyages by the English under Martin Frobisher, Humphrey Gilbert, and then Walter Raleigh ended in the tragedy of the "Lost Colony" of Roanoke Island in the 1580s. For another twenty years few English explorers made serious new efforts, although the press bubbled with publications regarding the New World, particularly the works of Richard Hakluyt the younger, whose great collections gathered the fugitive records of English, and indeed European, expansion overseas. Hakluyt's masterwork, The Principal Navigations (1598–1600), brought the literary productions of countless European mariners to the attention of a public newly stirred by what Shakespeare soon was to call this "brave new world" of Euro-America. Hakluyt notwithstanding, only in 1606 did a second Virginia colony set forth, and this one faltered grievously at the start with a shipwreck on Bermuda (which was to inspire Shakespeare’s The Tempest), riots at Jamestown, near starvation, and violent encounters. By 1603 French interest had revived under the
direction of a group of explorers and expansionists. Samuel de Champlain
most significantly, who hoped for profit from the New World and, even more,
a route through it to the fabled riches of Asia. Seasoned from his voyages to
Spanish America, Champlain picked up where Cartier had left off sixty years
earlier, founded permanent settlements in the St. Lawrence valley, and
through his agents and followers pushed French exploration as far west as
Lake Superior at a time when the English were still struggling in Virginia and
New England settlement had just begun at Plymouth.

LITERARY CONSEQUENCES OF 1492

The period of European exploration in the New World produced a surpris-
ingly large and intriguing body of literature. While many manuscripts were
archived and out of reach until the nineteenth century, a number of texts
found their way into print and were widely dispersed, thanks to the establish-
ment of printing in the half century before 1492. Shortly after Columbus’s
return to Spain in early 1493, there appeared in print his letter to the court
official Luis de Santangel, narrating the voyage and lustily describing the per-
petual spring Columbus had found in the West Indies the previous autumn.
From the appearance of that letter on, the printing press and the European
expansion into America were reciprocal parts of a single engine. Without the
ready dispersal of texts rich with imagery that stirred individual imagination
and national ambition in regard to the West Indies, Europe’s movement west-
ward would have been blunted and perhaps thwarted. The sword of conquest
found in the pen, and in the printing press, an indispensable ally.

The great mass of early American writings came from the hands of Eu-
ropians rather than the native peoples of the New World. Important excep-
tions happily exist. The natives had a lively oral culture that valued memory
over mechanics as a means of preserving texts, although among some groups
such as the Aztecs written traditions existed (in North America these records
included shellwork belts and painted animal hides, tepees, and shields) and
many more groups used visual records in subtle and sophisticated ways. Such
cataclysms as the Conquest of Mexico produced not only the Spanish nar-
ratives of Cortés, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, and others but also native responses, many of which perished with those who knew them. Those that
survived in original native characters or in transliterated form have inestim-
able ethnographic and literary value. For instance, anonymous native writers working in the Nahuatl language of the Aztecs in 1528—significantly,
they used the Roman alphabet introduced by the Spanish—lamented the fall
of their capital to Cortés in the following lines:

   Broken spears lie in the roads;
   we have torn our hair in our grief.
   The houses are roofless now, and their walls
   are red with blood.

No one reading these four lines will easily glorify the Conquest of Mexico or
of the Americas more generally. The story of the transoceanic encounter,
however, ceases to be a matter of easy contrasts once one reads widely in
the texts on either side. Although Europeans committed atrocities in the New World, often they did so as a result of blundering and miscommunication rather than cool, deliberate policy. In fact, the split between policy and action goes to the heart of the infant Atlantic world of the sixteenth century and is mirrored in and influenced by the character of the writing that survives from the period. The great distance separating the hemispheres made the coordination of intention and performance extremely difficult. The authorities at home lacked the knowledge to form prudent or practical policy; as a result many texts written by explorers or colonists were intended as “briefs” meant to inform or influence policy decisions made at a distance. To cite a simple example, Columbus himself wrote a point-by-point description of his second voyage in 1495, addressed to Ferdinand and Isabella in a series of “items” to which the specific responses of the sovereigns were added by a court scribe. More complexly, Cortés sought to justify his patently illegal invasion of Mexico in 1519 by sending several long letters to Charles V defending his actions and promising lavish returns if his conquest could proceed.

Most documents sent from America to the European powers reveal such generally political intentions. Europe responded by issuing directives aimed at controlling events across the sea. Even when good policies were articulated in Europe, however, applying them in the New World entailed further problems. By the time instructions arrived in Hispaniola, Mexico, Jamestown, or Quebec, new events in the colony might have rendered them pointless. Distance made control both crucial and difficult. Whereas formal authority typically resided in Europe, power as an informal fact of life and expediency and circumstance belonged to America, to those who could seize and use it or who acquired it by virtue of what they did rather than the official investitures they bore. Mutiny became so pervasive a fact or fear in America precisely because individuals and groups had, morally and geographically, great latitude in the thinly populated colonial enclaves. If writing served in this fluid, ambiguous universe as a means to influence official policy at home, it also emerged as a means of justifying actions (as with Cortés) that violated or ignored European directives.

Early American writing had, though, a third and more compelling purpose as a literature of witness. That we know so much about the European devastation of the West Indies comes from the fact that some Europeans responded powerfully to that devastation in writing. Although no one typifies this mood better than Bartolomé de las Casas, who assailed Spain’s ruthless destruction of whole peoples in America, it is the rare European document that does not reveal the bloody truths of Europe’s colonial dreams. Starting on the Columbian voyages themselves and flowering in the Spanish West Indies, especially in the 1540s and 1550s when debates about the mistreatment of the natives earnestly moved the clerics and government officials at home, the New World inspired an outpouring of written expression. Not all the literature of witness speaks to specific issues of policy, or particular public debates, but in many of the texts one senses a critical eye, a point of view not likely to be swayed by the slogans of empire or faith or even wealth. Writers such as Díaz del Castillo, the chronicler of Cortés, and England’s John Smith came from the underclass of their native countries, where but for the opportunities represented by America they might well have spent their days in silence. As a result, their writing could be subversive, even mutinous,
achieving its greatest depth when it captured a vision of America as more than a dependent province of the Old World, rather as a place where much that was genuinely new might be learned.

PILGRIM AND PURITAN

The establishment of Plymouth Plantation on the south shore of Massachusetts in 1620 brought to North America a new kind of English settler. The founders of the colony (later called Pilgrims by their leader and historian William Bradford) shared with their allies, the Puritans, a wish to purify Christian belief and practice. Whereas the Puritans initially were willing to work within the confines of the established Church of England, the Pilgrims thought it so corrupt that they wished to separate themselves from it completely. While still in England, they set up their own secret congregation in the village of Scrooby in Nottinghamshire. Often subject to persecution and imprisonment, the Scrooby Separatists (as they were also called) saw little chance for remaining true to their faith as long as they remained in England. In 1608, five years after Queen Elizabeth had been succeeded by James Stuart, an enemy of all such reformers, the Scrooby congregation left England and settled in The Netherlands, where, William Bradford tells us, they saw “fair and beautiful cities”—but, as foreigners, they were confronted by the “grisly face of poverty.” Isolated by their language and unable to farm, they took up trades like weaving. Bradford’s choice, that promised a living. Eventually, fearing that they might lose their religious identity as their children were swallowed up in Dutch culture, they petitioned for the right to settle in the vast American territories of England’s Virginia Company. Backed by English investors, the venture was commercial as well as religious in nature. Among the hundred people on the Mayflower there were almost three times as many secular settlers as Separatists. This initial group, set down on the raw Massachusetts shore in November 1620, made hasty arrangements to face the winter. The colonists were helped over this “starving time” by their own fortitude and the essential aid of the nearby Wampanoag Indians and their leader, Massasoit. From these “small beginnings,” as Bradford was eager to declare, grew a community of mythical import to the later nation.

Much larger at the start was the well-financed effort that brought a contingent of Puritans under John Winthrop to Massachusetts Bay, not far north of Plymouth, in 1630. Although these settlers initially expressed no overt intention to sever their ties with the Church of England, and they are generally regarded as nonseparating dissenters, the distance they put between themselves and that church’s hierarchy was eloquent testimony of a different purpose. On other issues, they shared with the Pilgrims the same basic beliefs: both agreed with Martin Luther that no pope or bishop had a right to impose any law on a Christian without consent and both accepted John Calvin’s view that God freely chose (or “elected”) those he would save and those he would damn eternally. By 1691, when a new charter subsumed Plymouth as an independent colony under Massachusetts Bay, the Pilgrims and Puritans had merged in all but memory.

Too much can be made of the Calvinist doctrine of election; those who have not read the actual Puritan sermons often come away from secondary
sources with the mistaken notion that Puritans talked about nothing but
damnation. Puritans did indeed hold that God had chosen, before their birth,
those whom he wished to save; but it does not follow that Puritans considered
most of us to be born damned. Puritans argued that Adam broke the “Cov-
enant of Works” (the promise God made in Adam that he was immortal and
could live in Paradise forever as long as he obeyed God’s commandments)
when he disobeyed and ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thereby
bringing sin and death into the world. Their central doctrine, however, was
the new “Covenant of Grace,” a binding agreement that Christ made with
all people who believed in him and that he sealed with his Crucifixion, prom-
isng them eternal life. Puritans thus addressed themselves not to the hope-
lessly unregenerate but to the indifferent, and they addressed the heart more
often than the mind, always distinguishing between “historical” or rational
understanding and heartfelt “saving faith.” There is more joy in Puritan life
and thought than we often credit, and this joy is the direct result of medi-
tation on the doctrine of Christ’s redeeming power. Edward Taylor is not
alone in making his rapturous litany of Christ’s attributes: “He is altogether
lovely in everything, lovely in His person, lovely in His natures, lovely in His
properties, lovely in His offices, lovely in His titles, lovely in His practice,
lovely in His purchases and lovely in His relations.” All of Taylor’s art is a
meditation on the miraculous gift of the Incarnation, and in this respect his
sensibility is typically Puritan. Anne Bradstreet, who is remarkably frank
about confessing her religious doubts, told her children that it was “upon
this rock Christ Jesus” that she built her faith.

Not surprisingly, the Puritans held to the strictest requirements regard-
ing communion, or, as they preferred to call it, the Lord’s Supper. It was
the more important of the two sacraments they recognized (baptism being the
other), and they guarded it with a zeal that set them apart from all
other dissenters. In the beginning communion was regarded as a sign of
election, to be taken only by those who had become church members by
standing before their minister and elders and giving an account of their
conversion. This insistence on challenging their members made these New
England churches more rigorous than any others and confirmed the feel-
ing that they were a special few. Thus when John Winthrop addressed the
immigrants to the Bay Colony aboard the flagship Arbella in 1630, he told
them that the eyes of the world were on them and that they would be an
example for all, a “city upon a hill.” Like William Bradford for the Pil-
grams, Winthrop in his history of the Puritans wished to record the actu-
alization of that dream.

WRITING IN TONGUES

While the New England colonies have conventionally been regarded as the
centrepiece of early American literature, the first North American settle-
ments had been founded elsewhere years, even decades, earlier. St. August-
ine, Jamestown, Santa Fe, Albany, and New York, for instance, are all older
than Boston. More important, English was not the only language in which
early North American texts were written. Indeed, it was a tardy arrival in
America, and its eventual emergence as the dominant language of classic
American literature hardly was inevitable. To some extent, the large initial
immigration to Boston in the 1630s, the high articulation of Puritan cultural ideals, and the early establishment of a college and a printing press in Cambridge all gave New England a substantial edge. Later political events would make English a useful lingua franca for the colonies at large and, in time, the literary medium of choice.

Before 1700, however, and often long after it, other languages remained actively in use not only for mundane purposes but also as expressive vehicles. Particularly beyond the vague borders of the English colonial world (the shifting lines between French Canada and New England and the southern colonies and Spanish Florida, for example), those other languages were completely dominant. Even within the limits of the eventual thirteen colonies, however, large enclaves of speakers of other languages existed, especially in the middle colonies. Among the noteworthy settlers of New Netherland, for instance, were Belgian Walloons, near neighbors of the Dutch in Europe but speakers of a radically different language. The mix of "foreigners" in Albany, begun as a fur trade post by Netherlander merchants on the upper Hudson, made it a minority Dutch town, its population made up of settlers of Scandinavian, French, Portuguese, English, Irish, Scots, German, African, and West Indian derivation—even people from Spain, then the enemy of the Netherlanders, and from faraway Croatia. For two centuries after New Netherland was conquered by the English in 1664 and renamed New York, Dutch and other languages were widely used there in public and private life before eventually dying out. Similar linguistic transformations, with the social and personal losses they bring, occurred in other English-controlled regions that would eventually form the United States. In Pennsylvania, where large groups of Protestants from continental Europe were welcomed by William Penn, German in particular remains a vital language to this day, although the friction between German communities there and "the English" reminds us that language is a ground of contest between ethnic groups, not just of self-expression within each. In fact, the first item printed in Pennsylvania, although it issued from the press established by an immigrant Englishman, was in German, and the largest book printed in any of the colonies before the Revolution was in the same language. When we read American history backward, looking for early precedents of national institutions, practices, and values, we are likely to miss the radical linguistic and cultural diversity of the colonial world. Readers of the colonial record need to attend to the many tongues through which the colonists articulated their experiences, vision, and values. It is to this end that translated selections from works written by non-English colonists are included along with English texts to represent the first full century of North American writing. Part of the usefulness of such a broad survey is the insight it offers into the themes, forms, and concerns shared by many peoples involved in the cultural and territorial expansion of European peoples at the time.

AMERICAN LITERATURE IN 1700

Along the eastern seaboard by 1700, most of the colonies that were to unite in seeking independence from Britain toward the end of the eighteenth century had been founded—Georgia was to follow in the 1730s. As Britain
sought to consolidate and unify its overseas possessions, the map began to resemble that of 1776, and English had already emerged as a powerful intercolonial tool. But up and down the coast, a surprising variety of peoples was in evidence, most of whom had become accustomed to the transatlantic or local publication of their writings. At the end of the first full century of European colonization, the printing press was active in many areas, from Cambridge and Boston to New York, Philadelphia, and Annapolis. From 1696 to 1700, to be sure, only about 250 separate items were issued in all these places combined. Although this is a small number compared to the output of the printers of London at the time, it must be remembered that printing was established in the American colonies before it was allowed in most of England, where restrictive laws, the last of them repealed as late as 1693, had long confined printing to four locations: London, York, Oxford, and Cambridge. In this regard, if only because of the isolation of the American provinces by the ocean, they ventured into the modern world earlier than their provincial English counterparts.

The literary situation in America three centuries ago is suggested by a brief examination of the products of the presses then in operation. Among those 250 items published at the century's end was a whole library of texts by the most prolific colonial author, Cotton Mather. In this period, he published more than three dozen titles, including such things as his account of the "tearful decade" (1688–98) of warfare between New England and New France and the latter's Indian allies, which incorporated his famous narrative of the bloody escape of Hannah Dustan from her captors. Mather also published several biographies of New England's founding ministers and penned treatises on the proper behavior of servants toward their masters, on the "well-ordered family," and on the spiritual risks run by seamen. He also issued a warning against "impostors pretend[ing] to be ministers." And he wrote Pillars of Salt, a venture into criminal biography that had religious origins but that also reflected the importance of an emergent popular (as opposed to elite) literary culture on both sides of the Atlantic.

Despite their tendency to mirror the self-regarding aspect of Puritan thought, even Mather's works remind us that America in 1700 was opening outward. In the Magnalia Christi Americana, published just after the start of the new century, Mather himself told an anecdote that conveys the change at hand. A newly trained minister who had journeyed north from Massachusetts Bay to Maine was preaching to a group of hardened fishermen. He was urging his listeners not to "contradict the main end of Planting this Wilderness," the service of God and God's purposes, when a member of the makeshift gathering had the effrontery to contradict him: "Sir, you are mistaken, you think you are Preaching to the People at the Bay; our main end was to catch Fish." Even in New England, Mather suggests, main ends differed profoundly from place to place and from community to community. Elsewhere, the rich array of purposes was reflected in the diverse items issued by American printers at the time when Mather's Magnalia was just appearing (this large book was first published in London, not in Boston, it might be noted). There was a pair of texts, for instance, dealing with the Native Americans of New York that suggest how colonialism was altered by the drive toward cross-cultural interaction. One reported on a conference held in 1696 between the governor of that "province," as all the colonies were then being
called, and the "Five . . . Nations of Indians," the Iroquois, a dynamic confederacy of peoples who had long controlled much of New York's territory and exacted tribute from far distant native peoples as well. This was a kind of text that proliferated throughout New York's colonial era, when the governor and his agents made regular visits to the important Iroquois capital at Onondaga to listen to the concerns of these English allies. The second text concerning native peoples in New York also reflected this unique cross-cultural pattern. In the 1690s, when the French and English empires were coming into serious conflict in America, native peoples were frequently swept up in the fray. The "Propositions Made by the Five Nations of Indians" to New York's governor in 1698 accordingly entreated him to protect the Iroquois from harassment by New France's Indian allies, who were moving eastward into Iroquoia and fiercely raiding the villages there.

