

عنوان المحاضرة

Lecture One

General and Brief Introduction to American Literature

مقدمة:

In the beginning, America was a series of British colonies on the east coast of the present-day United States. Therefore, its literary tradition begins with the tradition of English literature. However, very quickly unique American characteristics and the breadth of its production began to develop an American writing tradition.

Some consider Captain John Smith to be the first American author, when he wrote *The General Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* (1624)

Similar writers of interest include Daniel Cox, John Hammond, Gabriel Thomas, George Percy, Daniel Denton, Thomas Ash, John Lawson and William Strachey.

Poetry was also written in those early days, Nicholas Noyes wrote Doggerel verse.

Edward Taylor and Anne Bradstreet were popular and Michael Wigglesworth was known for his best selling poem *The Day of Doom*.

It is almost inevitable that given the history of the early American settlers, religious questions were rich topics for early writings. A journal written by John Winthrop discussed the religious foundations of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

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American literature has a relatively short but colorful history. The first widely read American author was Benjamin Franklin, whose witty aphorisms and sound advice written in the yearly journal *Poor Richard's Almanack* helped shape ideas of what it means to be an American.

Washington Irving (*The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*) was the first American to gain an international literary reputation. James Fenimore Cooper's verbal landscapes in his *Leatherstocking Tales* captured the nation's vast beauty. Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson broke from poetic tradition and brought a sense of individuality to the nation's literature. Mark Twain still captivates readers with his unique—and uniquely American—humor and insight. The modernists of the 1920s and 1930s produced such talents as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. Today, writers like Toni Morrison and Cormac McCarthy continue to make American literature relevant and exciting.

American literature like American history, although short, however, still full of glories and shining masterpieces and writers. Those American

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writers, while conquering this wild America, also had conquered the great field of American literature. From its first imitative activities to innovative attempts nowadays, American literature gradually gains its unique style, theme and form, and it is always excited to see their works are more and more America in its true sense. American literature is part of world's literature, however, it always has its unique flavor that cannot be easily ignored.

Most critics hold that the history of American literature can be divided into six parts, orderly, colonial period, romanticism, realism, naturalism, modernism and post-modernism.

Although American literature in its true sense did not begin until 19th century, however, we always talk about colonial period as a preparatory introduction to American literature.

American literature is the written or literary work produced in the area of the United States and its preceding colonies. During its early history, America was a series of British colonies on the eastern coast of the present-day United States. Therefore, its literary tradition begins as linked to the broader tradition of English Literature. However, unique American characteristics and the breadth of its production usually now cause it to be considered a separate path and tradition.

Unique American style

With the [War of 1812](#) and an increasing desire to produce uniquely American literature and culture, a number of key new literary figures emerged, perhaps most prominently [Washington Irving](#), [William Cullen Bryant](#), [James Fenimore Cooper](#), and [Edgar Allan Poe](#). Irving, often considered the first writer to develop a unique American style(although this has been debated) wrote humorous works in [Salmagundi](#) and the satire [A History of New York, by Diedrich Knickerbocker](#) (1809). Bryant wrote early romantic and nature-inspired poetry, which evolved away from their European origins. In 1832, Poe began writing short stories – including "[The Masque of the Red Death](#)", "[The Pit and the Pendulum](#)", "[The Fall of the House of Usher](#)", and "[The Murders in the Rue Morgue](#)" – that explore previously hidden levels of human psychology and push

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the boundaries of fiction toward [mystery](#) and [fantasy](#). Cooper's [Leatherstocking Tales](#) about [Natty Bumppo](#) (which includes [The Last of the Mohicans](#)) were popular both in the new country and abroad. Humorous writers were also popular and included [Seba Smith](#) and [Benjamin P. Shillaber](#) in [New England](#) and [Davy Crockett](#), [Augustus Baldwin Longstreet](#), [Johnson J. Hooper](#), [Thomas Bangs Thorpe](#), and [George Washington Harris](#) writing about the American frontier.

عنوان المحاضرة

Lecture Two

Colonial Literature

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Colonial American Literature

Colonial American literature is writing that emerged from the original U.S. colonies during the period from 1607 to the late 1700s. It was largely influenced by British writers, and was created to inform people about colonial life, religious disputes and settlement issues. Many of the characteristics of Colonial American literature can be found in the poems, journals, letters, narratives, histories and teaching materials written by settlers, religious figures and historical icons of the period. Colonial American literature includes the writings of Mary Rowlandson, William Bradford, Anne Bradstreet and John Winthrop.

Aspects and Characteristics of Colonial American Literature

Historical

One of the major characteristics of Colonial American literature is its historical aspects, which evolved over time during the 400 years since its beginnings. Great figures from American history have also contributed to this genre, such as John Smith and William Penn.

Narrative

Colonial American literature is characterized by the narrative, which was used extensively during this period. Most of the literary works of this genre are composed of letters, journals, biographies and memoirs. An example is Mary Rowlandson's narrative account, "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson." This narrative

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

gives an insider's account of a colonist being captured by Native Americans and describes the heavy hostility between the Native Americans and colonists. Rowland's story is categorized as an autobiography and a captivity narrative.