Such texts, reaching across the boundaries between the Indian nations and colonial powers, catch the diplomatic tone of cross-cultural relations in the Midatlantic region. The complexity of the political culture in early America is borne out in other texts of the era as well, such as God's Protecting Providence (1699). Philadelphia's Jonathan Dickinson's much reprinted account of his shipwreck and Indian captivity in Spanish Florida, which combined piety, adventure, and exoticism. Similarly exotic was Barbarian Cruelties (1700), which told of European captives in North Africa, an area of the globe that was long to be the focus of Westerners' anxieties and, in the post-Revolutionary era, an American war or two. But such adventurous narratives were not all set in exotic and distant locales. Some, like the seemingly mundane textbook in the English language written by Francis Daniel Pastorius and aimed not only at young Americans but also (as the author's own Germanic-sounding English suggested) at "those who from foreign countries and nations come to settle amongst us," suggest less dramatic but still important cross-cultural concerns. Religion, a dominant theme in the American press in 1700, was itself linked to strong social issues, as was demonstrated by Daniel Gould's account of the execution of Quaker dissenters in Boston fifty years earlier, a work that appeared in New York in 1700. The printer of Gould's book, in fact, also issued a pair of dissenting tracts by Quaker and Salem merchant Thomas Maule, including one called New England's Persecutors Mauled with Their Own Weapons. Maule's name became famous to later generations of readers through Nathaniel Hawthorne's none too accurate association of it with the curse dooming the Pyncheon family in his Salem novel The House of the Seven Gables. Finally, rounding out the century, came The Selling of Joseph by Samuel Sewall, among the earliest antislavery tracts written and published in America and thus a work of growing importance in the future. Although the published items from this half decade of the seventeenth century also comprised almanacs and governmental publications, such items contributed as well to the establishment of print culture and, ultimately, of literary traditions in British America. It was to be the almanac, one recalls, that helped make Benjamin Franklin's fortune as a printer, and it was Franklin who converted that everyday form into a vehicle of rare wit and sturdy English.
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<th>TEXTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Peoples indigenous to the Americas orally perform and transmit a variety of &quot;literary&quot; genres that include, among others, speeches, songs, and stories.</td>
<td>1000–1300 Anasazi communities inhabit southwestern regions.</td>
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<td>1493 Columbus, &quot;Letter to Luis de Santangel Regarding the First Voyage.&quot;</td>
<td>1492 Christopher Columbus arrives in the Bahamas; between 4 and 7 million Native Americans estimated in present-day United States, including Alaska.</td>
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<td>1500 Native American populations begin to be ravaged by European diseases.</td>
<td>1514 Bartolomé de las Casas petitions Spanish crown to treat Native American peoples like other human subjects; populations</td>
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<td>1519–21 Cortés conquers Aztecs in Mexico.</td>
<td>1526 Spanish explorers bring first African slaves to South Carolina.</td>
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<td>1539 First printing press in the Americas set up in Mexico City; Hernando de Soto invades Florida.</td>
<td>1542 Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, The Relation of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca.</td>
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<td>1552 Bartolomé de las Casas, The Very Brief Relation of the Devastation of the Indies.</td>
<td>1558–1603 Reign of Elizabeth I.</td>
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<td>c. 1568 Bernal Díaz del Castilho composes The True History of the Conquest of New Spain (pub. 1632).</td>
<td>1584 Walter Raleigh lands on &quot;island&quot; of Roanoke; names it &quot;Virginia&quot; for Queen Elizabeth.</td>
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<td>1588 Thomas Hariot, A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia.</td>
<td>1603–13 Samuel de Champlain explores the St. Lawrence River; founds Québec.</td>
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<td>1605 Garcilaso de la Vega, The Florida of the Incas.</td>
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Boldfaced titles indicate works in the anthology.
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<td>1613</td>
<td>Samuel de Champlain, <em>The Voyages of Sieur de Champlain</em></td>
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<td>1624</td>
<td>John Smith, <em>The General History of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles</em></td>
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<td>1630</td>
<td>John Winthrop delivers his sermon <em>A Model of Christian Charity</em> (pub. 1638)</td>
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<td>1630–50</td>
<td>William Bradford writes <em>Of Plymouth Plantation</em> (pub. 1656)</td>
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<td>1637</td>
<td>Thomas Morton, <em>New England Canaan</em></td>
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<td>1643</td>
<td>Roger Williams, <em>A Key into the Language of America</em></td>
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<td>1650</td>
<td>Anne Bradstreet, <em>The Tenth Muse</em></td>
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<td>1655</td>
<td>Adriaen Van der Donck, <em>A Description of New Netherland</em></td>
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<td>1661</td>
<td>Jacob Steendam, &quot;The Praise of New Netherland&quot;</td>
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<td>1662</td>
<td>Michael Wigglesworth, <em>The Day of Doom</em></td>
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<td>1673–1729</td>
<td>Samuel Sewall keeps his <em>Diary</em> (pub. 1878–82)</td>
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<td>1682</td>
<td>Mary Rowlandson’s <em>Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration</em></td>
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<td>1682–1725</td>
<td>Edward Taylor continues his <em>Preparatory Meditations</em> (pub. 1939, 1960)</td>
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<td>1684</td>
<td>Francis Daniel Pastorius, <em>Positive Information from America</em></td>
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<td>1702</td>
<td>Cotton Mather, <em>Magnalia Christi Americana</em></td>
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1607  | Jamestown is established in Virginia |
|       | *Powhatan confederacy prevents colonists from starving, teaches them to plant tobacco* |
| 1619  | Twenty Africans arrive in Jamestown on a Dutch vessel as indentured servants |
| 1620  | Mayflower drops anchor in Plymouth Harbor |
| 1621  | First Thanksgiving, at Plymouth |
| 1630–43 | Immigration of English Puritans to Massachusetts Bay |
| 1637  | Pequot War |
| 1638  | Anne Hutchinson banished from Bay Colony for challenging Puritan beliefs |
| 1675–78 | King Philip's War destroys power of Native American tribes in New England |
| 1681  | William Penn founds Pennsylvania |
| 1692  | Salem witch trials |
American Literature
1700–1820

AN EXPANDING WORLD AND UNIVERSE

By the time of Cotton Mather's death in 1728, which symbolically marks the passing of Puritanism as the colonists had experienced it, the imaginative world he and other clerical writers strove to maintain was challenged in a variety of ways. The eighteenth century saw enormous changes—economic, social, philosophical, and scientific—that inevitably affected the influence and authority of clergymen like Mather and transformed the ways in which they understood the world. Most important, many intellectuals now believed in the power of the human mind to comprehend the universe as never before, particularly through the laws of physics as they recently had been described by the great Isaac Newton (1642–1727). Inevitably, then, scripture became more a handmaiden than a guide to metaphysics. Second, and of equal importance, through the influence of the English metaphysician John Locke (1632–1704) there arose new psychological paradigms that promoted human sympathy, rather than supernatural grace, as the basis for the moral life. As elaborated by Adam Smith and other thinkers, this reliance on human sympathy or "sentiment" as the catalyst for moral choice and action concomitantly encouraged the belief that each individual had the power to control his or her spiritual destiny. Such challenges to the theocentric world of the colonial clergy were part of the immense changes in Western thought described by historians as the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment had political as well as scientific and religious implications. By the end of the century, colonists were in the process of establishing a polity the likes of which the world had not yet seen. There would be a religious element to this new nation, but it would be only one component of a state whose destiny, while still thought of as divinely guaranteed, was understood to be achievable on earth through the spread of democratic principles. The literature of this century reflected and extended these and other new emphases in Western thought and culture.

The eighteenth century brought a new world into being in the most basic and striking ways. The increase in population alone helps account for the greater diversity of opinion in religious as well as in political life that marked it and its literature. In 1670, for example, the population of the colonies numbered approximately 111,000. Thirty years later it was more than 250,000; by 1760, if one includes Georgia, it reached 1,600,000—and the settled area had tripled. The demand for and price of colonial goods increased in England, and vast fortunes were to be made in New England with any business connected with shipbuilding: especially timber, tar, and
pitch. Virginia planters became rich through tobacco; and rice and indigo from the Carolinas were in constant demand. Further, compared with such crowded cities as London, the colonies were healthier and cheaper, and promotional literature as well as personal testimony painted British North America as a region in which one could take charge of and transform one’s life. Thus those who could arrange their passage, either by paying for it outright or mortgaging it through indentured service, arrived in great numbers: Boston, for example, almost doubled in size from 1700 to 1720. The colonies were ethnically diverse; the great migration during the first half of the eighteenth century was not primarily English. Dutch and Germans came in large numbers and so did French Protestants. By this time, too, Jewish merchants and craftsmen established themselves in New York and Philadelphia.

This rapidly expanding trade—hallmark of what we now recognize as the beginning of modern consumerism—linked the colonies to other areas in what historians call the Atlantic Rim, a region encompassing Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean basin as well as North and South America. The rim had a complex, multiracial population united by their status as laborers. Thus even as the new and seemingly insatiable desire for goods brought great wealth to planters and merchants, it created at the other end of the social spectrum the world’s first multiracial working class, one whose members often had to endure great cruelty. The numbers of enslaved Africans increased in this period, for example, even as some of them, typified here by Olaudah Equiano, began to speak out about their experiences and condition. Other groups like the New England Indians suffered in different ways. Estimated to number 25,000 in 1600, they already had been reduced by one-third during the plague of 1616–18 and declined steadily thereafter; many Native American communities disappeared entirely during this period of expansion in the Northeast. Their fate in the southern colonies and the Caribbean islands, often linked to plantation slavery, was no better.

This economic take-off affected the very warp and woof of social organization. New England towns, for example, long viewed as pillars of stability, often were full of acrimonious debate between first settlers and newcomers as they bickered over diminishing land or the proper form and substance of worship. When the colonies’ first towns were formed, for example, acreage was apportioned to settlers and allotted free, but by 1713 speculators in land were hard at work, buying as much as possible for as little as possible and selling high. Many a town history records the wrangling of splinter groups and the establishment of a “second” church and the inevitable removal of families and groups who sought richer farm lands. Under new economic and religious pressures, the idea of a “community” of mutually helpful souls was fast disappearing, and the colonists’ gradual awakening to the iniquity of the slavery that they tolerated or encouraged only further stretched the capacity of their rhetoric of Christian charity.

While life in many parts of the colonies remained difficult, the hardships and dangers the first settlers faced were mostly overcome, and more and more colonists, particularly those along the coast, emulated the culture of metropolitan London. Concomitantly, once colonists began to expect the refinements made available by their extensive trading networks, they better understood what was special or unique about their experience in the New World. United by the common experience of ocean passage and the desire
to make new lives for themselves, these thousands of emigrants slowly but inexorably began to realize that they had more in common as inhabitants of America than they did as citizens of Europe that rapidly receded into memory. In 1702 no one would have dreamed of an independent union of colonies, but by the 1750s it was a distinct possibility.

ENLIGHTENMENT IDEALS

By the early eighteenth century, scientists and philosophers had posed great challenges to seventeenth-century beliefs, and the "modern" period as we understand it emerged from their efforts to conceive humans and their universe in new terms, even as they struggled to yoke this brave new world to what they learned in scripture. Indeed, scientists like Newton and philosophers like Locke sought to resolve implicit conflicts between their discoveries and traditionally held Christian truths. Because they believed that God worked in reasonable, comprehensible ways with humankind uppermost, they saw nothing heretical in arguing that the universe was an orderly system such that by the application of reason humanity would comprehend its laws, or that one's supreme obligation was to relate to one's fellows through an innate and thus natural power of sympathy. But the inevitable result of such inquiries made the universe seem more rational and benevolent than it had been represented in Puritan doctrine. Similarly, people increasingly defined their highest duties in social rather than in spiritual terms.

Because science made the world seem more comprehensible, many put less stock in revealed religion. Often these new scientists and philosophers were avowedly, or were called, Deists; they deduced the existence of a supreme being from the construction of the universe itself rather than from the Bible. "A creation," as one distinguished historian has put it, "presupposes a creator." A harmonious universe proclaimed the beneficence of God. A number of seventeenth-century modes of thought—Bradford's and Winthrop's penchant for the allegorical and emblematic, seeing every natural and human event as a message from God, for instance—seemed anachronistic and quaint. People were less interested in the metaphysical wisdom of introspective divines than in the progress of ordinary individuals, relating now to their fellow beings through emotions and experiences they shared as colonists. This no doubt accounts for the popularity of Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography. Many now assumed that humankind was naturally good and thus dwelt on neither the Fall nor the Incarnation, but rather on how thinking, feeling people shared the bonds of their common humanity. They were not interested in theology but in humankind's own nature, and frequently cited Alexander Pope's famous couplet:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
The proper study of mankind is man.

Locke said that "our business" here on earth "is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct." In suggesting that we are not born with a set of innate ideas of good or evil and that the mind is rather like a blank wax tablet (a tabula rasa) on which experiences are inscribed, Locke qualified traditional belief and suggested that the more that we understood
and sympathized with our fellow men and women, the richer our social and spiritual lives would be.

**REASON AND RELIGION: THE GREAT AWAKENING**

But the old beliefs did not die easily, and as early as the 1730s a conservative reaction against the worldview of the new science and psychology followed as some intellectuals, aware of the new thought but intent on maintaining the final truth of revealed religion, resisted the religious implications of Enlightenment principles. But the genie had escaped from the bottle, and this reaction was indelibly marked by the new thought it opposed. One unexpected result, for example, was that the first half of the eighteenth century witnessed a number of religious revivals in both England and America that in part were fueled by the new emphasis on emotion as a component of human experience. Although some historians view the revivals as desperate efforts to reassert outmoded Puritan values in the face of the new, in fact the religious fires that burned so intensely between 1735 and 1750 were themselves the direct product of the new cult of feeling whose foundation Locke had laid. Now ministers as well as philosophers argued that our greatest pleasure was derived from the good we did for others, and that our sympathetic emotions (our joys as well as our tears) were not signs of humankind's fallen state but rather a guarantee of our glorious future. The African American poet Phillis Wheatley, for example, whose poem on the death of the itinerant Methodist George Whitefield (1714–1770) made her famous, said that Whitefield prayed that "grace in every heart might dwell" and longed to see "America excell." Following his many successful religious revivals in England, Whitefield embarked on a preaching tour along the Atlantic seaboard colonies in 1739–40, a visit that was punctuated by great emotionalism. But in this he only followed the similarly "extraordinary circumstances" that had occurred in Northampton, Massachusetts, under the leadership of Jonathan Edwards in the 1730s and that have come to be synonymous with the "Great Awakening."

Edwards also had read his Locke and understood that if his parishioners were to be awakened from their spiritual slumbers they had to experience religion in a more heartfelt way, not just strive to comprehend it intellectually. Thus, from his time as a young minister under the tutelage of his eminent grandfather, the Reverend Solomon Stoddard, Edwards began to rejuvenate the basic tenets of Calvinism, including that of unconditional election, the one doctrine most difficult for eighteenth-century minds to accept. Edwards insisted that such doctrines made sense in terms of Enlightenment science. Hammering at his audience through what one historian has called a "rhetoric of sensation," he persuaded his congregation that God's sovereignty was not only a most reasonable doctrine but also the most "delightful," and appeared to him in an almost sensuous way as "exceeding pleasant, bright, and sweet." In carefully reasoned, calmly argued prose, as harmonious and as ordered as anything the age produced, Edwards brought many in his audience to understand that "if the great things of religion are rightly understood, they will affect the heart." Thus, while most people remember Edwards for his frightening sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an
Angry God, he was much more moved by the experience of joy that his faith brought him. More typical is his “Personal Narrative” or his apostrophe to Sara Pierpont (whom he would marry), for both testify to how experientially moving he found true religious feeling. These are foundational texts for understanding the rise of the sentimental in literature and Western culture generally.

The Awakening in turn engendered as many critics as supporters, for many believed that revivalists were too given over to “enthusiasm” at the expense of their reason. Thus Edwards and others who believed in the new light that God had shed over them had to expend much time and energy in pamphlet wars with prominent clergy such as Boston’s Charles Chauncy who, from his pulpit in that city’s First Church, compared the antics of the revived to the hysteria that Anne Hutchinson earlier had instigated. Heirs to a rapid expansion of print culture that fueled the controversies over revival, opponents like Edwards and Chauncy, and others on both sides of the religious question, used the presses as never before to win over public opinion. Inevitably, the fires of revival burned lower; when Edwards himself tried to consolidate his success in Northampton and in 1749 demanded from applicants personal accounts of conversion before admitting them to church membership, he was accused of being a reactionary, removed from his pulpit, and effectively silenced. He spent the next few years as a missionary to the American Indians in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, a town forty miles west of Northampton, imitating the call of the Reverend David Brainard, a young man who, had he lived, would have married Edwards’s daughter Jerusha. There Edwards remained until invited to become president of the College of New Jersey. His death in Princeton was the direct result of his being inoculated against smallpox, which he had done to set an example for his frightened and superstitious students: it serves as a vivid reminder of how complicated in any one individual the response to the “new science” could become.

**Imperial Politics**

If religion occupied many colonists in the first half of the eighteenth century, after 1763, when Great Britain had consolidated its empire in the New World with victory over the French in Canada, politics dominated its second half. On June 7, 1776, at the second Continental Congress, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia moved that “these united colonies are, and of a right ought to be, free and independent states.” A committee was duly appointed to prepare a declaration of independence, and it was issued on July 4. Although these motions and their swiftness took some delegates by surprise—the purpose of the congress had, after all, not been to declare independence but to protest the usurpation of rights by king and Parliament and to effect a compromise with the homeland—others saw them as the inevitable consequence of the events of the preceding decade. The Stamp Act of 1764, taxing all newspapers, legal documents, and licenses, had infuriated Bostonians and resulted in the burning of the governor’s palace; the Virginian Patrick Henry had taken the occasion to speak with passion against taxation without representation. In 1770 a Boston mob had been fired on by British soldiers. Three years later was the famous “Tea Party,” when colonists dressed as Native
Americans and dumped English tea into Boston harbor as a protest against paying taxes on it. This event tested the limits of British rule. In adopting the costume of Native Americans, these protesters declared themselves antithetical to everything British. The news of the April 1775 confrontation with the British in Concord and Lexington, Massachusetts, was still on everyone's tongue in Philadelphia when the Second Continental Congress convened that May.

Although the drama of these events and the personal suffering they caused cannot be underestimated, colonists also were transformed into revolutionaries through the power of the word. Thomas Paine’s pamphlet Common Sense, published in January 1776, has been credited with tipping the scales toward revolution; but it was preceded by a vast literature that took to heart the arguments of the Whig opposition in England. The Whigs, the so-called country as opposed to court party, inveighed against luxury and tyranny in terms that resonated across the Atlantic. We see Whig party principles applied to the American strand in Royall Tyler’s play The Contrast (1787). In arguing that separation from England was the only reasonable course and that “the Almighty” had planted these feelings in us “for good and wise purposes,” Paine appealed to basic tenets of the Enlightenment. His clarion call to those that “love mankind,” those “that dare oppose not only the tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth!” did not go unheeded. Americans needed an apologist for the Revolution, and in December 1776, when Washington’s troops were at their most demoralized, it was, again, Paine’s first Crisis paper—popularly called The American Crisis—that was read to all the regiments and was said to have inspired their future success.

Paine first came to America in 1774 with a note from Benjamin Franklin recommending him to publishers and editors. He was only one of a number of young writers who took advantage of the revolution in print culture that was to make authorship as we know it possible. This was, in fact, the great age of the newspaper and the moral essay; Franklin tells us that he modeled his own style on the clarity, good sense, and simplicity of the English essayists Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. The first newspaper in the colonies appeared in 1704, and by the time of the Revolution there were almost fifty papers and forty magazines. The great cry was for a “national literature” (meaning anti-British), and the political events of the 1770s were advantageous for a career in letters. Even women like Judith Sargent Murray, Sarah Wentworth Morton, and others got into the act, and all found eager audiences for their work in periodicals like Isaiah Thomas’s Massachusetts Magazine. Although the conventions of the day required anonymity, the women used feminine pen-names, thus proclaiming the right of all women to opine in print on public events. Actually, the identity of these women writers was generally known; their literary efforts added to the campaign for a true realization of the principle of equality.

Similarly, other writers published utilitarian political and polite—esthetically enjoyable—literature simultaneously. Philip Freneau, for example, succeeded first as a writer of satires of the British; after publishing his Poem Written Chiefly during the Late War (1786) he turned to newspaper work, editing the New York Daily Advertiser and writing anti-Federalist Party essays, making himself an enemy of Alexander Hamilton in the process. Other authors, Amis Boudinot Stockton among them, cut a different profile,
publishing in local periodicals and newspapers but also contributing significantly to an extensive manuscript culture in which literary efforts were shared with a coterie of like-minded people. But, as the career of Frenéau suggests, despite the amount of bellettistic writing extant from the late eighteenth century, the most significant writings of the period are political, like the essays Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison wrote for New York newspapers in 1787 and 1788 in support of the new federal constitution, collectively known as The Federalist Papers. They provided an eloquent defense of the framework of the republic and remind us that in good measure the uniqueness of the new United States of America resided in the language of the documents, the very words, on which the nation was based. Together with such self-consciously American works as Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography and Hector St. John de Crévecoeur’s Letters from an American Farmer, they mark the beginning of a new sense of national identity as colonists from greatly different backgrounds and of varied nationalities now found reasons to call themselves “Americans.” This transformation was not easy.

Washington Irving’s fictional character Rip Van Winkle found the world radically different when, finally awakened from his slumbers, he tried to make sense of what he had missed, the American Revolution: “God knows, I’m not myself—I’m somebody else—that’s me yonder—no—that’s somebody else got into my shoes—I was myself last night, but I fell asleep on the mountain . . . and everything’s changed, and I’m changed, and I can’t tell what’s my name, or who I am!”

Because neither the technological nor the economic infrastructure was yet in place to support a national audience, because people lived in widely separated and poorly connected villages or on remote farms, none of these early American writers, including such popular novelists as Susanna Rowson and Charles Brockden Brown, could live by their pens alone. The crisis in American life caused by the Revolution had made artists self-conscious about American subjects, but it was Washington Irving who best learned how to exploit this nascent self-consciousness, who had the distinction of being the first American writer to live on the income produced by his publications. His generation discovered ways of being American without compromising their integrity, and they successfully harnessed the world of print to their ambition to speak through the profession of authorship.

PURSUING HAPPINESS

When John Winthrop described his “model” for a Christian community, he envisioned a group of men and women working together for the common good, each of whom knew his or her place in the stable social structure decreed by God. At all times, he said, “some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity,” others low and “in subjection.” Ideally, it was to be a community of love, all made equal by their fallen nature and their concern for the salvation of their souls, but it was to be a stable community. But President John Adams witnessed social mobility of a kind and to an extent that Winthrop would not have dreamed possible. As historians have observed, European critics of America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries never understood that great social change was possible
without social upheaval primarily because there was no feudal hierarchy to overthrow. When Crèvecoeur wanted to distinguish America from Europe, it was the medievalism of the latter that he wished to stress. The visitor to America, he said, “views not the hostile castle, and the haughty mansion, contrasted with the clay-built hut and miserable cabin, where cattle and men help to keep each other warm, and dwell in meanness, smoke and indigence.”

Of course, in 1820, many Americans were still not free. Some of the Founding Fathers, like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, were slave owners themselves. Men could not vote unless they owned property; women could not vote at all. Women were wards of their fathers until marriage, upon which their legal identity was merged with their husbands, so that they could not own property or keep any wages they might earn. Educated at home for domestic duties, young women were supposed to be excluded from public, intellectual life. But, by the end of the eighteenth century, a movement to educate women like men—so that they could properly imbue their young children with patriotic ideals—had gained considerable strength. Every literary woman testified in her own way to the usefulness of all women in the public sphere. Fired by Enlightenment ideals of reason and equality, women like Judith Sargent Murray and Hannah Foster began to speak and write on public subjects and to agitate for their rights as citizens.

The condition of Native Americans continued to deteriorate throughout the nineteenth century. Well understanding their vulnerability to colonial expansionist drives, many eastern tribes sided with the British during the Revolution. After the British defeat, they were exposed both to white vengeance and white greed. Entire tribes were systematically displaced from their traditional territories, pushed ever farther and farther west. Nevertheless, the same forces that earlier had undermined church authority in New England gradually affected the Americans’ understanding of what constituted the good society. If, as Russell Nye once put it, the two assumptions held to be true by most eighteenth-century Americans were “the perfectibility of man, and the prospect of his future progress,” American citizens had to ground those assumptions in the reality of their day-to-day relations with others whose plight had not yet been touched by the contagion of liberty. Thus much imaginative energy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was expended in beginning to correct institutional and social injustices: the tyranny of monarchy, the tolerance of slavery, the misuse of prisons, the place of women. Even as they agitated for an extension of the principles of liberty codified by the Revolutionary generation, few doubted that with the application of intelligence the human lot could be improved. Writers like Freneau, Franklin, and Crèvecoeur argued that, if it was not too late, the transplanted European might learn something about fellowship and manners from “the noble savages” rather than from rude white settlers, slave owners, and backwoods pioneers.

For many, Franklin best represents the promise of the Enlightenment in America, even as his long and fruitful life also testified to the pitfalls that accompanied an uncritical adoption of principles that enshrined the individual’s concerns above those of the community. Franklin was self-educated, social, assured, a man of the world, ambitious and public-spirited, speculative about the nature of the universe, and in matters of religion content “to observe the actual conduct of humanity rather than to debate supernatural
matters that are unprovable.” When Ezra Stiles asked him about his religion, he said he believed in the “creator of the universe” but he doubted the “divinity of Jesus.” He would never be dogmatic about it, however, because—as he wryly put it—he expected soon “an opportunity of knowing the truth with less trouble.” Franklin always presents himself as a man depending on firsthand experience, too worldly-wise to be caught off guard, and always minding “the main chance;” as one character in Tyler’s The Contrast counsels. This aspect of Franklin’s persona, however, belies another side of him and of the eighteenth century: those idealistic assumptions in which the great public documents of the American Revolution, especially the Declaration of Independence, are grounded. Given the representative nature of Franklin’s character, it seems right that of the documents most closely associated with the formation of the American republic—the Declaration of Independence, the treaty of alliance with France, the Treaty of Paris, and the Constitution—only he signed all four.

The fact that Americans in the last quarter of the eighteenth century held that “certain truths are 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” was the result of their reading the Scottish philosophers, particularly Francis Hutcheson and Lord Kames (Henry Home), who argued that all people in all places possess a sense common to all—a moral sense—that contradicted the notion of the mind as an empty vessel awaiting experience. This idealism paved the way for writers like Bryant, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, but in the 1770s its presence is found chiefly in politics and ethics. The assurance of a universal sense of right and wrong made possible both the overthrow of tyrants and the restoration of order, and it allowed humankind to make new earthly covenants, not, as was the case with Bradford and Winthrop, for the glory of God, but, as Thomas Jefferson argued, for an individual’s right to happiness on earth. How Americans used and abused that right in the service of self-interest would become the theme of countless writers after 1820, as a market revolution permanently enshrined liberal principles over those of the civic republicanism that had informed the previous generation’s behavior.
## AMERICAN LITERATURE 1700–1820

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<th>TEXTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>1704–05 Sarah Kemble Knight keeps The Private Journal of a Journey from Boston to New York (pub. 1825)</td>
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<td>1728 William Byrd writes his History of the Dividing Line (pub. 1841)</td>
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<td>1735 “The Speech of Moses Bon Siaam” published in London periodical</td>
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<td>1741 Jonathan Edwards, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God</td>
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<td>1760 Briont Hammond, Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance</td>
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<td>1764 James Grant, The Sugar Case</td>
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<td>1768 Samson Occom, A Short Narrative of My Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>1771–90 Benjamin Franklin continues his Autobiography (Part 1 pub. 1818)</td>
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<td>1773 Phillis Wheatley, Poems on Various Subjects</td>
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<td>1774 John Woolman, The Journal of John Woolman</td>
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<tr>
<td>1774–83 John and Abigail Adams exchange letters (pub. 1840, 1875)</td>
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<td>1776 Thomas Paine, Common Sense</td>
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<tr>
<td>1780s Annis Boudinot Stockton publishes poems in magazines and newspapers</td>
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<tr>
<td>1782 J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, Letters from an American Farmer</td>
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<td>1786 Philip Freneau, Poems</td>
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<td>1787 Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia + Royall Tyler, The Contrast</td>
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<td>1787–88 The Federalist papers</td>
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**Boldface title indicate works in the anthology.**

1718 French found New Orleans
1726–56 The “Great Awakening”
1741 Vitus Bering discovers Alaska
1755–63 French and Indian Wars
1773 Boston Tea Party
1775–83 War for American Independence
1776 Declaration of Independence
1783 Britain opens “Old Northwest” to United States after Treaty of Paris ends American Revolution
1787 U.S. Constitution adopted

180
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<th>TEXTS</th>
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<td>1789</td>
<td>1789 George Washington elected first president</td>
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<td>Oludah Equiano. <em>The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Oludah Equiano</em></td>
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<td><em>Sarah Wentworth Morton publishes her first poem; pub. My Mind and Its Thoughts</em></td>
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<td>1790</td>
<td>1791 Washington D.C. established as U.S. capital</td>
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<td>Judith Sargent Murray, <em>On the Equality of the Sexes</em></td>
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<td>1791</td>
<td>1803 United States buys Louisiana Territory from France</td>
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<td>Susanna Rowson, <em>Charlotte: A Tale of Truth</em></td>
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<td>1798</td>
<td>1812–14 Second war against England</td>
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<td>Charles Brockden Brown, <em>Wieland</em></td>
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<td>1819 Spain exchanges Florida for U.S. assumption of $5 million in claims</td>
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American Literature
1820–1865

THE LITERARY HERITAGE OF THE YOUNG REPUBLIC

Educated Americans in the new Republic were more familiar with Greek and Roman history, and European history and literature, than with American writers of the colonial and Revolutionary eras. Many now-familiar works of early American literature were not accessible—some still unpublished (Edward Taylor's poems), some available only in incomplete texts (Benjamin Franklin's autobiography), some extremely rare (Cotton Mather's *Magnuma Christi Americana*, printed in London in 1702, first printed in the United States in a small edition at Hartford in 1820, and not generally available until 1853). Educated American boys and some girls learned Greek and Latin literature in childhood—epics, tragedies, comedies, pastoral poems, histories, satires. The English-language tradition that Americans shared, whether Northerners or Southerners, was British, constituted by Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Shakespeare's plays, and Milton's *Paradise Lost* as well as eighteenth-century literature, including essays by Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Samuel Johnson, and Oliver Goldsmith, and much now-neglected poetry such as Pope's *The Dunciad*, James Thomson's *The Seasons*, and Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*. Despite their political independence, Americans from Maine to Georgia (the southernmost Atlantic state until Florida was admitted to the union in 1845) acknowledged much the same literary canon, although the inhabitants of the regions settled by Puritans tended to cherish the dissenting John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* more than literary-minded Southerners, whose colonial ancestors more often had belonged to the Church of England.

Furthermore, by the second quarter of the nineteenth century, after the wartime disruptions to trade were over, Americans had quick access to contemporary British literature and criticism. Crossing the Atlantic on sailing ships or steamers, any book or magazine could be reprinted, a month or less after its appearance in London, in the larger coastal cities—Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston. Volumes of poetry by the well-loved Scots poet Robert Burns and by the English Romantics (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Moore, Shelley, and Keats), then Tennyson, and a little later Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning were reprinted in the United States almost as soon as they appeared in England. The great British quarterly reviews (which made a point of judging new literary works by fixed literary principles, thereby exposing their readers to literary criticism written from a theoretical stance) were reprinted even in such inland cities as Albany and
Cincinnati in the 1840s. The better newspapers of the seacoast cities had correspondents in European capitals such as London and Paris, and the post office initiated cheap mailing rates for printed material. From the 1840s onward, the network of railroads transported books over the Appalachians to the Midwest. With good reason, Emily Dickinson in her home in Amherst or William Gilmore Simms in his home outside Charleston could feel in touch with the latest London literary news.

Gender differences in literary knowledge were more obvious than regional differences, for at least into the middle of the century the efforts were made to censor the reading of girls and young women. One simple way was to deny them classical education and thereby protect them from sexually frank writings in Greek and Latin. Some women writers in this period, notably Caroline Kirkland and Margaret Fuller, did receive informal classical educations through the aid of fathers or brothers; some men, including the working-class Walt Whitman and the well-born but impoverished Herman Melville, received little formal education—Frederick Douglass least of all. Within each social class, in general, however, fewer girls were educated than boys, and care was taken to keep all young women away from English novels of the previous century that might pollute their minds. At the beginning of the period, fiction was generally held to inflame the imagination and passions of susceptible young readers, especially young women. In fact, movements for women’s education often stressed that serious learning would keep young girls away from novels. In her New England novels Harriet Beecher Stowe enumerated the few books that a young woman might have in her room in the first decades of the century: Samuel Richardson’s Sir Charles Grandison, about a model gentleman, was allowed, but not his seduction novel Clarissa. Margaret Fuller’s conflicting feelings toward Sir Walter Scott sprang from her father’s opposition to her reading novels and tales, and even in the next generation Emily Dickinson read fiction against her father’s wishes. Young men like Dickinson’s brother were also warned of the evil effects novels might have on their morals, but with less urgency. Still, in this period even such a now-standard British work as Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels was available only in expurgated editions. Moral opposition to fiction waned over the decades, but was not entirely dead even at the outbreak of the Civil War.