Religion and Poetry

Religion is also another characteristic of Colonial American literature and can be found mostly in Puritan writings. The Puritans wrote about the religious foundations of many of their settlements, especially the exodus from Britain, and employed the constant theme that God should be worshipped. They also used texts that prepared them for worship. This literature helped spread the message of God, suggesting that "life was a test" and the soul would face damnation if that test was failed. Ambition and hard work were continuously stressed. Many of the Puritan works were written in poetry form. Anne Bradstreet's poetry, the "Bay Psalm Book," and Pastor Edward Taylor's "Preparatory Mediations" are good examples of religious texts of the era. It was this type of writing that led to the Puritanism and Great Awakening movements. Non-Puritan writers also used religion to show the religious tension between the Colonial settlers and Native Americans.

The Enlightenment

In the 18th century, the Enlightenment showed a great shift in Colonial American literature from a religious foundation to scientific reasoning applied to human nature, society, culture and political awareness. Many texts were written in pamphlet or narrative form and challenged the role of God and religious life, seeking to replace them with reason. Rational thought and science were the new themes. "The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin" and the pamphlet "Common Sense" by Thomas Paine explored many of these new ideas. Similar texts also led the way to more awareness of social, economic and scientific issues. The American Revolution had a large part to play in the shifting of ideas.

Romanticism Lecture Three

مقدمة:

Influence of European Romanticism on American writers

The European Romantic movement reached America in the early 19th century. American Romanticism was just as multifaceted and individualistic as it was in Europe. Like the Europeans, the American Romantics demonstrated a high level of moral enthusiasm, commitment to individualism and the unfolding of the self, an emphasis on intuitive perception, and the assumption that the natural world was inherently good, while human society was filled with corruption.

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Romanticism became popular in American politics, philosophy and art. The movement appealed to the revolutionary spirit of America as well as to those longing to break free of the strict religious traditions of early settlement. The Romantics rejected rationalism and religious intellect. It appealed to those in opposition of Calvinism, which includes the belief that the destiny of each individual is preordained. The Romantic movement gave rise to New England [Transcendentalism](#) which portrayed a less restrictive relationship between God and Universe. The new philosophy presented the individual with a more personal relationship with God. Transcendentalism and Romanticism appealed to Americans in a similar fashion, for both privileged feeling over reason, individual freedom of expression over the restraints of tradition and custom. It often involved a rapturous response to nature. It encouraged the rejection of harsh, rigid Calvinism, and promised a new blossoming of American culture.

American Romanticism embraced the individual and rebelled against the confinement of neoclassicism and religious tradition. The Romantic movement in America created a new literary genre that continues to influence American writers. Novels, short stories, and poems replaced the sermons and manifestos of yore. Romantic literature was personal, intense, and portrayed more emotion than ever seen in neoclassical literature. America's preoccupation with freedom became a great source of motivation for Romantic writers as many were delighted in free expression and emotion without so much fear of ridicule and controversy. They also put more effort into the psychological development of their

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

characters, and the main characters typically displayed extremes of sensitivity and excitement.

The works of the Romantic Era also differed from preceding works in that they spoke to a wider audience, partly reflecting the greater distribution of books as costs came down during the period. The Romantic period saw an increase in female authors and also female readers.

Poe, Emerson, and Hawthorne are near perfect representations for Romanticism. Poe's poetry has that happy, lyrical, and metrical verse. His subjects may be gloomy, but his poems contain sentimentality and supernatural characteristics and are about exploring the human psyche. For example, "The Raven" is about a sleepless narrator who is absolutely haunted by a raven. This man is mourning the death of his lost Lenore and is very melancholy. The raven shows up and makes his perch and will not leave. The man asks questions about grief, but the raven will only answer "nevermore." This event would never occur in real life, which makes the poem Romantic. The poem also is about exploring the depths of this man's grief. Similarly, Emerson is Romantic. Actually he is transcendental, but this can be seen as an offshoot of Romanticism. In "Self Reliance," Emerson espouses the ideas of Transcendentalism. He tells the reader things like the importance of trusting oneself and that we don't know everything by knowledge; some things are learned through experience. The philosophy makes sense but is "out there" enough for it to be hard to incorporate into everyday life. Discussing abstract ideas without translation to real life is Romantic as well. In his poem "Give All to Love," he also talks of the importance to trusting oneself and giving oneself over to the divine power of love. In Hawthorne's short stories, these abstract qualities take on a symbolic meaning. In "The Birthmark," Alymer was so involved in achieving perfection that he ended up killing his wife in the process. As virtual mentor says, "Nature in romantic literature is moral; it bears symbolic meaning, and humans who challenge it with inadequate respect for the immanent power of the divine generally learn lessons in humility" (virtual mentor).

Who are they again?

So who were these Romanticism writers? First of all they were a diverse group of individuals varying from different backgrounds and styles, but one thing that they had in common was that they were all individualistic minded writers. Here is a list of the authors below with their major works and importance:

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

Nathaniel Hawthorne- "Young Goodman Brown", "The Scarlet Letter", "The House of Green Gables", one of the anti-romantics.

Edgar Allan Poe- "Narrative of Arthur Gordon Rym", "A Tell Tale Heart", "The Raven", inventor of the American short short, known for his Gothic writings, and viewed the countryside as a phantasm or an illusionary mental image.

Washington Irving- "Rip Van Winkle", "Sleepy Hollow", is the father of American Literature, saw the country as a escape from city life, and fought for copyright infringement laws for authors.