Other species of writing were thought to inculcate the highest civic virtues. From the early years of the republic, many well-educated Americans believed that the new nation must have its own national poem, and dozens of poems of great length and surpassing dullness were published. Joel Barlow, one of the group of poets known as “the Connecticut Wits” in post-Revolutionary America, in 1807 published The Columbiad, meant as the epic poem of Columbia, the United States, where he might teach the love of national liberty and the dependence of good morals and good government on republican principles. Signing his preface in Great Crossing, Kentucky, in 1827, Richard Emmons named his four-volume Freddomia; or, Independence Preserved, an Epick Poem on the Late War of 1812 in honor of his American muse, the Goddess of Freedom. Throughout the first half of the century, critics called for writers to celebrate the new country in poetry or prose, repeatedly going so far as to advise would-be writers on potentially fruitful subjects such as American Indian legends, stories of colonial battles, and
celebrations of the American Revolution (although one respected literary theory held that writers would be better setting their works in a remoter past, rather than a period so near to the present).

Early calls for the existence of an American literature were altered by the popularity in the United States of Sir Walter Scott, first as the author of widely read poems such as The Lady of the Lake, then, decisively, as a historical novelist. After 1814, when he published Waverley anonymously, Scott produced a new novel almost every year. Until the secret of his authorship was revealed in 1826, the novels were ascribed to "The author of Waverley" or, by reviewers, to "the Great Unknown." In the United States, where a new novel by the author of Waverley was almost a national event, literary critics and aspiring novelists instantly saw the appeal of Scott's use of historical settings and his creating imagined scenes in which real historical people intermingled with fictional characters. Scott's example not only made the novel a respectable, even elevated, genre, it had much to do with redirecting the literary efforts of ambitious Americans from epic poetry toward prose fiction. James Fenimore Cooper had already written a novel in imitation of Jane Austen, but his success came in the historical novel, after he imitated Scott's The Pirate in The Spy (1821), where George Washington was a character. Lydia Maria Francis (later Child) began to write Hobomok (1824) after reading J. G. Palfrey's review of Yamoyden, "a metrical tale in six cantos, after the manner of Scott"—meaning the poetry of Scott. But she had read the Scott novels as they appeared, and set Hobomok in seventeenth-century Massachusetts, her equivalent of Scott's Scotland of a previous century. Following Scott and Cooper, Catharine Maria Sedgwick in The Linwoods (1835) brought Revolutionary heroes, including Washington, into her plot along with fictional characters. From adolescence Hawthorne was steeped in Scott, and Melville's reading of Scott emerged as late as his 1876 epic poem, Clarel. In old age Walt Whitman lovingly described a book he had cherished for fifty years, Scott's poems, complete in one volume. Before the mid-century, when every up-to-date American read Dickens, every literate American read Scott, and all appeals for the creation of a great American literature were infused with the knowledge that Scott had invented an infinitely adaptable genre of historical fiction.

Another adaptable genre was the personal travel book. The young American Washington Irving had become friends with the great Walter Scott through his Cervantes-influenced parodic History of New York (1809). Irving's The Sketch Book (1819–20) was a peculiar intermingling of tales and highly personal essays in which the narrator, "Geoffrey Crayon," was compared to an idiosyncratic landscape painter who travels Europe sketching "in nooks, and corners, and by-places," but neglecting "to paint St. Peter's, or the Coliseum; the cascade of Terni, or the bay of Naples." Captivated by the genial sensibility thus displayed, American readers acknowledged Irving as the first great writer of the United States and cherished The Sketch Book for decades. Henry T. Tuckerman's Italian Sketch Book (1833) frankly imitated it, and Nathaniel Parker Willis's Pencillings by the Way (1835–36) was modeled on it. In tone and structure Herman Melville's Redburn (1849) was deeply indebted to it. Knowing that Willis had financed his travels in part by sending letters home to newspapers, the penniless young Bayard Taylor imitated his strategy in what became Views A-foot (1846); and Willis was also a
model for Caroline Kirkland's *Holidays Abroad* (1849) and Louise Clapp's *Residence in the Mines* (the "Dame Shirley" letters, 1854). Melville's first two books, *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847), purported to be accurate accounts of experiences in the Marquesas and Tahiti and were valued primarily as such. Similarly, Caroline Kirkland's two books on frontier Michigan, *A New Home—Whose Will Follow?* (1839) and *Western Clearings* (1845), were not only entertaining, but were valued as useful sources of general information for potential emigrants. Bayard Taylor's letters home from California in 1849 and 1850, collected in *Eldorado* (1850), were infused with buoyant charm, but his purpose was documentary: to let Easterners know what life was already like for the forty-niners and what they might experience if they themselves sought their fortunes in California. At Walden Pond outside Concord, Massachusetts, Henry David Thoreau read Melville's first book, *Typee*, very soberly, as a source of anthropological information about natives in the South Sea Islands. Then, in *Walden*, he turned the travel genre on its head, announcing that he was writing a travel book himself, having traveled a good deal in Concord. Exploring himself, Thoreau wrote the classic American travel book.

THE SHIFTING CANON OF AMERICAN WRITERS

A painting popular during the late nineteenth century was Christian Schussele's reverential *Washington Irving and His Literary Friends at Sunnyside*. Working in 1863, four years after Irving's death, Schussele portrayed a number of elegantly clad notables in Irving's small study in his Gothic cottage-castle on the Hudson River, north of New York City. Among them were several writers whose works appear in this anthology: Irving himself, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Cullen Bryant, and James Fenimore Cooper. Intermingled with these men were poets and novelists now seldom read: William Gilmore Simms, Fitz-Greene Halleck, Nathaniel Parker Willis, James Kirke Paulding, John Pendleton Kennedy, and Henry T. Tuckerman, along with the historians William H. Prescott and George Bancroft. The painting was a pious hoax, for these guests never assembled together at one time, at Sunnyside or anywhere else; and while a few of those depicted were indeed Irving's friends, he barely knew some of them and never met others at all. Yet the painting suggests that Washington Irving, beloved by ordinary readers and by most of his fellow writers, was the central American literary figure between 1809 (the year of his parody *History of New York*) and his death in 1859, just before the Civil War. He had demonstrated in *The Sketch Book* (1819–20) that memorable fiction—*Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*—could be set in the villages or rural areas of the United States (thereby initiating what became backwoods humor and later the local-color movement); he also seemed to prove, by the book's international success, that an American writer could win a British and Continental audience.

Irving's legion of imitators included several of the men in the painting; and among his fellow writers, Irving's reputation was enhanced by his generosity, as in his gallantly relinquishing the subject of the conquest of Mexico
to Prescott or in urging the publisher George P. Putnam to bring out an American edition of the first book by the unknown Herman Melville. Although James Fenimore Cooper's *Leather-Stocking* novels had a great vogue in Europe (where they became a major source of information and misinformation about the United States), and his fame as a fiction writer rivaled Irving's in this country, his influence on American writers never approached the breadth of Irving's. Irving and Cooper both spent years abroad, Irving in England and Spain, Cooper in France. Americans never held Irving’s absence against him, for his winning the friendship of great foreigners (such as Sir Walter Scott) seemed to reflect glory on his country; and for years he was honorably representing his country, as secretary of the legation in London, as minister to Spain. Furthermore, he had a way of demonstrating his Americanism, as in 1832, when on returning from Europe he caught the public's imagination with his arduous trip to present-day Oklahoma. When Cooper returned to the United States in 1833 after almost a decade abroad, he was appalled at the spread of excessively democratic attitudes and lectured his fellow citizens in *A Letter to His Countrymen* (1834) and a satirical novel, *The Monikins* (1835). Cooper embroiled himself in lawsuits, and public opinion turned against him as papers, including Horace Greeley's New York *Tribune*, waged a campaign against him, literally defaming him as a would-be aristocrat. Irving's personal popularity was such that late in 1849, when he was charged with plagiarizing his biography of Goldsmith from two recent British biographies, newspapers from Maine to Louisiana denounced his accuser without even examining the evidence. Nor did the influence of Ralph Waldo Emerson rival Irving's, despite his profoundly provocative effects on such writers as Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson—effects that make modern literary historians see him as the seminal writer of the century.

The Schussele painting tells more than the artist could have intended about the fragile status of literary reputations, for while including many writers now all but forgotten, it excludes many others in this anthology. To begin with, it excludes all women, even those who had done substantial work already, such as Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Caroline Kirkland, Lydia Maria Child, Fanny Fern, Margaret Fuller, and most famous of all, Harriet Beecher Stowe (Emily Dickinson’s greatest burst of poetic creation had already occurred by 1863, but she remained an unpublished poet). The painting also excludes several male writers who now seem among the most important of the century: John Greenleaf Whittier (whose militant abolitionism ruled him out of such good company), Edgar Allan Poe, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and Herman Melville. Furthermore, while the Marylander Kennedy was included, all other Southerners were excluded, among them writers such as Augustus Baldwin Longstreet (whose impulse to record disappearing phases of Georgia life parallels a recurrent impulse in Sedgwick’s writing) and George Washington Harris (whose exuberant prose has drawn readers for a century and a half). Schussele's arraying of literary notables offers a powerful lesson in the constant shifting of literary reputations. This edition of the anthology does not offer selections from, for a few examples, the Southerners Longstreet and Harris or from a northern writer of striking psychological fiction, Elizabeth Barstow Stoddart. It also omits two of the
most famous names of the nineteenth century: the Massachusetts writers Oliver Wendell Holmes and James Russell Lowell, neither of whom speaks powerfully to many readers at the present moment. Yet as taste changes they may be valued again, and perhaps in new ways. Holmes, for instance, may be read for what he called his "medicated novels" (realistic psychological fictions), perhaps in an era when attention also shifts to Stowe's New England novels, which some think have never been sufficiently praised for their own merits or acknowledged for their influence on later women's fiction. It seems safe to say that despite his historical importance Lowell will not soon be given ninety pages, as he was in some anthologies of the 1960s, but any writers omitted now may be called back in later editions, along with others never before included.

THE SMALL WORLD OF AMERICAN WRITERS

The writers in Schussele's painting would never have fitted into Irving's snug room; but the American literary world was very small indeed, so small that many of the writers in this period knew each other, often intimately, or else knew much about each other. At Litchfield, Connecticut, the young Georgian Longstreet greatly admired one of the minister Lyman Beecher's daughters (not Harriet, then a small child). Other writers lived, if not in each other's pockets, at least in each other's houses, or boardinghouses: Lemuel Shaw, from 1830 to 1860 chief justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court and Herman Melville's father-in-law after 1847, for a time stayed in a Boston boardinghouse run by Ralph Waldo Emerson's widowed mother; the Longfellows summered in the 1840s at the Pittsfield boardinghouse run by Melville's cousin, a house in which Melville had stayed in his early teens. Lydia Maria Child's husband owed money to Melville's Boston grandfather; and the executor of the estate, Lemuel Shaw, called to collect the debt, much to Mrs. Child's chagrin. In New York, the Sedgwick family (which included Catharine Maria Sedgwick part of the year) was on intimate terms with another native of western Massachusetts, William Cullen Bryant; and James Fenimore Cooper borrowed money from a Sedgwick. The guardian of the orphaned Louise Amelia Smith (later "Dane Shirley") was a classmate of Emily Dickinson's father. In the 1840s the newspaper editor Bryant sometimes took walks with another editor, young Walt Whitman. In Pittsfield in the early 1850s Melville and his family exchanged visits with Charles and Elizabeth Sedgwick of Lenox, in whose house Catharine Maria Sedgwick spent part of the year; until his death Charles was the clerk of court when Judge Shaw held his session in Lenox each September; and Elizabeth Sedgwick had taught Melville's older sister Helen at her school. In Pittsfield and Lenox, Hawthorne and Melville paid each other overnight visits; in Concord the Hawthornes rented the Old Manse, the Emerson ancestral home, and later bought a house there from the educator Bronson Alcott and made it famous as the Wayside; in Concord the Emersons welcomed many guests, including Margaret Fuller (who also visited with the Hawthornes); and when Emerson was away, Thoreau, a native of Concord, sometimes stayed in the house to help Mrs. Emerson. Emerson repeatedly rescued Bronson Alcott
from financial disaster, and Bronson’s daughter Louisa May Alcott took less-
ons in Emerson’s house (and revered her nature guide, Thoreau). Fanny
Fern’s brother, Nathaniel Parker Willis, whom she satirically depicted as
“Hyacinth” in Ruth Hall, was a close friend of Melville for a time; in the
winter of 1847, Willis and Melville’s friend, editor Evert A. Duyckinck, took
the train up to Fordham together to attend the funeral of Virginia Poe, the
wife of Edgar Poe, who, like Melville and Hawthorne, was one of Duyckinck’s
authors in his Wiley & Putnam series, Library of American Books. The pop-
ular Manhattan hostess Anne Lynch assigned the young travel writer Bayard
Taylor to write a valentine for a slightly older travel writer, Herman Melville,
in 1848; and three years later, apparently with matchmaking in mind, brough
together Taylor’s intimate friend R. H. Stoddard and Elizabeth Bar-
tow, a distant relative of Hawthorne. Melville took Caroline Kirkland’s Ho-

days Abroad on shipboard with him in 1849, and the next year she was
delighted with his White-Jacket; they probably were acquainted. Emerson
shared his enthusiasm for Leaves of Grass with Bronson Alcott and Henry
David Thoreau, who, during a stay in New York, took the Brooklyn ferry to
call on Whitman. Lydia Maria Child and John Greenleaf Whittier were long-
time friends, veterans in the great cause of abolition. On a visit to Wash-
ington after the Civil War had broken out, the still reclusive, and ailing,
Hawthorne seriously considered making the hazardous trip to Wheeling to
meet the extraordinary new contributor to the Atlantic Monthly, Rebecca
Harding; later he welcomed her at Wayside.

Many of the male writers of this period came together casually for dining
and drinking, the hospitality at Evert Duyckinck’s house in New York being
famous, open to Southerners like William Gilmore Simms as well as New
Yorkers like Melville and Bostonians like the elder Richard Henry Dana, the
father of the author of the popular Two Years before the Mast. Of the clubs
formed by male writers, artists, and other notables, the two most memor-
able are the Bread and Cheese Club, which Cooper organized in 1824 in the back
room of his publisher’s Manhattan bookstore, and the Saturday Club, a con-
vivial Boston group formed in 1856 and especially associated with the Atlan-
tic Monthly and the publishing house of Ticknor and Fields. Members of the
Bread and Cheese Club included the poet William Cullen Bryant, Samuel
F. B. Morse (the painter who later invented the telegraph), the poet Fitz-
Greene Halleck, and Thomas Cole (the English-born painter of the American
landscape). Emerson was among the members of the Saturday Club, along
with James Russell Lowell, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell
Holmes, and the historians John Lathrop Motley and William H. Prescott;
Nathaniel Hawthorne attended some meetings. Along with more formal
organizations, informal associations flourished. In 1836 a small group of
Boston-based Unitarians began to meet to study German philosophy; at first
simply called Hedge’s club, from the organizer, Frederic Hedge, the group
passed into literary history as the “Transcendental Club.” Margaret Fuller
conducted a series of “conversations” in the late 1830s and early 1840s that
foreshadowed many women’s clubs of the future. In the late 1850s a Bohem-
ian group of newspaper and theater people and writers drank together at
Pfaff’s saloon on Broadway above Bleecker Street; for a time Whitman was
a fixture there.
THE SMALL—BUT EXPANDING—COUNTRY

Such intimacy was inevitable in a country that had only a few literary and publishing centers, almost all of them along the Atlantic seaboard. Despite the acquisition of the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803 and the vast southwest from Mexico in 1848, most of the writers we still read lived all their lives in the original thirteen states, except for trips abroad, and their practical experience was of a compact country: in 1840 the “northwestern” states were those covered by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan; Wisconsin was still a territory), while the “southwestern” humor writers such as George Washington Harris, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, and Johnson Jones Hooper wrote in the region bounded by Georgia, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee.

Improvements in transportation were shrinking the country—even while territorial gains were enlarging it. When Irving went from Manhattan to Albany in 1800, steamboats had not yet been invented; the Hudson voyage was slow and dangerous, and in 1803 the wagons of Irving’s Canada-bound party barely made it through the bogs beyond Utica. The Erie Canal, completed in 1825, changed things: in the 1830s and 1840s Hawthorne, Melville, and Fuller took the canal boats in safety, suffering only from crowded and stuffy sleeping conditions. When Irving went buffalo hunting in Indian territory (now Oklahoma) in 1832, he left the steamboat at St. Louis and went on horseback, camping out at night except when his party reached one of the line of missions built to accommodate whites who were Christianizing the Plains Indians. Around the first of October 1832, Lyman Beecher of Boston, having accepted the presidency of Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, set out in at least one stagecoach with several members of his family, including Harriet, later the author of Uncle Tom’s Cabin. They stopped in New York City and Philadelphia (apparently leading a milk cow), then had to leave the stagecoach for wagons when they reached the Alleghenies, west of Harrisburg. Intending to take a steamboat from Wheeling (then in Virginia), they delayed because of cholera in Cincinnati and ultimately took a stagecoach, arriving in mid-November. By the 1840s railroads had replaced stagecoaches between many eastern towns, although to get to New Orleans in 1848 Whitman had to change from railroad to stagecoach to steamboat. Despite frequent train wrecks, steamboat explosions, and Atlantic shipwrecks, by the 1850s travel between major cities had ceased to be the hazardous adventure it had been at the beginning of the period.

The exception was travel to and from San Francisco. That old Spanish-Mexican port became an almost instant metropolis in the Gold Rush of 1849. when thousands of gold seekers and others poured in from all over the world. Americans and Europeans often took the long and perilous voyage around Cape Horn, as Louise Clappe (“Dame Shirley”) and her doctor-husband did in 1849–50. Much faster was the route by ship from an eastern port to Chagres, then across the isthmus by horseback and canoe to Panama City (though, young Bayard Taylor made it in five days in 1850), and by ship to San Francisco. Thousands set off for California from Missouri or Texas in wagons, on horseback, or simply on foot, walking beside wagons, crossing the central plains, the Rocky Mountains, and western deserts.
The eastern cities—New York, Philadelphia, and Boston—though the largest in the nation, were tiny in comparison to their modern size. The site of Brook Farm, now long since absorbed by Boston, was chosen because it was nine miles remote from the State House and two miles away from the nearest farm. The population of New York City at the start of the 1840s was only a third of a million (about 5 percent of its current size) and was concentrated in lower Manhattan: Union Square was the northern edge of town. Horace Greeley, the editor of the New York Tribune, escaped the bustle of the city by living on a ten-acre farm up the East River on Turtle Bay, where the East Fifties are now; there he and his wife provided a bucolic retreat for Margaret Fuller when she was his literary critic and metropolitan reporter. In 1853 the Crystal Palace, an exposition of arts, crafts, and sciences created in imitation of the great Crystal Palace at the London World's Fair of 1851, failed—largely because it was too far out of town, up west of the Croton Water Reservoir (which had made pure running water available for a decade, already). The reservoir was on the spot where the New York Public Library now stands, at Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue, and the Crystal Palace was on the site of the modern Bryant Park (for decades an ironic place to be named for the nature poet, it has been reclaimed for safe public enjoyment).

The writers in this period tended to look east for their audiences—some of the writers, in earlier decades, to England, all of them to the publishing centers on the east coast, even those who had lived in what was called the west (Kirkland in Michigan, Stowe in Ohio). Several of the writers could remember clearly when news came in 1803 that President Jefferson had bought an enormous territory, impossible to visualize: all of them knew that acquiring Oregon might have cost a third war with Great Britain in the mid-1840s; and all of them lived through the acquisition of the Southwest, including California, in 1848. In varying ways, many of the writers were affected by the expansion westward. Cooper propelled his aged hero Leatherstocking across the Mississippi in The Prairie (1827) before Irving outdid Cooper by going across the Mississippi himself. Through much of her childhood, Harriet Prescott's father was away, trying to make his fortune in Oregon. In The Oregon Trail, a series of articles in the New York Knickerbocker (1847), Francis Parkman recounted his journey westward as far as Wyoming; in 1849, he capitalized on the acquisition of the Southwest by publishing it as a book with an expanded, misleading title, The California and Oregon Trail. Melville, who had traveled as far west as the Mississippi before going whaling and who had seen native peoples mistreated in the Pacific islands and along the Pacific coast of South America, reacted hostilely to Parkman's disdain for the American Indians he encountered: "Who can swear that among the naked British barbarians sent to Rome to be stared at more than 1500 years ago, the ancestor of Bacon might not have been found?—Why, among the very Thugs of India, or the bloody Dyaks of Borneo, exists the germ of all that is intellectually elevated and grand. We are all of us—Anglo-Saxons, Dyaks and Indians—sprung from one head and made in one image." From northern California the young Bayard Taylor sent home reports on the Gold Rush to the New York Tribune and published them early in 1850 as Eldorado. Apparently not trying to find an eastern outlet, Louise Clapp ("Dame Shirley") published her letters about her
"Residence in the Mines" (1851–52) only belatedly, in 1854, in a friend’s short-lived San Francisco literary magazine, The Pioneer; consequently, her fame was never truly national in her lifetime. Longfellow relied on books for his descriptions of the Mississippi region in *Evangeline* (1847), but if the East had cried out to be put into literature early in the century, now the Mississippi cried out to be put into literature by someone who knew it. At mid-century the boy-printer Samuel Clemens in Hannibal, Missouri, on the great river, set into type many stories by writers of the old Southwest. When the Civil War came, Clemens found reason for going west to Nevada and California, then to Hawaii; and in 1872 he brought a version of his adventures into print in the East, in Hartford, Connecticut, as *Roughing It*. Soon, in 1875, he would write the splendid "Old Times on the Mississippi" for the *Atlantic Monthly* and at least one great book set on the river, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884).

**THE ECONOMICS OF AMERICAN LETTERS**

Geography and modes of transportation bore directly on publishing procedures in the United States of this period. For a long time writers who wanted to publish a book carried the manuscript to a local printer, paid job rates to have it printed and bound, and made their own arrangements for distribution and sales. Longfellow worked in this fashion with a firm in Brunswick, Maine, when he printed his translation of *Elements of French Grammar* and other textbooks during his first years as a teacher. Over the years, however, true publishing centers developed in the major seaports that could receive the latest British books by the fastest ships and, hastily reprinting them, distribute them inland by river traffic as well as in coastal cities. After 1820 the leading publishing towns were New York and Philadelphia, with the Erie Canal soon giving New York an advantage in the Ohio trade. Boston remained only a provincial publishing center until after 1850, when publishers realized the value of the decade-old railroad connections to the West. (Shipped by sea, copies of Melville’s early books reached New Orleans two weeks or so after publication in New York.) Despite the aggressive merchandising techniques of a few firms, the creation of a national book-buying market for literature, especially American literature, was long delayed.

The problem was that the economic interests of American publisher-bookdealers were antithetical to the interests of American writers. A national copyright law became effective in the United States in 1790, but it was 1891 before American writers had international protection and foreign writers received protection in the United States. Through almost all the century, American printers routinely pirated English writers, paying nothing to Sir Walter Scott or Charles Dickens or later writers for their novels, which were rushed into print and sold very cheaply in New York, Philadelphia, and other cities. American readers benefited from the situation, for they could buy the best British and Continental writings cheaply, but American writers suffered, because if they were to receive royalties, their books had to be priced above the prices charged for works of the most famous British writers. American publishers were willing to carry a few native novelists and poets as prestige items for a while, but they were businesspeople, not philanthropists.
To compound the problem, Irving's apparent conquest of the British publishing system, by which he received large sums for The Sketch Book and succeeding volumes, proved delusory. Cooper and others followed in Irving's track for a time and were paid by magnanimous British publishers under a system whereby works first printed in Great Britain were presumed to hold a British copyright. But this practice was ruled illegal by a British judge in 1849, and the British market dried up for American writers.

Throughout this period, like our own, making a serious American contribution to the literature of the world was no guarantee at all of monetary rewards. Except for the few authors of best-sellers like Stowe and, later, Alcott (both publishing after mid-century), the United States was not a country in which one could make a living by writing fiction and poetry: Fanny Fern's financial triumph (also after 1850) was as a columnist; and although he published poetry and fiction, Bayard Taylor's main income came from his newspaper articles written home from exotic locations (then collected into travel books) and, later, from his very popular lectures. Serious authors could not always find publishers for their work. Unlike most other male writers, Irving could always find a publisher, and in 1849 his career was revived by Putnam's lavish promotion of his life of Oliver Goldsmith; Cooper could also get his new books published, and the reissue of some of his earlier successes restored some of his popularity before his death late in 1851. Other writers for periods of time became editors of magazines or newspapers (there were dozens of newspapers in Manhattan in the 1840s), where they could publish themselves. These editors included Poe, Longstreet, Harris, Thorpe, Johnson Jones Hooper of Alabama, Lowell, and other notable examples: Fuller, who for several years reported for the New York Tribune at home and from Europe; Whitman, who for much of the 1840s and 1850s was free to editorialize in one Brooklyn or Manhattan newspaper or another; Whittier, who for more than two decades before the Civil War was corresponding editor of the Washington National Era; Child, who edited the New York Anti-Slavery Standard and wrote letters to the Boston Courier; Kirkland, who edited the New York Union and wrote for other magazines; and, most conspicuous, Bryant, long-time owner of the New York Evening Post. Fanny Fern's brother Nathanial Willis Parker was a celebrity writer of poetry, fiction, and travel sketches; but he earned his living during this period as the editor of the New York Home Journal. Whitman was his own publisher for most editions of Leaves of Grass and filled mail orders himself, as Thoreau also did when an occasional request came for one of the seven hundred copies of his first book, which the publisher had returned to him. At crucial moments in his career, Melville felt constrained not to write what he wanted to write, as when he sacrificed his literary aspirations after the failure of Mardi and wrote Redburn and White-Jacket, which he regarded as mere drudgery; and at other times he was "prevented from publishing" works he had completed, including The Isle of the Cross, which he probably destroyed. Ironically, the writer freest to pursue literary greatness in this period was probably Emily Dickinson, whose "letter to the world" remained unmailed during her lifetime. Fanny Fern broke all the rules by being paid lavishly for her columns in the New York Ledger.
CONFORMITY, MATERIALISM, AND THE ECONOMY

The eccentricity of Americans, especially in rural areas and smaller towns, was notorious among visitors from abroad and was recorded in some of its aspects by diverse writers. In Stowe's New England novels of the late 1850s and early 1860s, there is a gallery of portraits of mentally angular or gnarled characters. In Amherst, Emily Dickinson out-Thoreaued Thoreau in her resolute privacy, idiosyncrasies, and individuality. But she could be understood in relation to real and fictional characters. The night her correspondent Thomas Wentworth Higginson met her in 1870, he strove to convey her character in a letter to his wife: "if you had read Mrs. Stoddard's novels you could understand a house where each member runs his or her own selves."

Despite such powerful individualists, it seemed to some of the writers that Americans, even while deluding themselves that they were the most self-reliant populace in the world, were systematically selling out their individualities. Emerson sounded the alarm: "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company which the members agree for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity." In The Celestial Railroad Hawthorne satirically described the condition at the Vanity Fair of modern America, where there was a "species of machine for the wholesale manufacture of individual morality." He went on: "This excellent result is effected by societies for all manner of virtuous purposes; with which a man has merely to connect himself, throwing, as it were, his quota of virtue into the common stock; and the president and directors will take care that the aggregate amount be well applied." Thoreau repeatedly satirized America as a nation of joiners that tried to force every newcomer "to belong to their desperate odd-fellow society"; to Thoreau, members of the Odd Fellows and other social organizations were simply not odd enough, not individual enough.

But none of the writers found anything comical in the wholesale loss of Yankee individualism as both men and women deserted worntout farms for factories, where many began to feel what Emerson called "the disproportion between their faculties and the work offered them." Far too often, the search for a better life had degenerated into a desire to possess factory-made objects. "Things are in the saddle," Emerson said sweepingly, "and ride mankind." In elaboration of that accusation, Thoreau wrote Walden as a treatise on expanding the spiritual life by simplifying material wants. Informed Thoreau's outrage at the materialism of his time was the bitter knowledge that even the most impoverished were being led to waste their money (and, therefore, their lives) on trumpery. In a vocabulary echoing Benjamin Franklin, he condemned the emerging consumer economy that was devoted, even in the infancy of advertising, to the creation of "artificial wants" for things that were unneeded or outright pernicious. And to counter the loss of an archetypal Yankee virtue, he made himself into a jack-of-all trades and strong master of one, the art of writing.

The difference in the social status (and the earning power) of men and women did not penetrate the consciousness of all writers, even all women writers, but Child produced the comprehensive, pioneering History of the
Condition of Women, in Various Ages and Nations, and after her own harsh experience at trying to support herself and her daughters by the conventional feminine skill of sewing. Fanny Fern missed no chance to expose the cruel myth that any industrious woman could earn a decent living. After his own failure to earn a living in America was painfully obvious to him, Melville meditated on the exploitation of female millworkers in The Tartarus of Maids. Douglass portrayed himself as never being without hope, although a slave. Harding portrayed wage-slaves in the iron mills, male and female, as utterly without reasonable hope. In strangely different ways the writers to speak out most profoundly about the emerging American economic system were Child, Stowe, Fern, Thoreau, Douglass, Melville, Whitman, and Davis.

ORTHODOX RELIGION AND TRANSCENDENTALISM

All the major writers found themselves at odds with the dominant religion of their time, a Protestant Christianity that exerted practical control over what could be printed in books and magazines. Sedgwick, a Unitarian, as befitted her high social status, was appalled at the unseemliness of backwoods Methodist revivals; more often, writers, even nominal Unitarians, were appalled at the coldness of churches, not the wildness. This church, Emerson said, acted "as if God were dead." Whitman, bred as a Quaker, was even more bitter toward all Protestant churches: "The churches are one vast lie; the people do not believe them, and they do not believe themselves." Still, the writers all came from Protestant backgrounds in which Calvinism was more or less watered down (less so in the cases of Melville and Dickinson), and they knew their theology. Emerson, Thoreau, and Child (who published a history of all religions in 1851), regularly tried to place Protestant Christianity in relation to other religions, while Melville tended to judge contemporary Christianity by the absolute standards of the New Testament. In The Celestial Railroad Hawthorne memorably satirized the American urge to be progressive and liberal in theology as well as in politics, and Melville extended the satire throughout an entire book, The Confidence-Man.

Awareness of the fact of religious ecstasy was not at issue. Emerson, for instance, showed in The Over-Soul a clinical sense of the varieties of religious experience, the "varying forms of that shudder of awe and delight with which the individual soul always mingle with the universal soul." Similarly, Thoreau acknowledged the validity of the "second birth and peculiar religious experience" available to the "solitary hired man on a farm in the outskirts of Concord" but felt that any religious denomination in America would pervert that mystical experience into something available only under its auspices and in accordance with its particular doctrines. Like Thoreau, Whitman saw all religious ecstasy as equally valid and came forth in Song of Myself outbidding "the old cautious hucksters" like Jehovah, Kronos, Zeus, and Hercules, gods who held too low an estimate of the value of men and women. Among these writers Melville was alone in his anguish in conviction that true Christianity was impracticable. Melville also felt the brutal power of the Calvinistic Jehovah with special keenness: human beings were "god-bullied" even as the hull of the Pequod was in Moby-Dick, and the best way people had of demonstrating their own divinity lay in defying the omnipotent tyrant. To Dickinson
also, God was often a bully—a “Mastiff,” whom subservience might, or might not, appease. In a series of novels Harriet Beecher Stowe compellingly described the way rigid Calvinism could cripple young minds.

Transcendentalism in the late 1830s and early 1840s was treated in most mainstream newspapers and magazines as something between a national laughingstock and a clear menace to organized religion. The running journalistic joke, which Hawthorne echoed in The Celestial Railroad, was that no one could define the term, other than that it was highfalutin, foreign, and obscurely dangerous. The conservative Christian view is well represented by a passage that appeared in Stowe’s newspaper serialization of Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1851) but was omitted from the book version, a sarcastic indictment of the reader who might find it hard to believe that Tom could be stirred by a passage in the Bible: “I mention this, of course, philosophic friend, as a psychological phenomenon. Very likely it would do no such a thing for you, because you are an enlightened man, and have out-grown the old myths of past centuries. But then you have Emerson’s Essays and Carlyle’s Miscellanies, and other productions of the latter day, suited to your advanced development.” Such early observers understood well enough that Transcendentalism was more pantheistic than Christian. The “defiant Pantheism” infusing Thoreau’s shorter pieces helped keep them out of the magazines, and James Russell Lowell for the Atlantic Monthly publication of a section of The Maine Woods censored a sentence in which Thoreau declared that a pine tree was as immortal as he was and perchance would “go to as high a heaven.”

Melville also was at least once kept from publication by the religious scruples of the magazines, and often he was harshly condemned for what he had managed to publish. For years he bore the wrath of reviewers such as the one who denounced him for writing Moby-Dick and the Harpers for publishing it: “The Judgment day will hold him liable for not turning his talents to better account, when, too, both authors and publishers of injurious books will be conjointly answerable for the influence of those books upon the wide circle of immortal minds on which they have written their mark. The bookmaker and the book-publisher had better do their work with a view to the trial it must undergo at the bar of God.” The ultimate result was that Melville was silenced. This was extreme, but Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman all suffered for transgressing the code of the Doctors of Divinity (Thoreau said he wished it were not the D.D.’s but the chickadee-dees who acted as censors). Thoreau, Whitman, and Stoddard all had works censored before publication in the Atlantic Monthly.