Walt Whitman- the controversial "Leaves of Grass", "Franklin Evans", one of the bridge poets between American Romanticism and the 20th century.

Henry David Thoreau- "Civil Disobedience", he was a practical transcendentalist.

Harriet Beecher Stowe- "Uncle Tom's Cabin". the "little lady who started the Civil War" and kept European nations from aiding the south in the Civil War.

James Fenimore Cooper- "The Last of the Mohicans" and was the father of the American novel.

Emily Dickinson- "is My verse...alive", one of the bridge poets between American Romanticism and the 20th century.

Lecture Four

Realism

مقدمة:

American realism

American realism was an early 20th century idea in art, music and literature that showed through these different types of work, reflections of the time period. Whether it was a cultural portrayal, or a scenic view of downtown New York City, these images and works of literature, music and painting depicted a contemporary view of what was happening; an attempt at defining what was real.

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Realism in American Literature, 1860-1890

In American literature, the term "realism" encompasses the period of time from the Civil War to the turn of the century during which William Dean Howells, Rebecca Harding Davis, Henry James, Mark Twain, and others wrote fiction devoted to accurate representation and an exploration of American lives in various contexts. As the United States grew rapidly after the Civil War, the increasing rates of democracy and literacy, the

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

rapid growth in industrialism and urbanization, an expanding population base due to immigration, and a relative rise in middle-class affluence provided a fertile literary environment for readers interested in understanding these rapid shifts in culture. In drawing attention to this connection, Amy Kaplan has called realism a "strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change" (*Social Construction of American Realism* ix).

Realism was a movement that encompassed the entire country, or at least the Midwest and South, although many of the writers and critics associated with realism (notably W. D. Howells) were based in New England. Among the Midwestern writers considered realists would be Joseph Kirkland, E. W. Howe, and Hamlin Garland; the Southern writer John W. DeForest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* is often considered a realist novel, too.

American Realism

Description:

Like all the terms relating to literary movements, the term is loose and somewhat equivocal. American Realism began as a reaction to and a rejection of Romanticism, with its emphasis on emotion, imagination, and the individual. The movement began as early as the 1830's but reached prominence and held sway from the end of the Civil War to around the end of the nineteenth century. The movement was centered in fiction, particularly the novel. It attempted fidelity to real life, or "actuality," in its representation. The realist concerns himself with the here and now, centering his work in his own time, dealing with common-place everyday events and people, and with the socio-political climate of his day .

Major Writers

Samuel Clemens, fiction
of Huckleberry Finn, Life on the Mississippi

Offenses",

King Arthur's Court

Bret Harte, short fiction
Harte "The Outcasts of Poker Flat" "The Luck

Ambrose Bierce, fiction
Civilian (1891)

William Dean Howells, fiction, essays
(1882), *The Rise of Silas Lapham, A Hazard of New*

Representative Works

The Adventures

"Fenimore Cooper's Literary

A Connecticut Yankee in

Selected Stories of Bret

of Roaring Camp"

Tales of Soldiers and

A Modern Instance
Fortunes

**** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ****

Henry James, fiction	<u>"Daisy Miller," Portrait of A Lady, <i>The American</i>, <i>The Turn of the Screw</i></u>
Edith Wharton, fiction	<u><i>The House of Mirth</i>, <i>Ethan Frome</i>, <i>The Age of Innocence</i></u>
Kate Chopin, fiction	<u><i>The Awakening</i></u>
George Washington Cable, fiction	<u><i>The Grandissimes</i>, <i>Old Creole Days</i></u>
Joel Chandler Harris, fiction	<u>Uncle Remus stories</u>
Charles Chestnutt, fiction	<u><i>The Conjure Woman</i></u>
(1899), <u><i>The House Behind the Cedars</i> (1900)</u>	<u>"The Goophered Grapevine," "The Passing of Grandison"</u>
Paul Lawrence Dunbar, poet	
Hamlin Garland, fiction	<u>"Under the Lion's Paw"</u>

Common Themes and Elements in Realism

Pragmatism

literature of the common-place

attempts to represent real life

ordinary people--poor and middle class

ordinary speech in dialect--use of vernacular

recent or contemporary life

subject matter presented in an unidealized, unsentimentalized way

democratic function of literature

social criticism--effect on audience is key

presents indigenous American life

importance of place--regionalism, "local color"

sociology and psychology

**** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ****

Lecture Five Naturalism

مقدمة:

American Naturalism in Literature

American literary naturalism is a literary movement that became popular in late-nineteenth-century America and is often associated with literary realism. The term naturalism was initially coined by Emile Zola, the renowned French author who is also credited as a key figure in the development of French literary naturalism. In the late nineteenth century, the literary movement became popular all over Europe, from England to Russia. American writers were particularly influenced by the British and French models and began to adapt the form to reflect American social, economic, and cultural conditions. Viewed as a combination of realism and romanticism, critics contend that the American form is heavily influenced by the concept of determinism—the theory that heredity and environment influence determine human behavior. Although naturalism is often associated with realism, which also seeks to accurately represent human existence, the two movements are differentiated by the fact that naturalism is connected to the doctrine of biological, economic, and social determinism. In their short fiction, naturalist writers strive to depict life accurately through an exploration of the causal factors that have shaped a character's life as well as a deterministic approach to the character's thoughts and actions. Therefore, instead of free will, a naturalist depicts a character's actions as determined by environmental forces.

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American literary naturalism came to the forefront of popular literature during a time of tremendous cultural and economic upheaval in the United States; in the late nineteenth century, industrialization, urbanization, mechanization, and an influx of immigrants from all over the world resulted in extreme changes on the American landscape. The short fiction of American literary naturalism depicts the experiences of impoverished and uneducated people living in squalor and struggling to survive in a harsh, indifferent world. Major thematic concerns of the form include the fight for survival—man against nature and man against society; violence; the consequences of sex and sex as a commodity; the waste of individual potential because of the conditioning forces of life; and man's struggle with his animalistic, base instincts. As a result, the short stories of this literary movement are often regarded as depressing, slice-of-life documentations of sad, unfulfilled lives. A handful of significant American authors, such as Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, and Frank Norris, utilized the form, which noticeably declined in popularity by the early twentieth century. Critics note, however, the

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

literary movement's continuing influence on contemporary American authors.

NATURALISM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Definitions:

The term naturalism describes a type of literature that attempts to apply scientific principles of objectivity and detachment to its study of human beings. Unlike realism, which focuses on literary technique, naturalism implies a philosophical position: for naturalistic writers, since human beings are, in Emile Zola's phrase, "human beasts," characters can be studied through their relationships to their surroundings. Other influences on American naturalists include Herbert Spencer and Joseph LeConte. Naturalistic writers believed that the laws behind the forces that govern human lives might be studied and understood. Naturalistic writers thus used a version of the scientific method to write their novels; they studied human beings governed by their instincts and passions as well as the ways in which the characters' lives were governed by forces of heredity and environment. Although they used the techniques of accumulating detail pioneered by the realists, the naturalists thus had a specific object in mind when they chose the segment of reality that they wished to convey.

In George Becker's famous and much-annotated and contested phrase, naturalism's philosophical framework can be simply described as "pessimistic materialistic determinism."

The naturalistic novel usually contains two tensions or contradictions, and . . . the two in conjunction comprise both an interpretation of experience and a particular aesthetic recreation of experience. In other words, the two constitute the theme and form of the naturalistic novel. The first tension is that between the subject matter of the naturalistic novel and the concept of man which emerges from this subject matter. The naturalist populates his novel primarily from the lower middle class or the lower class. . . . His fictional world is that of the commonplace and unheroic in which life would seem to be chiefly the dull round of daily existence, as we ourselves usually conceive of our lives. But the naturalist discovers in this world those qualities of man usually associated with the heroic or adventurous, such as acts of violence and passion which involve sexual adventure or bodily strength and which culminate in desperate moments and violent death. A naturalistic novel is thus an extension of realism only in the sense that both modes often deal with the local and contemporary. The naturalist, however, discovers in this material the extraordinary and excessive in human nature.

The second tension involves the theme of the naturalistic novel. The naturalist often describes his characters as though they are conditioned and controlled by environment, heredity, instinct, or chance. But he also

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

suggests a compensating humanistic value in his characters or their fates which affirms the significance of the individual and of his life. The tension here is that between the naturalist's desire to represent in fiction the new, discomfiting truths which he has found in the ideas and life of his late nineteenth-century world, and also his desire to find some meaning in experience which reasserts the validity of the human enterprise.

Characteristics:

Characters. Frequently but not invariably ill-educated or lower-class characters whose lives are governed by the forces of heredity, instinct, and passion. Their attempts at exercising free will or choice are hamstrung by forces beyond their control.

Setting. Frequently an urban setting, as in Norris's *McTeague*.

Techniques and plots. Walcutt says that the naturalistic novel offers "clinical, panoramic, slice-of-life" drama that is often a "chronicle of despair". The novel of degeneration--Zola's *L'Assommoir* and Norris's *Vandover and the Brute*, for example--is also a common type.

Themes:

1. Walcutt identifies survival, determinism, violence, and taboo as key themes.

2. The "brute within" each individual, composed of strong and often warring emotions: passions, such as lust, greed, or the desire for dominance or pleasure; and the fight for survival in an amoral, indifferent universe. The conflict in naturalistic novels is often "man against nature" or "man against himself" as characters struggle to retain a "veneer of civilization" despite external pressures that threaten to release the "brute within."

3. Nature as an indifferent force acting on the lives of human beings. The romantic vision of Wordsworth--that "nature never did betray the heart that loved her"--here becomes Stephen Crane's view in "The Open Boat": "This tower was a giant, standing with its back to the plight of the ants. It represented in a degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual--nature in the wind, and nature in the vision of men. She did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent."

4. The forces of heredity and environment as they affect--and afflict--individual lives.

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

5. An indifferent, deterministic universe. Naturalistic texts often describe the futile attempts of human beings to exercise free will, often ironically presented, in this universe that reveals free will as an illusion.