IMMIGRATION AND XENOPHOBIA

However threatened conservative Protestants felt by Transcendentalism and by religious speculations like Melville’s, they felt far more threatened by Catholicism when refugees from the Napoleonic Wars were followed by refugees from oppressed and famine-struck Ireland. In Boston, Lyman Beecher, father of Harriet Beecher Stowe, thundered out antipapist sermons, then professed dismay when in 1834 a mob in Charlestown, across the Charles River from Boston, burned the Ursuline Convent School where daughters
of many wealthy families were educated. For a time Louisa May Alcott’s mother devoted herself to needy Irish immigrants in Boston, in effect defining the job of social worker, all the time appalled at the unstoppable tide of poverty. Through the 1830s and 1840s and long afterward, the United States was saturated with lurid books and pamphlets purporting to reveal the truth about sexual practices in nunneries and monasteries (accounts of how priests and nuns disposed of their babies were specially prized) and about the pope’s schemes to take over the Mississippi Valley (Samuel F. B. Morse and others warned that Jesuits were prowling the Ohio Valley, in disguise). An extreme of xenophobia was reached in the summer of 1844, when rioters in Philadelphia (the City, everyone pointed out, of Brotherly Love) burned Catholic churches and a seminary. Schooled in cultural relativism by his South Sea experiences, Melville was responding to the current hostility when he described the pestilential conditions of steerage passengers in emigrant ships and then made this plea: “Let us waive that agitated national topic, as to whether such multitudes of foreign poor should be landed on our American shores; let us waive it, with the one only thought, that if they can get here, they have God’s right to come; though they bring all Ireland and her miseries with them. For the whole world is the patriarchy of the whole world; there is no telling who does not own a stone in the Great Wall of China.”

Some jobs by definition were deemed unfit for most native-born Americans. In Moby-Dick (chapter 27) Melville said that fewer than half the men on whaling ships were American-born, although almost all the officers were. Then he added: “Herein it is the same with the American whale fishery as with the American army and military and merchant navies, and the engineering forces employed in the construction of the American Canals and Railroads,” the “native American” providing the brains, the “rest of the world” supplying the muscles. The Panama Railroad was completed in 1855 at the cost of thousands of lives of cheap laborers from the Orient, Europe (especially Ireland), and the Caribbean. An article on the railroad in the January 1859 Harper’s New Monthly Magazine mentioned many “Coolies from Hindostan” and recalled that a thousand Chintamen had become “affected with a melancholic, suicidal tendency, and scores of them ended their unhappy existence by their own hands,” while many others died of diseases. This article treated workers as disposable products, saying that the number of those who died could be replenished with, for instance, “freshly imported Irishmen and Frenchmen.” For the first transcontinental railroad in the United States, completed at Promontory Point, Utah, on May 10, 1869, the Union Pacific—working westward—drew laborers from Ireland, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries, among other European sources; the Central Pacific—working eastward—imported perhaps 15,000 Chinese for the most hazardous jobs. What was to become of those still alive when the work was completed? And, now that these Asians were here, what was to keep others from following them? Those of European ancestry could not imagine how the Chinese might be integrated into the national public life. Contradictory efforts both to use immigrant labor and to pretend the immigrants were not here challenged the thinking and the ethics of native-born white Americans, producing waves of anti-immigrant propaganda and violence throughout the period.

For all his humanitarian eloquence, Melville, like the other writers,
realized that the new immigrants were changing the country from the cozy, homogeneous land it had seemed to be to the more fortunate whites. In fact, the country had never been homogeneous; even before the great Irish migration of the 1840s, people had arrived from many European countries, and the idea of stopping immigration selectively and shipping back some immigrants proved as impractical as the prewar “solution” of colonizing black Americans “back” to Africa. But the pace of immigration had increased radically after the Civil War, as did the percentage of immigrants arriving from southern and eastern European countries. Many native-born white people shared Harriet Beecher Stowe’s post–Civil War nostalgia for the days before railroads, Catholics, and eastern European immigration. In the early 1880s, pogroms in Russia drove thousands of Jews into exile, many to western Europe, many to the United States, where immigration officials detained a large number of them at Ward’s Island in the East River, deeming them unfit to be disembarked at Castle Garden, on the Battery, with most other immigrants. In response, Emma Lazarus in 1883 founded the Society for the Improvement and Colonization of Eastern European Jews.

NATIONAL SINS

Some of the writers of this period lived with the anguish of the paradox that the most idealistic nation in the world was implicated in continuing national sins: the near-genocide of the American Indians (whole tribes in colonial times had already become, in Melville’s erroneous phrase for the Pequots, as extinct as the ancient Medes), the enslavement of blacks, and (partly a by-product of slavery) the staged “Executive’s War” against Mexico, started by President Polk before being declared by Congress. The imperialistic Mexican War seemed so gaudily exotic—and so distant—that only a small minority of American writers voiced more than perfunctory opposition; an exception was Thoreau, who spent a night in the Concord jail in symbolic protest against being taxed to support the war. Emerson was an exception, earlier, when most writers were silent about the successive removal of eastern Indian tribes to less desirable lands west of the Mississippi River, as legislated by the Indian Removal Act of 1830. American destiny plainly required a little practical callousness, most whites felt, in a secular version of the colonial notion that God had willed the extirpation of the American Indian. Henry W. Bellows, the very popular Unitarian minister of the Church of All Souls in New York City (pastoral advisor of William Cullen Bryant and Mrs. Herman Melville), had been president of the United States Sanitary Commission, the agency charged with the welfare of the Union volunteer army. In The Old World in Its New Face (1868), Bellows told of meeting a Californian on shipboard in the Mediterranean who had “just escaped scalping on the plains” in 1867 and who thought “extermination the only humane remedy for Indian troubles.” Bellows added: “It is astonishing how blood-thirsty a little personal experience of the Indians makes most Americans! I have never known any body crossing the Plains whose humanity survived the passage.” Later, he casually alluded to the “American Indian passion for blood and extinction of their enemies.”

It was black slavery, what Melville called “man’s foulest crime,” which most stirred the consciences of the white writers, and in describing his own
enslavement, the fugitive Frederick Douglass developed a notable capacity to stir readers as well as audiences in the lecture halls. When the Fugitive Slave Law was enforced in Boston in 1851 (by Melville’s father-in-law, Chief Justice Shaw), Thoreau worked his outrage into his journals; then after another famous case in 1854 he combined the experiences into his most scathing speech, Slavery in Massachusetts, for delivery at a Fourth of July counter-ceremony at which a copy of the Constitution was burned because slavery was written into it. In that speech Thoreau summed up the disillusionment that many of his generation shared. He had felt a vast but indefinite loss after the 1854 case. he said: “I did not know at first what ailed me. At last it occurred to me that what I had lost was a country.” On the very eve of the Civil War, Harriet Jacobs recorded the anguish of a fugitive slave mother whose “owners” were always on the prowl to find her and turn her into the hard cash they needed. More obliquely than Thoreau, Melville explored black slavery in Benito Cereno as an index to the emerging national character. At his bitterest, he felt in the mid-1850s that “free America” was “intrepid, unprincipled, reckless, predatory, with boundless ambition, civilized in externals but a savage at heart.”

John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859, immediately repudiated by the new Republican Party, drew from the now tubercular Thoreau a passionate defense. During the Civil War itself, Lincoln found the genius to suit diverse occasions with right language and length of utterance, but the major writers fell silent. When the war began on April 12, 1861, with the firing of Confederate guns on Fort Sumter, in Charleston harbor, Irving, Cooper, Poe, and Fuller were dead (the younger two earlier than the older two), and before Robert E. Lee’s surrender to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox, Virginia, on April 9, 1865, Thoreau and Hawthorne had also died. Some writers in this anthology had in their way, directly and indirectly, helped to bring the war on: Lincoln was not wholly teasing if in fact he called Stowe “the little woman who had started the big war”; Child and Whittier had by 1861 devoted decades of their lives to the struggle against slavery, arousing furious resistance to them both in the North and in the South; and Douglass’s oratory had revealed to many white Northerners a sense of the evils of slavery and the humanness of those of another race (or of mixed races). Firebrand Yankees such as Thoreau and firebrand Southerners such as G. W. Harris had roused the passions of at least some members of their own communities and regions. When the war came, most northern writers were slow to have a sense of its reality and, like Southerners, erroneously expected it to last only a few months. Visiting Boston and Concord in 1862, fresh from the newly formed West Virginia (the portion of a slave state that had chosen to stay with the Union), Rebecca Harding Davis saw that Emerson had no notion what suffering was involved. Hawthorne, who received her with enthusiasm, had faced the start of the war as a southern sympathizer in a village that had welcomed John Brown, then had seen Washington in wartime, and retained, as he always did, a practical politician’s sense of things.

Among the antebellum writers the war did not evoke great fiction, but Melville’s uneven Battle-Pieces (1866) included some remarkable meditative poems as well as the technically interesting Donelson, in which he conveyed vividly the anxiety of civilians awaiting news during a prolonged and dubious battle and eagerly reading aloud the latest bulletins posted outside the telegraph office. Whitman’s Drum-Taps (1865) also is uneven but contains
several great poems. After a few copies had been dispersed, Whitman held back the edition for a sequel mainly consisting of newly written poems on Lincoln, among them When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d, the greatest literary work to come out of the war and one of the world’s great elegies. Both volumes summed up the national experience. Both writers looked ahead as well as backward. Whitman calling “reconciliation” the “word over all,” and Melville urging in his Supplement to Battle-Pieces that the victorious North “be Christians toward our fellow-whites, as well as philanthropists toward the blacks, our fellow-men.” Later in Specimen Days Whitman made a memorable attempt to do the impossible—to put the real war realistically into a book.

Before she died, Child saw how little Reconstruction had done to achieve her hopes for education and financial uplifting of former slaves. Both Whitman and Melville, especially in their later years, saw American politics come to be concerned with great national struggles over momentous issues; rather, politics meant corruption, on a petty or a grand scale. Melville lived out the Gilded Age as an employee at the notoriously corrupt customhouse in New York City. In Clarel, foreseeing a descent from the present “civic barbarism” to “the Dark Ages of Democracy,” he portrayed his American pilgrims to the Holy Land as recognizing sadly that the time might come to honor the god of limitations in what had been the land of opportunity, a time when Americans might cry: “To Terminus build fanes! / Columbus ended earth’s romance: / No New World to mankind remains!” Written self-consciously as a countercentennial poem, Clarel was published early in June 1876 (George Custer and his men were riding toward Montana Territory; one of the first reviews of Clarel ran in the New York World on June 26, the day after the battle at Little Big Horn). No one would have thought to invite Melville to compose the public Centennial Ode for the great celebration in Philadelphia on July 4, but there were some who knew that Walt Whitman, a true national poet, might well have been invited instead of Bayard Taylor, who so long before had written a valentine for Melville.

THE CHANCE FOR GREATNESS

The American Revolution had helped to incite the French Revolution and, as it seemed to many Americans, its disastrous consequences, and in the post-Napoleonic era Americans struggled to make sense of profound political and social changes in Europe as well as a new scientific knowledge. In 1799 Napoleon’s soldiers in Egypt had taken possession of a large piece of balsalt, the Rosetta Stone; a French civilian had deciphered its hieroglyphics, thereby initiating modern Egyptology and influencing the study of the Bible by subjecting it to historical principles. Archaeological excavations in Italy and elsewhere were transforming historical and aesthetic knowledge of classical Greece and Rome. The German aristocrat Baron Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), on his voyage to Central and South America in 1799–1804, had made stunning discoveries in botany, biology, geology, physical geography, meteorology, climatology, and even astronomy; he published his discoveries in many volumes, starting in 1807. Long before Darwin published his On the Origin of Species (1859), biologists were publishing evidence of
plant and animal evolution, and geologists were challenging religious chronologies that set the creation of the world around 5000 B.C.E. Knowledge of the physical universe was increasing explosively.

At the same time, vast parts of the earth were being seized, not studied, as European states embarked on a ferocious quest for new colonies. One American writer, Herman Melville, had been on the spot when the French seized the Marquesas and had arrived in Tahiti just after the French in their warships extended the benefits of their protection to that island. Melville was in Honolulu when England relinquished its brief control of the Hawaiian Islands. He then sailed under the command of the man who had seized California for the United States in 1843, only to relinquish it the next day, when he received corrected reports of British intentions. The Russians had control of an enormous hunk of the North American continent—Alaska, Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Russia—any number of European powers might at any moment seize any part of the Pacific, Africa, Asia, or even Central or South America. England was already challenging Boston and New York merchants for mastery of trade with China, and any one of several other countries might force Japan to open its harbors to them, not the United States. The seizure of land after the Mexican War had seemed, to a few Americans, deplorable, but within months gold had been discovered in California, clear evidence of divine blessing on the war. After California, what should the United States seize next? Writing Moby-Dick during the Gold Rush, drawing on his personal experiences with imperialism in the Pacific, Melville defined America’s opportunities in whaling terms (chapter 89): “What to that apostolic lance, Brother Jonathan [the United States], is Texas but a Fast-Fish?” Melville foresaw (chapter 14) the time when America would “add Mexico to Texas, and pile Cuba upon Canada” in its piratical acquisitiveness.

At mid-century Irving was an old man and some dared to think an overrated writer. Most of the writers in this period did their best work as young men and women, fiercely ambitious, and in spirit “essentially western” (as Melville said in chapter 22 of Israel Potter). Literary greatness in America was up for grabs, there for the seizing as much as the Marquesas Islands and California had been. In his whaling book, Melville hoped to make literary greatness a “Fast-Fish” forever. Walt Whitman a few years later made the same gigantic attempt to become the poet for America. In the early 1860s, Emily Dickinson, to whom the gold of genius had been given in childhood (poem 454 [455]), and who had made her farewells to friends bound for the Golden State, knew that she was not only the Queen of Calvary (poem 348 [347]), but also the Queen of California in literary greatness—a “Sovereign on a Mine” (poem 901 [856]), the “Prince of Mines” (poem 466 [597]). Thoreau, in Life without Principle, characteristically denounced the “rush to California,” preferring to mine the “auriferous” regions within. The critic Sydney Smith had asked contemptuously in the Edinburgh Review (1820): “In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book?”; Thoreau, who had begun so modestly by addressing his neighbors in Concord, at the end of Walden addressed the book to both John Bull and Brother Jonathan—to anyone in the four quarters of the globe who could read the English language. That was exuberant “western” ambitiousness—what Melville called the “true American” spirit.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTS</th>
<th>CONTEXTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1820  Washington Irving, The Sketch Book</td>
<td>1821  Sequoyah (George Gaskin) invents syllabary in which Cherokee language can be written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821  William Cullen Bryant,  &quot;Thanatopsis&quot;</td>
<td>1821–22  Santa Fe Trail opens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1822  James Fenimore Cooper, The Pioneers</td>
<td>1823  Monroe Doctrine warns all European powers not to establish new colonies on either American continent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1823  David Cusick, Sketches of Ancient History of the Six Nations</td>
<td>1825  Erie Canal opens, connecting Great Lakes region with the Atlantic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826  Cherokee Council composes Memorials</td>
<td>1827  Baltimore and Ohio, first U.S. railroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1829  William Apess, A Son of the Forest</td>
<td>1827–28  Cherokee Nation ratifies its new constitution • The newspaper the Cherokee Phoenix founded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830  David Walker, Appeal</td>
<td>1829–37  President Andrew Jackson encourages westward movement of white population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834  Catharine Maria Sedgwick, &quot;A Reminiscence of Federalism&quot;</td>
<td>1830  Congress passes Indian Removal Act, allowing Jackson to relocate eastern Indians west of the Mississippi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1836  Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature</td>
<td>1831  William Lloyd Garrison starts The Liberator, antislavery journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839  Caroline Stansbury Kirkland, A New Home—Who'll Follow?</td>
<td>1836  Transcendentalists meet informally in Boston and Concord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841  T. B. Thorpe, &quot;The Big Bear of Arkansas.&quot;</td>
<td>1838  Underground railroad aids slaves escaping north, often to Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843  Margaret Fuller, &quot;The Great Lawless&quot;</td>
<td>1838–39  &quot;Troll of Tears&quot;, Cherokees forced from their homelands by federal troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845  Edgar Allan Poe, &quot;The Raven&quot;; Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</td>
<td>1844  Samuel Morse invents telegraph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846–48  United States wages war against Mexico. Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo cedes entire southwest to United States</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEAR</td>
<td>TEXTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, &quot;Evangeline&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td>Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter • Bayard Taylor, Eldorado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Herman Melville, Moby-Dick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom’s Cabin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>Henry David Thoreau, Walden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass • Louise Amanda Smollett Clapp, &quot;California. In 1851 and 1852, Residence In the Mines&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>Fanny Fern (Sarah Willis Parson), Fresh Leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>Abraham Lincoln, &quot;A House Divided&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>Lydia Maria Child, &quot;Letter to Mrs. Margaretta Mason&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>Harriet Prescott Spofford, &quot;Circumstance&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860–65</td>
<td>Emily Dickinson writes several hundred poems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl • Rebecca Harding Davis, Life in the Iron-Mills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>John Greenleaf Whittier, Snow-Bound: A Winter Idyl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>Louisa May Alcott, &quot;Transcendental Wild Oats&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Emma Lazarus, &quot;The New Colossus&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
American Literature
1865–1914

THE TRANSFORMATION OF A NATION

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the fertile, mineral-rich American continent west of the Appalachians and Alleghenies was occupied, often by force, largely by Europeans, who exploited its resources freely. These new Americans, their numbers doubled by a continuous flow of immigrants, pushed westward to the Pacific coast, displacing Native American cultures and Spanish settlements when they stood in the way. Vast stands of timber were consumed; numberless herds of buffalo and other wild game gave way to cattle, sheep, farms, villages, and cities and the railroads that linked them to markets back east; various technologies converted the country’s immense natural resources into industrial products both for its own burgeoning population and for foreign markets.