Practitioners:

Theodore Dreiser

Edith Wharton; "The House of Mirth" (1905)

Ellen Glasgow; "Barren Ground" (1925) (

John Dos Passos (1896-1970), U.S.A. trilogy (1938): The 42nd Parallel (1930), 1919 (1932), and The Big Money (1936)

James T. Farrell (1904-1979), Studs Lonigan (1934)

John Steinbeck (1902-1968), The Grapes of Wrath (1939)

Richard Wright, Native Son (1940), Black Boy (1945)

Norman Mailer (1923-2007), The Naked and the Dead (1948)

Other writers sometimes identified as naturalists:

Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio (1919)

Abraham Cahan, The Making of an American Citizen

Kate Chopin; "The Awakening"

Rebecca Harding Davis

William Faulkner

Henry Blake Fuller, The Cliff-Dwellers

Hamlin Garland, Rose of Dutcher's Coolly

Robert Herrick, The Memoirs of an American Citizen (1905)

Ernest Hemingway

E. W. Howe, The Story of a Country Town

Lecture Six

Modernism

Modernism in Literature: Quick Overview

Don't confuse the Modernists movement with the standard dictionary definition of modern. Modernism in Literature is not a chronological designation; rather it consists of literary work possessing certain loosely defined characteristics.

What is Modernism?

The following are characteristics of Modernism:

Marked by a strong and intentional break with tradition. This break includes a strong reaction against established religious, political, and social views.

Belief that the world is created in the act of perceiving it; that is, the world is what we say it is.

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There is no such thing as absolute truth. All things are relative.
No connection with history or institutions. Their experience is that
of alienation, loss, and despair.

Championship of the individual and celebration of inner strength.

Life is unordered.

Concerned with the sub-conscious.

American Modernism

Known as "The Lost Generation" American writers of the 1920s Brought
Modernism to the United States. For writers like Hemingway and
Fitzgerald, World War I destroyed the illusion that acting virtuously
brought about good. Like their British contemporaries, American
Modernists rejected traditional institutions and forms. American
Modernists include:

Ernest Hemingway - *The Sun Also Rises* chronicles the
meaningless lives of the Lost Generation. *Farewell to Arms*
narrates the tale of an ambulance driver searching for meaning in
WWI.

F. Scott Fitzgerald - [The Great Gatsby](#) shows through its
protagonist, Jay Gatsby, the corruption of the American Dream.
John Dos Passos, Hart Crane, and Sherwood Anderson are other
prominent writers of the period.

Elements of Modernism in American Literature

Modernism was a cultural wave that originated in Europe and swept the
United States during the early 20th century. Modernism impacted music,
art and literature by radically undoing traditional forms, expressing a
sense of modern life as a sharp break from the past and its rigid
conventions. In literature, the elements of modernism are thematic,
formal and stylistic.

Destruction

During the First World War, the world witnessed the chaos and
destruction of which modern man was capable. The modernist American
literature produced during the time reflects such themes of destruction
and chaos. But chaos and destruction are embraced, as they signal a
collapse of Western civilization's classical traditions. Literary modernists
celebrated the collapse of conventional forms. Modernist novels destroy
conventions by reversing traditional norms, such as gender and racial
roles, notable in F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby," for example.
They also destroy conventional forms of language by deliberately
breaking rules of syntax and structure. William Faulkner's novel "The

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

"Sound and the Fury," for instance, boldly rejects the rules of language, as Faulkner invents new words and adopts a first-person narrative method, interior monologue.

Fragmentation

Related to the theme of destruction is the theme of fragmentation. Fragmentation in modernist literature is thematic, as well as formal. Plot, characters, theme, images, and narrative form itself are broken. Take, for instance, T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," which depicts a modern waste land of crumbled cities. The poem itself is fragmented, consisting of broken stanzas and sentences that resemble the cultural debris and detritus through which the speaker (modern man) wades. William Faulkner's novels, such as "The Sound and the Fury" are also fragmented in form, consisting of disjointed and nonlinear narratives. Modernist literature embraces fragmentation as a literary form, since it reinforces the fragmentation of reality and contradicts Hegelian notions of totality and wholeness.

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Cycle

Modernist literature is concerned with representing modernity, which, by its very definition, supersedes itself. Modernity must, in order to emerge, annihilate the past. Problematically, modernity must annihilate itself the very moment it is actualized, as the moment it emerges, it becomes a part of the past. Modernist literature represents the paradox of modernity through themes of cycle and rejuvenation. Eliot's speaker in "The Waste Land" famously declares "these fragments I have shored against my ruins" (line 430). The speaker must reconstruct meaning by reassembling the pieces of history. Importantly, there is rebirth and rejuvenation in ruin, and modernist literature celebrates the endless cycle of destruction, as it ever gives rise to new forms and creations.

Loss and Exile

Modernist literature is also marked by themes of loss and exile.

Modernism rejected conventional truths and figures of authority, and modernists moved away from religion. In modernist literature, man is assured that his own sense of morality trumps. But individualism results

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

in feelings of isolation and loss. Themes of loss, isolation and exile from society are particularly apparent in Ernest Hemingway's novels, the protagonists of which adopt rather nihilistic outlooks of the world because they have become so disenfranchised from the human community.

Narrative Authority

Another element of modernist literature is the prevalent use of personal pronouns. Authority becomes a matter of perspective. There is no longer an anonymous, omniscient third-person narrator, as there is no universal truth, according to the modernists. In fact, many modernist novels (Faulkner's, for instance) feature multiple narrators, as many modernist poems ("The Waste Land", for instance) feature multiple speakers. The conflicting perspectives of various narrators and speakers reflect the multiplicities of truth and the diversities of reality that modernism celebrates.

Social Evils

Modernist novels did not treat lightly topics about social woes, war and poverty. John Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath" frankly depicts families plagued by economic hardship and strife, contradicting idyllic depictions of American life represented elsewhere in literature. Modernist novels also reflect a frank awareness of societal ills and of man's capacity for cruelty. Ernest Hemingway's anti-heroic war tales depicted the bloodiness of the battlefields, as he dealt frankly with the horrors of war. Faulkner, particularly in his most famous novel, "The Sound and the Fury," also shows how incomprehensibly cruel man can be, especially with regard to racial and class differences

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

Lecture Seven

Harlem Renaissance

Harlem Renaissance

The **Harlem Renaissance** was a [cultural movement](#) that spanned the 1920s. At the time, it was known as the "New Negro Movement", named after the 1925 anthology by [Alain Locke](#). Though it was centered in the [Harlem](#) neighborhood of [New York City](#), many French-speaking black writers from African and Caribbean colonies who lived in [Paris](#) were also influenced by the Harlem Renaissance.

The Harlem Renaissance is unofficially recognized to have spanned from about 1919 until the early or mid 1930s. Many of its ideas lived on much longer. The zenith of this "flowering of Negro literature", as [James Weldon Johnson](#) preferred to call the Harlem Renaissance, was placed between 1924 (the year that *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* hosted a party for black writers where many white publishers were in attendance) and 1929 (the year of the [stock market](#) crash and the beginning of the [Great Depression](#)).

Important Features

1. Harlem Renaissance (HR) is the name given to the period from the end of World War I and through the middle of the 1930s Depression, during which a group of talented African-American writers produced a sizable body of literature in the four prominent genres of poetry, fiction, drama, and essay.

2. The notion of "twoness", a divided awareness of one's identity, was introduced by W.E.B. Du Bois, one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). and the author of the influential book *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903): "One ever feels his two-ness - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled stirrings: two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

3. Common themes: alienation, marginality, the use of folk material, the use of the blues tradition, the problems of writing for an elite audience.

4. HR was more than just a literary movement: it included racial consciousness, "the back to Africa" movement led by Marcus Garvey, racial integration, the explosion of music particularly jazz, spirituals and blues, painting, dramatic revues, and others.

Novels of the Harlem Renaissance

Fauset, Jessie Redmon: *There is Confusion*, 1924; *Plum Bun*, 1928; *The Chinaberry Tree*; 1931; *Comedy, American Style*, 1933

Hughes, Langston: *Not Without Laughter*, 1930

Larsen, Nella: *Quicksand*, 1928; *Passing*, 1929

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

McKay, Claude: *Home to Harlem*, 1927; *Banjo*, 1929; *Gingertown*, 1931; *Banana Bottom*, 1933
Schuyler, George: *Black No More*, 1930; *Slaves Today*, 1931
Thurman, Wallace: *The Blacker the Berry; a Novel of Negro Life*, 1929; *Infants of the Spring*, 1932; *Interne*, with Abraham I. Furman, 1932
Van Vechten, Carl: *Nigger Heaven*, 1926

Harlem Renaissance

In 1904 several middleclass African American families moved away from the decaying conditions of *Black Bohemia* of midtown into the newly-built suburb of Harlem. This initiated a move north of educated African Americans and a foothold into Harlem. In 1910 a large block along 135th and Fifth Ave was bought up by various African American realtors and a church group. These purchases caused a "white flight" and lowered real estate prices.

The Harlem Renaissance, also known as the New Negro Movement, was a literary, artistic, cultural, intellectual movement that began in Harlem, New York after World War I and ended around 1935 during the Great Depression. The movement raised significant issues affecting the lives of African Americans through various forms of literature, art, music, drama, painting, sculpture, movies, and protests. Voices of protest and ideological promotion of civil rights for African Americans inspired and created institutions and leaders who served as mentors to aspiring writers. Although the center of the Harlem Renaissance began in Harlem, New York, its influence spread throughout the nation and beyond and included philosophers, artists, writers, musicians, sculptors, movie makers and institutions that "attempted to assert... a dissociation of sensibility from that enforced by the American culture and its institutions."

Harlem Renaissance Definition

An African-American cultural movement of the 1920s and 1930s, centered in [Harlem](#), that celebrated black traditions, the black voice, and black ways of life. Arna Bontemps, Langston [Hughes](#), Zora Neale [Hurstun](#), James Weldon [Johnson](#), Jean Toomer, and Dorothy West were some of the writers associated with the movement.

Definition:

a cultural movement in 1920s America during which black art, literature, and music experienced renewal and growth, originating in New York

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

City's Harlem district; also called [Black Renaissance](#), [New Negro Movement](#)

Characteristics of Harlem Renaissance Poetry

The Harlem Renaissance was a literary and cultural movement that began with the inception of the 20th Century. It is so called because it was first noticed in Harlem, a neighborhood of New York City. The movement was an African American cultural explosion expressed through essays, songs, theatrical pieces, novels and poetry. Harlem Renaissance poetry, as written by such literary luminaries as Langston Hughes and W.E.B. DuBois, was characterized by its themes, influences, focus and intent.