The Civil War, the seemingly inevitable result of growing economic, political, social, and cultural divisions between North and South, lasted four years, cost some eight billion dollars, and claimed more than six hundred thousand lives. Its savagery seems also to have left the country morally exhausted. Nevertheless, in spite of the astonishing loss of life and ruin of property, especially in the South, the country prospered materially over the five following decades. The war effort stimulated technological innovations and developed new methods of efficiently organizing and managing the movement of large numbers of people, raw materials, and goods. After the war these accomplishments were adapted to industrial modernization on a massive scale. The first transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869; industrial output grew exponentially; agricultural productivity increased dramatically; electricity was introduced on a large scale; new means of communication, such as the telephone, revolutionized many aspects of daily life; coal, oil, iron, gold, silver, and other kinds of mineral wealth were discovered and extracted, producing large numbers of vast individual fortunes and making the nation as a whole rich enough, for the first time, to capitalize its own further development. By the end of the century, no longer a colony politically or economically, the United States could begin its own overseas imperialist expansion (of which the Spanish-American War in 1898 was only one sign).

The central material fact of the period was industrialization on a scale unprecedented in the earlier experiences of Great Britain and Europe. Between 1850 and 1880 capital invested in manufacturing industries more than quadrupled, while factory employment nearly doubled. By 1885 four transcontinental railroad lines were completed, using in their own construction and carrying to manufacturing centers in Cleveland and Detroit the
nation's quintupled output of steel from Pittsburgh and Chicago. As major industries were consolidated into monopolies by increasingly powerful (and ruthless) individuals a very small number of men came to control such enormously profitable enterprises as steel, oil, railroads, meat packing, banking, and finance. Among these men were Jay Gould, Jim Hill, Leland Stanford, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan, and John D. Rockefeller. Robber barons to some, captains of industry to others, they successfully squeezed out their competitors and accumulated vast wealth and power—social and political as well as economic.

In 1865 the United States, except for the manufacturing centers of the northeastern seaboard, was a country of farms, villages, and small towns. Most of its citizens were involved in agriculture or small family businesses. In 1870 the U.S. population was 38.5 million; by 1910 it had grown to 92 million and by 1920, to 123 million. This increase in population came about almost entirely on account of immigration, as did the population shift from country to city. Perhaps 25 million people, mostly Europeans, entered the United States between the Civil War and World War I. Some of the newcomers tried farming; but most settled in the cities—even in the cities in which they had disembarked—so that, for example, the population of New York City grew from 0.5 million to nearly 3.5 million between 1865 and the turn of the twentieth century, whereas Chicago, with a population of 29,000 in 1850, had more than 2 million inhabitants by 1910. (Yet, to keep things in perspective, it should be noted that in 1900 only New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia had more than 1 million inhabitants each.) The new Americans, along with their children and their children's children, enabled the United States eventually to become the urban, industrial, international power we recognize today; they also irrevocably altered the ethnic composition of the population and contributed immeasurably to the democratization of the nation's cultural life. In 1890 most white Americans (including the Irish who had begun to come in the 1840s) either lived in New England or had New England ancestors. But by 1900 New Englanders were no longer numerically dominant. Long-settled and newly arrived white people faced each other across divides of power, income, and privilege—worker against owner, farm against city, immigrant against native born, creating suspicion and social turbulence on a scale that the nation had never seen before.

This transformation of an entire continent involved incalculable suffering for millions of people even as others prospered. In the countryside increasing numbers of farmers, dependent for transportation of their crops on the monopolistic railroads, were squeezed off the land by what novelist Frank Norris characterized as the giant "octopus" that crisscrossed the continent. Everywhere independent farmers were placed "under the lion's paw" of land speculators and absentee landlords that Hamlin Garland's story made infamous. Large-scale farming—initially in Kansas and Nebraska, for example—also squeezed family farmers even as such practices increased gross agricultural yields. For many, the great cities were also, as the socialist novelist Upton Sinclair sensed, jungles where only the strongest, the most ruthless, and the luckiest survived. An oversupply of labor kept wages down and allowed industrialists to maintain inhumane and dangerous working conditions for men, women, and children who competed for jobs.

Neither farmers nor urban laborers were effectively organized to pursue
their own interests, and neither group had any significant political leverage until the 1880s, when the American Federation of Labor, an association of national unions of skilled workers, emerged as the first unified national voice of organized labor. Before then legislators almost exclusively served the interests of business and industry, and the scandals of President Grant's administration, the looting of the New York City treasury by William Marcy ("Boss") Tweed in the 1870s, and the later horrors of municipal corruption exposed by journalist Lincoln Steffens and other "muckrakers" were symptomatic of what many writers of the time took to be the age of the "Great Barbecue." Early attempts by labor to organize were crude and often violent, and such groups as the "Molly Maguires," which performed acts of terrorism in the coal-mining area of northeastern Pennsylvania, confirmed middle-class fears that labor organizations were "illegal conspiracies" and thus public enemies. Direct violence was probably, as young radical writer Emma Goldman believed, a necessary step toward establishing meaningful ways of negotiating disputes between industrial workers and their employers; it was, in any event, not until collective bargaining legislation was enacted in the 1930s that labor effectively acquired the right to strike.

THE LITERARY MARKETPLACE

The rapid transcontinental settlement and new urban industrial circumstances summarized above were accompanied by the development of a national literature of great abundance and variety. New themes, new forms, new subjects, new regions, new authors, new audiences all emerged in the literature of this half century. In fiction, characters rarely represented before the Civil War became familiar figures: industrial workers and the rural poor, ambitious business leaders and vagrants, prostitutes and unheroic soldiers. Women from many social groups, African Americans, Native Americans, ethnic minorities, immigrants: all began to write for publication, and a rapidly burgeoning market for printed work helped establish authorship as a possible career.

Some account, however brief, of the growth of this market may be helpful in understanding the economics of American cultural development. Since colonial times newspapers had been important to the political, social, and cultural life of America, but in the decades after the Civil War their numbers and influence grew. Joseph Pulitzer established the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in 1878, and in 1883 he bought the New York World; both papers were hugely successful. William Randolph Hearst had already made the San Francisco Examiner the dominant newspaper in the far west, and in 1895 he bought the New York Journal to compete with Pulitzer's World. In 1897 The Jewish Daily Forward was founded; its circulation eventually reached 250,000 and was read by three or four times that number. Many of the "writers" who went on to become "authors" got their start as newspaper journalists (Bierce, Cahan, Crane, Dreiser, Sui Sin Far, Harris, William Dean Howells, Frank Norris, and Twain among them). Perhaps of equal importance was the development of literary careers and literature as an institution was the establishment of newspaper syndicates in the 1880s by Irving Bacheller and S. S. McClure. These syndicates published humor, news, car-
toons, and comic strips (by the 1890s), but they also printed both short fiction and novels—Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, for example—in installments.

In the middle of the eighteenth century Benjamin Franklin and Andrew Bradford were among the first to publish monthly magazines, in no small part to demonstrate that a distinctively American culture was forming on the North American continent. By the early years of the nineteenth century weekly magazines such as the *Saturday Evening Post* (founded in 1821), the *Saturday Press* (1838), and the *New York Ledger* (1847) published many writers of fiction, including Mark Twain. East Coast magazines such as *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (1850), *Scribner's Monthly* (1870), Century *Illustrated Monthly Magazine* (1881), the *Atlantic Monthly* (1857), and the *Galaxy* (1866) all provided outlets for such figures as Kate Chopin, Sarah Orne Jewett, Henry James, William Dean Howells, Sarah Piatt, Sui Sin Far, Mark Twain, and Constance Fenimore Woolson. On the West Coast, the *Overland Monthly* (1868) emerged as the leading literary periodical, publishing Bret Harte, Ambrose Bierce, Jack London, and Mark Twain among others. This bare listing of magazines and literary contributors is intended only to suggest the importance of periodicals in providing sources of income and audiences crucial to the further formation of a complex American literary tradition.

Many of these periodicals also played a part in the emergence toward the end of the nineteenth century of what the critic Warner Berthoff aptly designates "the literature of argument"—powerful works in sociology, philosophy, and psychology, many of them impelled by the spirit of exposure and reform. It would be hard to exaggerate the influence—on other writers as well as on the educated public—of Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* (1879). Lester Frank Ward's *The Psychic Factors in Civilization* (1893), Henry Demarest Lloyd's *Wealth against Commonwealth* (1894), Brooks Adams's *The Law of Civilization and Decay* (1895), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics* (1898), Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), and Ida Tarbell's *The History of the Standard Oil Company* (1904).

In short, as the United States became an international political, economic, and military power during this half century, the quantity and quality of its literary production kept pace. In its new security, moreover, it welcomed (in translation) the leading European figures of the time—Leo Tolstoy, Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, Émile Zola, Benito Péres Galdós, Giovanni Verga—often in the columns of Henry James and William Dean Howells, who reviewed their works enthusiastically in *Harper's Weekly* and *Harper's Monthly*, the *North American Review*, and other leading journals of the era. American writers in this period, like most writers of other times and places, wrote to earn money, gain fame, change the world, and—out of that mysterious compulsion to find the best order for the best words—to express themselves in a permanent form. The nature of that form—what might be called the "realistic international art story"—was itself, of course, a product of the complex interplay of historical forces and aesthetic developments apparent, in retrospect, from the time of the publication of French writer Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) and, especially, his *Three Tales* (1877). Among the leading American realists of the period were Mark Twain,
Henry James, Edith Wharton, and William Dean Howells, who together encompassed literary style from the comic vernacular through ordinary discourse to impressionistic subjectivity. Among them these writers recorded life on the vanishing frontier, in the village, small town, and turbulent metropolis, as well as in European resorts and capitals. They established the literary identity of distinctively American protagonists, specifically the vernacular boy hero and the "American Girl," the baffled and strained middle-class family, the businessman, the psychologically complicated citizens of a new international culture. Together, in short, they set the example and charted the future course for the subjects, themes, techniques, and styles of fiction we still call modern.

FORMS OF REALISM

Broadly speaking, realism is used to label a movement in English, European, and American literature that gathered force from the 1830s to the end of the century. It was, ultimately, nothing more or less than the attempt to write a literature that recorded life as it was lived rather than life as it ought to be lived or had been lived in times past. As defined by William Dean Howells (1837–1920), the magazine editor who was for some decades the chief American advocate of realistic aesthetics as well as author of over thirty novels that strive for realism, realism "is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material." Although this definition does not answer every question that may be raised about truth, treatment, or even about material, it offers a useful point of departure. Henry James spoke of the "documentary" value of Howells's work, thereby calling attention through Howells to realism's preoccupation with the physical surfaces, the particularities of the sensate world in which fictional characters lived. These characters were "representative" or ordinary characters—characters one might pass on the street without noticing. Unlike their romantic counterparts, they don't walk with a limp, their eyes don't blaze, they don't emanate diabolical power. Realism, as practiced by Howells, particularly in The Rise of Silas Lapham (1885), the novel many literary historians have identified as quintessentially realistic in the American tradition, seeks to create the illusion of everyday life being lived by ordinary people in familiar surroundings—life seen through a clear glass window (though partly opened to allow for the full range of sense experience).

Edith Wharton's practice of realism shows it at its most technically adroit. In her early story "Souls Belated" (included here) setting is rendered with the fine precision we associate with realism: one of the belated souls, the recently divorced Lydia Tilotson, returns to her hotel sitting room now uncomfortably shared with her lover: "She sat glancing vaguely about the little sitting room, dimly lit by the pallid-globed lamp, which left in twilight the outlines of the furniture, of his writing table heaped with books and papers, of the tea roses and jasmine drooping on the mantelpiece. How long had home it had all grown—how like home!" Wharton had a portrait-painter's eye for detail and especially for the subtle ways light made the physical world plastic. The characters in the story, while they belong to a higher social class than the Laphams of Howells's famous novel, are all recognizable as mem-
bers of that class. Indeed, another passage from the story suggests that it is the aspiration of the wealthy to be as much like each other as possible—to live a life without surprises or drama:

The moral atmosphere of the Tillotson interior was as carefully screened and curtained as the house itself: Mrs Tillotson senior dreaded ideas as much as a draft in her back. Prudent people like an even temperature; and to do anything unexpected was as foolish as going out in the rain. One of the chief advantages of being rich was that one need not be exposed to unforeseen contingencies: by the use of ordinary firmness and common sense one could make sure of doing exactly the same thing every day at the same hour.

Wharton creates a physical setting of great particularity and familiar character types; but her concluding sentence reveals a satirical intent as delicious as it is authorially intrusive. Indeed, while it is true that in her best novels Wharton holds a mirror up to New York high society she is more interested in the psychological and moral reality of the drama of human consciousness than she is in the scenery that furnishes the stage on which the drama is enacted. Even in such centrally realistic novels of manners such as The House of Mirth (1905), The Custom of the Country (1913), and The Age of Innocence (1920) Wharton's primary concerns are more nearly with the intangible—thwarted desire, self-betrayal, murderous emotion, repressed voices—than with the interior decoration of mansions or the fashionable dress of her characters.

In fact, it proved impossible for any realist to represent things exactly as they were; literature demands shaping narratives where life is messy and calls for narrators where life is not narrated. Present-day literary theorists are much more aware of what is called "the crisis of representation"—by which is meant the difference between the representation and the thing represented—than were this generation of realists themselves. But if they had been aware of this problem, they would likely have insisted on the value and significance of their work in calling attention to areas of experience that writers had never dealt with before. It could be plausibly argued that all literature after realism has been, to some degree, "realistic" in its aims.

Working with great self-awareness at the very boundaries of realism, the two greatest artists of the era—Henry James and Mark Twain—understood quite well that language was an interpretation of the real rather than the real thing itself. Twain’s work was realistic in its use of colloquial and vernacular speech as opposed to high-flown rhetoric and in its parade of characters drawn from ordinary walks of life. For many later writers, the simple language of Huckleberry Finn signified the beginning of a truly American style. But Twain’s work also embodied a remarkable comic genius—the author of Huckleberry Finn is funny in ways that Huck himself could never achieve— and resembled performance comedy. Indeed, Twain achieved enormous success as a public reader of his own work. At the other extreme, over a long career Henry James worked his way from recognizably realistic fiction, with a large cast of socially specified (although typically upper-class) characters described by an all-knowing and completely accurate narrator, on toward increasingly subtle representations of the flow of a character's inner thought, such that his elaborately metaphoric work became the starting point for psychological, stream-of-consciousness fiction.
Naturalism is commonly understood as an extension or intensification of realism. The intensification involves the introduction of characters of a kind only occasionally to be found in the fiction of Howells, James, or Wharton—characters from the fringes and lower depths of contemporary society, characters whose fates are the product of degenerate heredity, a sordid environment, and a good deal of bad luck. Bierce, Crane, Dreiser, London, and Norris are usually the figures identified as the leading American naturalists of this period, but before we turn to their work the philosophic and scientific backgrounds of naturalism require some attention.

One of the most far-reaching intellectual events of the last half of the nineteenth century was the publication in 1859 of Charles Darwin’s Origin of Species. This book, together with his Descent of Man (1870), hypothesized on the basis of massive physical evidence that over the millennia humans had evolved from “lower” forms of life. Humans were special, not—as the Bible taught—because God had created them in His image, but because they had successfully adapted to changing environmental conditions and had passed on their survival-making characteristics. In the 1870s English philosopher Herbert Spencer’s application of Darwin’s theory of evolution to social relations was enthusiastically welcomed by many leading American businessmen. Andrew Carnegie was only one successful industrialist who argued that unrestrained competition was the equivalent of a law of nature designed to eliminate those unfit for the new economic order.

Another response to Darwin was to accept the deterministic implications of evolutionary theory and to use them to account for the behavior of characters in literary works. That is, characters were conceived as more or less complex combinations of inherited attributes and habits ingrafted by social and economic forces. As Émile Zola (1840–1902), the influential French theorist and novelist, put the matter in his essay “The Experimental Novel” (1880):

In short, we must operate with characters, passions, human and social data as the chemist and the physicist work on inert bodies, as the physiologist works on living bodies. Determinism governs everything. It is scientific investigation; it is experimental reasoning that combats one by one the hypotheses of the idealists and will replace novels of pure imagination by novels of observation and experiment.

A number of American writers adopted aspects of this pessimistic form of realism, this so-called naturalistic view of humankind, though each writer incorporated such naturalism into his or her work in individual ways, to different degrees, and combined with other perspectives. It would be a mistake in short to believe that American writers simply cobbled their understandings of Darwin, Spencer, or Zola into some rigid, absolutist, dogmatic position shared by all of them. Rather, writers responded to these challenges to traditional belief systems in diverse and innovative ways. They were all concerned on the one hand to explore new territories—the pressures of biology, environment, and other material forces—in making people, particularly lower-class people, who they were. On the other hand, Bierce, Crane, Dreiser, London, and Norris all allowed in different degrees for the value of human beings, for their potential to make some measure of sense out of their experience and for their capacity to act compassionately—even altruistically—under the most adverse circumstances. Even though, therefore, they
were challenging conventional wisdom about human motivation and causality in the natural world, the bleakness and pessimism sometimes found in their fiction are not the same as despair and cynicism.