Intent

Intent is a primary characteristic of all Harlem Renaissance literature, including poetry. The intent of this poetry was to improve and uplift African Americans through historical awareness and a popular culture that reflected self-awareness and self-worth in black Americans. All of this intent was expressed by the phrase "The New Negro," introduced by sociologist Alain LeRoy Locke in 1925. The term describes a new wave of African-American intellectuals who used poetry and other forms of artistic and cultural expression to subvert racial stereotypes and address the racial, economic, cultural and social impediments facing black Americans at the turn of the century.

Focus and Themes

Harlem Renaissance poetry is characterized by a focus on the black American experience and relevant themes. Much of the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance is characterized as an examination of the historical place of the contemporary African American with regards to history and the future. This poetry asks the question: where has the black American been and where is he/she going? Themes of migration---from Africa to the United States, from slavery and the south to industrial jobs in the urban north---were common. Poetry of the Renaissance also addressed themes of American identity and the American dream. In two famous poems, Langston Hughes wrote, "I, too, am America" and "What happens to a dream deferred?"

Musical Themes

Much of the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance is characterized in both theme and content by the influence of traditionally "black" forms of music. The repetitive structure and recurring themes of blues music

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

characterize the structure of many Renaissance poems. The interplay between jazz musicians and the call-and-response structure of slave songs also impacted the structure of Renaissance poetry. In its references to the black American past and experience of slavery, poetry of the era often alluded to African American spirituals. With regards to themes, much literature of the Harlem Renaissance included references the national popularity of blues and jazz.

Poetic Influences

Harlem Renaissance poetry took poetic influence from disparate forms of cultural expression. On page 287 of the book "The Harlem Renaissance," author Michael Feith asserts that poetry of the period was characterized by the influenced of African American folk poetry and oral traditions and contemporary American experimentation in modernist free verse. Authors Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman further declare on page 84 of their "Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance, Volume 1" that Harlem Renaissance poetry from Chicago was characterized by the influence of an avant-garde style that arose in that city during the First World War. This style saw the ironic interpolation of elements of Negro spirituals into contemporary poetry.

Lecture Eight

Samples of American Poetry

Because I Could Not Stop for Death

A Poem by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.

We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
And I had put away
My labour, and my leisure too,
For his civility.

We passed the school where children played,
Their lessons scarcely done;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun.

Or rather, he passed us;
The dews grew quivering and chill,
For only gossamer my gown,
My tippet only tulle.

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

We paused before a house that seemed
A swelling of the ground;
The roof was scarcely visible,
The cornice but a mound.

Since then 'tis centuries; but each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity.

Because I Could Not Stop for Death
A Poem by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)
Type of Work

“Because I Could Not Stop for Death” is a [lyric](#) poem on the theme of death. The poem contains six stanzas, each with four lines. A four-line stanza is called a quatrain. The poem was first published in 1890 in *Poems, Series 1*, a collection of Miss Dickinson's poems.

Commentary and Theme

“Because I Could Not Stop for Death” reveals Emily Dickinson’s calm acceptance of death. It is surprising that she presents the experience as being no more frightening than receiving a gentleman caller—in this case, her fiancé (Death personified).

The journey to the grave begins in Stanza 1, when Death comes calling in a carriage in which Immortality is also a passenger. As the trip continues in Stanza 2, the carriage trundles along at an easy, unhurried pace, perhaps suggesting that death has arrived in the form of a disease or debility that takes its time to kill. Then, in Stanza 3, the author appears to review the stages of her life: childhood (the recess scene), maturity (the ripe, hence, “gazing” grain), and the descent into death (the setting sun)—as she passes to the other side. There, she experiences a chill because she is not warmly dressed. In fact, her garments are more appropriate for a wedding, representing a new beginning, than for a funeral, representing an end.

Her description of the grave as her “house” indicates how comfortable she feels about death. There, after centuries pass, so pleasant is her new life that time seems to stand still, feeling “shorter than a Day.”

The overall theme of the poem seems to be that death is not to be feared since it is a natural part of the endless cycle of nature. Her view of death may also reflect her personality and religious beliefs. On the one hand, as a spinster, she was somewhat reclusive and introspective, tending to

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

dwell on loneliness and death. On the other hand, as a Christian and a Bible reader, she was optimistic about her ultimate fate and appeared to see death as a friend.

Characters

Speaker: A woman who speaks from the grave. She says she calmly accepted death. In fact, she seemed to welcome death as a suitor whom she planned to "marry."

Death: Suitor who called for the narrator to escort her to eternity.

Immortality: A passenger in the carriage.

Children: Boys and girls at play in a schoolyard. They symbolize childhood as a stage of life.

Text and Notes

A Poem by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.
We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
And I had put away
My labor, and my leisure too,
For his civility.
We passed the school, where children strove
At recess, in the ring;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun.
Or rather, he passed us;
The dews grew quivering and chill,
For only gossamer my gown,¹
My tippet² only tulle.³
We paused before a house⁴ that seemed
A swelling of the ground;
The roof was scarcely visible,
The cornice⁵ but a mound.
Since then 'tis centuries,⁶ and yet each
Feels shorter than the day

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity.

Meter

Notes

- 1...gossamer my gown: Thin wedding dress for the speaker's marriage to Death.
- 2...tippet: Scarf for neck or shoulders.
- 3...tulle: Netting.
- 4...house: Speaker's tomb.
- 5...cornice: Horizontal molding along the top of a wall.
- 6...Since . . . centuries: The length of time she has been in the tomb.