Critic Cathy Davidson characterizes Ambrose Bierce as "a literary hippoglyph who combines elements that by standard literary historiography should not be conjoined: realism and impressionism, naturalism and surrealism." So while in some respects and in some stories Bierce might be said to be "naturalistic," a careful reading of any of his best short stories—"Chicamauga," "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," and "The Man and the Snake" to name three—makes clear the inadequacy of naturalism as a way of explaining or interpreting Bierce. Undue attention to the sensational and grotesque, Davidson argues, can blind readers to the postmodern self-reflexiveness of Bierce.

Stephen Crane is another case in point. Crane believed, as he said of Maggie, that environment counts for a great deal in determining human fate. But not every person born in a slum ends up as a hooligan, drunk, or suicide. "A great deal," moreover, is not the same as everything. Nature is not hostile; he observes in "The Open Boat," only "indifferent, flatly indifferent." Indeed, the earth in "The Blue Hotel" is described in one of the most famous passages in naturalistic fiction as a "whirling, fire-smote, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb." At the end of the story, however, the questions of responsibility and agency are still alive. In Crane's The Red Badge of Courage Henry Fleming responds to the very end to the world of chaos and violence that surrounds him with alternating surges of panic and self-congratulations, not as a man who has fully understood himself and his place in the world. All the same, Henry has learned something—or at least he seems to have done so. Crane, like most naturalists, is more ambiguous, more accepting of paradoxes than a reductive notion of naturalism would seem to allow for.

Biology, environment, psychological drives, and chance, that is to say, play a large part in shaping human ends in Crane's fiction. But after we have granted this ostensibly naturalistic perspective to Crane, we are still left with his distinctiveness as a writer, with his personal honesty in reporting what he saw (and his concomitant rejection of accepted literary conventions), and with his use of impressionistic literary techniques to present incomplete characters and a broken world—a world more random than scientifically predictable. We are also left, however, with the hardly pessimistic implication of "The Open Boat": that precisely because human beings are exposed to a savage world of chance where death is always imminent, they would do well to learn the art of sympathetic identification with others and how to practice solidarity, an art often learned at the price of death. Without this deeply felt human connection, human experience is as meaningless as wind, sharks, and waves—and this is not, finally, what Crane believed.

Theodore Dreiser certainly did not share Crane's tendency to use words and images as if he were a composer or a painter. But he did share, at least early in his career, Crane's skepticism about human beings; like Crane he was more inclined to see men and women as more like moths drawn to flame than lords of creation. But, again, it is not Dreiser's beliefs that make him a significant figure in American letters: it is what his imagination and literary technique do with an extremely rich set of ideas, experiences, and emotions to create the "color of life" in his fiction that make him a writer worth our attention. If Crane gave American readers through the personal honesty of
his vision a new sense of the human consciousness under conditions of extreme pressure, Dreiser gave them for the first time in his unwieldy novels such as *Sister Carrie* (1900) and *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911) a sense of the fumbling, yearning, confused response to the simultaneously enchanting, exciting, ugly, and dangerous metropolis that had become the familiar residence for such large numbers of Americans by the turn of the century. Abraham Cahan, like Dreiser, wrote about city-dwellers, in particular about eastern European Jews who, starting in 1882, began migrating in large numbers to America. Many of these Yiddish-speaking immigrants settled in the Lower East Side ghetto of Manhattan. Cahan’s major novel *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) brilliantly explores the tensions entailed in the course of reconciling traditional values and ways of living with American modernity.

Exclusive focus on atavistic impulses in London’s *Call of the Wild* (1903) and *The Sea-Wolf* (1904) may keep readers from responding to the complexities of these and other of London’s best fiction. “The Law of Life” may be cited in support of critic Earl Labor’s contention that “the essential creative tension for [London’s] literary artistry, is the opposition of materialism versus spiritualism—that is, the tension between the logical and the scientific on the one hand and the irrational and mystical on the other.” In the “Law of Life” Old Koskoosh, about to be left to die by his tribe, thinks: “Nature did not care. To life she set one task, gave one law. To perpetuate was the task of life, its law is death.” The rather abstract reflection would seem to suggest that the story is driven by a deterministic view of life—that nothing individuals did was of any real significance. Yet the bulk of the story is given over to Old Koskoosh’s memories of his life and particularly to the re-creation of a formative moment from his youth as he and a companion come upon the scene of an old moose struggling in vain against the circle of wolves that have wounded and will soon devour him. In re-creating this extraordinary moment in all of its vivid, dramatic power, and in identifying with the totemic figure of the moose, Koskoosh, it might be argued, has erased his earlier generalization about evolutionary necessity and the meaninglessness of the individual. Acts of imagination and identification do lend meaning and dignity to human existence.

In sum, despite residual prohibitions that insisted on humanity’s elevated place in the universe and a middle-class readership that disliked ugliness and “immorality,” urban America and the depopulated hinterlands proved to be fertile ground for realistic literary techniques and naturalistic ideas, though the ideas were inconsistently applied and the documentary techniques were cross-cut by other literary strategies. Outside of literature, the nation’s founding principle of equality contrasted to the harsh realities of country and urban life, to the lives of African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, women, and minorities, for example, and made for increasing receptiveness to narratives that held a looking glass up to the middle class and obliged them to see how the other half—of themselves and others—lived.

**REGIONAL WRITING**

Regional writing, another expression of the realistic impulse, resulted from the desire both to preserve distinctive ways of life before industrialization
dispersed or homogenized them and to come to terms with the harsh realities that seemed to replace these early and allegedly happier times. At a more practical level, much of the writing was a response to the rapid growth of magazines, which created a new, largely female market for short fiction along with correlated opportunities for women writers. By the end of the century, in any case, virtually every region of the country, from Maine to California, from the northern plains to the Louisianna bayous, had its "local colorist" (the implied comparison is to painters of so-called genre scenes) to immortalize its distinctive natural, social, and linguistic features. Though often suffused with nostalgia, the best work of the regionalists both renders a convincing surface of a particular time and location and investigates psychological character traits from a more universal perspective. This mélangé may be seen in such an early example of regional, also called local-color, writing as Bret Harte's "The Luck of Roaring Camp," which made Harte a national celebrity in 1868. The story is locally specific (though it lacked true verisimilitude) as well as entertaining, and it created mythic types as well as depictions of frontier character that were later called into question by Piatt and Woolson among others.

Hamlin Garland, rather than creating a myth, set out to destroy one. Like so many other writers of the time, Garland was encouraged by Howells to write about what he knew best—in this case the bleak and exhausting life of farmers of the upper Midwest. As he later said, his purpose in writing his early stories was to show that the "mystic quality connected with free land... was a myth." Garland's farmers are no longer the vigorous, sensuous, and thoughtful yeomen depicted in Crèvecoeur's Letters from an American Farmer (1782) but bent, drab figures reminiscent of the protest poet Edwin Markham's "Man with a Hoe" (1899). In "Under the Lion's Paw," from the collection Main-Travelled Roads (1891), we see local color not as nostalgia but as realism in the service of social protest.

The work of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Sui Sin Far, and Constance Fenimore Woolson may be seen as an invitation to consider the world from the perspective of women awakening to, protesting against, and offering alternatives for a world dominated by men and male interests and values. Mary Austin was also a feminist and much of her writing, including her classic Land of Little Rain (1903), invites readers to see the world from a woman's perspective. But Austin's larger claim on literary history is that she made the deserts of southern California palatable for the first time in literature. The marginal characters who people this inhospitable terrain cannot be imagined as existing anywhere else. Stowe, Jewett, Freeman, and Woolson do more than lament the postwar economic and spiritual decline of New England; their female characters suggest the capacity of human beings to live independently and with dignity in the face of community pressures, patriarchal power over women, including women artists and writers, and material deprivation. Together with Alice Brown of New Hampshire and Rose Terry Cook of Connecticut—to mention only two others—these regional writers created not only places but themes that have assumed increasing importance in the twentieth century.

Kate Chopin, not unlike Mark Twain, may be thought of as a regional writer interested in preserving the customs, language, and landscapes of a region of the South. Certainly we have no better record of the antebellum
lower Mississippi River Valley than Twain provided in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Life on the Mississippi, and Chopin's short stories and her novel The Awakening pick up, almost literally, where Twain's books leave off—in the northern Louisiana countryside and, downriver, in New Orleans.

Chopin began her writing career only after she returned to St. Louis from her long sojourn in Louisiana, and in some measure her narratives are tinged with personal nostalgia for a more relaxed and sensuous way of life than people in America's rapidly growing cities could any longer provide. As an urban outsider, Chopin was perhaps all the more sensitive to the nuances of Louisiana country life in particular. Perhaps, too, as a woman, a way of life that centered around families and small communities lent itself to her distinctive form of regionalism. In any case, her treatment of the Creoles, Cajuns, and blacks of New Orleans and Natchitoches (Nakitush) Parish provide fine examples of the literary portrayal of a distinctive region—one less severe and less repressed than the towns and villages portrayed by her New England sister realists. And just as Twain in Huckleberry Finn offers thematic richness beyond the visual and aural documentation of a time, a place and varied society, so too does Chopin, in The Awakening; give us unique access to the interior life a Protestant woman awaking to her oppressions and repressions in the context of a Catholic community still marked by less conscience-stricken Old World attitudes. That The Awakening also has served to crystallize many women's issues of the turn of the century and since is testimony to the potential for regional realism to give the lie to attempts to derogate it as a genre.

REALISM AS ARGUMENT

During these fifty years a vast body of nonfictional prose was devoted to the description, analysis, and critique of social, economic, and political institutions and to the unsolved social problems that were one consequence of the rapid growth and change of the time. Women’s rights, political corruption, the degradation of the natural world, economic inequity, business deceptions, the exploitation of labor—these became the subjects of articles and books by a long list of journalists, historians, social critics, and economists. Much of this writing had literary ambitions, survives as literature, and continues to have genuine power. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's “The Yellow Wallpaper,” for example, may have been written to keep women from going crazy under the suffocating conditions that would disallow women full equality and full participation in the creative, economic, and political life of the nation; but unlike mere propaganda it has resisted all attempts to turn it into a single Western Union message. In fact, the more it has been read the more meanings it has yielded. Similarly, in one of the most ambitious American works of moral instruction, The Education of Henry Adams (1918), Adams registers through a literary sensibility a sophisticated historian's sense of what we now recognize as the disorientation that accompanies rapid and continuous change. To put the case for Adams's book in contemporary terms, Adams invented the idea of future shock. The result is one of the most essential books of and about the whole period.

Of all the issues of the day, perhaps the most persistent and resistant to
solution was the fact of racial inequality. Several selections in this anthology address the long, shameful history of white injustices to black Americans, but two works by black writers and leaders from the turn of the century have a special claim on our attention: the widely admired autobiography of Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (1900) and the richly imagined *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) by W. E. B. Du Bois, with its brilliantly argued rejection of Washington's philosophy. The Washington-Du Bois controversy set the major terms of the continuing debate between black leaders and in the black community: which strategies will most effectively hasten complete equality for blacks educationally, socially, politically, and economically? It is also fair to say that in very different ways Washington's *Up from Slavery* and Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*—admirable literary achievements in themselves—anticipated a tide of black literary production that continues with great force to the present day. One could also argue that the thought and language of Washington and Du Bois are everywhere to be felt in the thought and language of the distinguished line of black thinkers, writers, and artists who followed them.

Two other major writers of the time are Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. These poets, whose roots are in the antebellum period, continued their work into the 1880s. Though their influence would be felt most strongly after World War II, in hindsight they can be seen as the fountainheads of two major strains in modern poetry: the expansive, gregarious form of the self-celebratory Whitman and the concise, compact expressions of the radically private Dickinson.

In the half century we have been considering, material, intellectual, social, and psychological changes in the lives of many Americans went forward at such extreme speed and on such a massive scale that the enormously diverse writing of the time registers, at its core, degrees of shocked recognition of the human consequences of these radical transformations. Sometimes the shock is expressed in recoil and denial—thus the persistence, in the face of the ostensible triumph of realism, of the literature of diversion: nostalgic poetry, sentimental and melodramatic drama, and swashbuckling historical novels. The more enduring fictional and nonfictional prose forms of the era, however, come to terms imaginatively with the individual and collective dislocations and discontinuities associated with the closing out of the frontier, urbanization, intensified secularism, unprecedented immigration, the surge of national wealth unequally distributed, revised conceptions of human nature and destiny, the reordering of family and civil life, and the pervasive spread of mechanical and organizational technologies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTS</th>
<th>CONTEXTS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1855 Walt Whitman, <em>Leaves of Grass</em></td>
<td>1865 Thirteenth Amendment abolishes slavery • Lincoln assassinated • Reconstruction begins</td>
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<tr>
<td>1860–65 Emily Dickinson writes several hundred poems</td>
<td>1867 United States purchases Alaska from Russia</td>
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<tr>
<td>1869 Bret Harte, &quot;The Outcasts of Poker Flat&quot;</td>
<td>1868 Fourteenth Amendment grants African American citizenship</td>
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<tr>
<td>1871 Sarah Morgan Piatt, <em>A Woman's Poems</em></td>
<td>1869 National Woman Suffrage Association founded • first transcontinental railroad completed; Central Pacific construction crews composed largely of Chinese laborers</td>
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<td>1872 Coehlo, &quot;[I am alone]&quot;</td>
<td>1872 Yellowstone, first U.S. national park, established</td>
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<td>1876 Charlot, &quot;[He has filled graves with our bones]&quot;</td>
<td>1876 General Custer defeated by Sioux and Cheyenne at Little Bighorn River • Alexander Graham Bell invents the telephone</td>
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<tr>
<td>1878 Henry James, <em>Daisy Miller</em></td>
<td>1877 Reconstruction ends; segregationist Jim Crow laws instituted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880 Constance Fenimore Woolson, &quot;Miss Grief&quot;</td>
<td>1879 Thomas Edison invents the electric light bulb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881 Joel Chandler Harris, &quot;The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story&quot;</td>
<td>1880–1910 Vast immigration from Europe; U.S. population in 1900 is fourteen times greater than in 1800</td>
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<tr>
<td>1884 Mark Twain (Samuel L. Clemens), <em>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</em> • W. D. Howells, <em>The Rise of Silas Lapham</em></td>
<td>1882 J. D. Rockefeller organizes Standard Oil Trust • Chinese Exclusion Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886 Sarah Orne Jewett, &quot;A White Heron&quot;</td>
<td>1886 Statue of Liberty dedicated</td>
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<tr>
<td>1889 Hamlin Garland, &quot;Under the Lion's Paw&quot;</td>
<td>1887 General Allotment Act (Dawes Act) passed to redistribute tribally held land base</td>
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<td>1889 Wovoka (Jack Wilson), a Paiute, has vision that inspires Ghost Dance religion</td>
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<td>TEXTS</td>
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<td>1890</td>
<td>Ambrose Bierce, &quot;An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, &quot;A New England Nun&quot;; Wovoka, &quot;The Messiah Letter; Cheyenne Version&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Charlotte Perkins Gilman, &quot;The Yellow Wall-paper&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Frederick Jackson Turner, The Significance of the Frontier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>James Mooney publishes Ghost Dance Songs</td>
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<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Stephen Crane, &quot;The Open Boat&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Abraham Cahan, &quot;The Imported Bridegroom&quot; and Other Stories of the New York Ghetto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Kate Chopin, The Awakening; Charles W. Chesnutt, &quot;The Wife of His Youth&quot;; Edith Wharton, &quot;Souls Beloved&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Frances Densmore, Chipewa Songs; Sai Sin Far, &quot;Mrs. Spring Fragrance&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Charles Alexander Eastman (Ojibwe), From the Deep Woods to Civilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Census Bureau declares frontier &quot;closed&quot;; Seventh Cavalry massacre at Wounded Knee ends Native American armed resistance to U.S. government; Ellis Island Immigration Station opens</td>
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<td>1893</td>
<td>World’s Columbian Exposition held in Chicago</td>
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<td>1896</td>
<td>Plessy v. Ferguson upholds segregated transportation</td>
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<td>1898</td>
<td>United States annexes Hawaii</td>
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<tr>
<td>1898–99</td>
<td>Spanish–American War</td>
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<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>U.S. population exceeds seventy-five million</td>
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<td>1901</td>
<td>J. P. Morgan founds U.S. Steel Corporation; first transatlantic radio</td>
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<td>1903</td>
<td>Henry Ford founds Ford Motor Co.; Wright brothers make the first successful airplane flight; The Great Train Robbery is first U.S. cinematic narrative</td>
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<td>1905</td>
<td>Industrial Workers of the World founded</td>
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<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) founded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>Panama Canal open</td>
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</tbody>
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