Meter

In each stanza, the first line has eight syllables (four feet); the second, six syllables (three feet); the third, eight syllables (four feet); and the fourth, six syllables (three feet). The meter alternates between iambic tetrameter (lines with eight syllables, or four feet) and iambic trimeter (lines with six syllables, or three feet). In iambic meter, the feet (pairs of syllables) contain an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. The following example demonstrates the metric scheme.

.....1.....2.....3.....4
Be **CAUSE**..|.I **COULD**..|..not **STOP**..|..for **DEATH**,
.....1.....2.....3
He **KIND**..|..ly **STOPPED**..|..for **ME**;
.....1.....2.....3.....4
The **CARR**..|.iage **HELD**..|..but **JUST**..|..our **SELVES**
....1.....2.....3
And **IM**..|mor **TAL**..|.i **TY**.

End Rhyme

.....The second and fourth lines of stanzas 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 rhyme.
However, some of the lines contain only close rhymes or eye rhymes. In the third stanza, there is no end rhyme, but ring (line 2) rhymes with the penultimate words in lines 3 and 4.

Internal Rhyme

Figures of Speech

.....Following are examples of figures of speech in the poem.

Alliteration

Because I could not stop for Death (line 1)
he **knew no** haste (line 5)
My labor, and **my** leisure too (line 7)
At recess, in the ring
gazing grain (line 11)
setting sun (line 12)

**** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ****

For only gossamer my gown (line 15)
My tippet only tulle (line 16)
toward eternity (line 24)

Anaphora

We passed the school, where children strove
At recess, in the ring;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun. (lines 9-12)

Paradox

Since then 'tis centuries, and yet each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads (lines 21-23)

Personification

We passed the setting sun.
Or rather, he passed us (lines 12-13)

Comparison of the sun to a person

Death is personified throughout the poem

Hope is the Thing with Feathers

A Poem by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

In her poem, Emily Dickinson communicates that hope is like a bird because of its free and independent spirit. Hope is similar to a bird in its ability to bring comfort and consolation. Dickinson uses techniques such as extended metaphor and imagery to describe hope throughout her poem. The poem is introduced with, "Hope is the thing with feathers." Dickinson's use of the word "thing" denotes that hope is something

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

abstract and vague. By identifying hope as a thing, Dickinson gives an intangible concept characteristics of a concrete object. The opening line of this poem also sets up the extended metaphor of comparing hope to a bird in the word “feathers.” “Feathers represent hope, because feathers offer the image of flying away to a new hope and a new beginning.”

Line two of Dickinson’s poem further broadens the metaphor by giving hope delicate and sweet characteristics in the word “perches.”

Dickinson’s choice of the word also suggests that, like a bird, hope is planning to stay. “Hope rests in our soul the way a bird rests on its perch.” The next line continues with hope singing to our souls. The line “And sings the tune—without the words,” gives the reader a sense that hope is universal. Hope sings without words so that everyone may understand it, regardless of language barriers. The closing line of the first stanza, “And never stops at all,” implies that hope is never ending. Hope cannot be stopped or destroyed. Dickinson’s point is emphasized in the words “never” and “at all.” In just one line, there are two negative words, which highlight Dickinson’s message.

The second stanza depicts hope’s continuous presence. “And sweetest in the gale is heard,” is ironic because hope’s most comforting song is heard during a “gale,” a horrible windstorm.

Those whom live without hope carry a very heavy burden indeed. Hope surely is the light in the dark tunnel. While it is true that many people all over the world live in extremely challenging situations, leading hard lives in appalling conditions. What keeps people going in such circumstances is the glimmer of hope that things can change. This is one thought that came to mind when first reading the poem "Hope is a Thing With Feathers" by Emily Dickinson. Another is that whoever or wherever you are in the world there is always hope, and what's more hope costs nothing.

What is striking about the poem is its absolute simplicity, both in structure and in the words the poem presents. However the content and ideas being discussed in the poem are really far from simple, the idea of hope in "extremity" and hope in the "chillest land/And on the strangest sea," is a quite philosophical way of viewing the world. The clear and easy way the rhyme scheme works in conjunction with the simple words

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

certainly works in counter to the content. It is clear that this poem is much more than a simple piece of verse.

One of the messages of the poem seems to say that whatever life throws at the individual there is always the dove-like glimmer of hope that sits in all of us that is so strong that its voice can still be heard in the "gale" of stormy times. Everyone goes through stormy times in their life and no matter where you are on earth or from which "strangest sea" you inhabit but there is no need to despair.

Pain and hope the poem seem to be saying, come to all of us, but hope is the resistance that keeps human nature stubborn and fighting the things that life throws at us. Hope through the metaphor Dickinson uses, is a bird that "perches in the soul" of everyone, regardless of race, gender or status. It is something that everyone has to "keep them warm" against the storm of life, and it never stops singing nor does it ask "a crumb" of the user. It is something that is present within us that we take for granted and usually think little of, until that is we come across poetry like this to capture our attention.

There is a definite contrast within the poem between hope on the one side as represented with the words like "warm," "Soul," "sweetest;" and in the pain of life as represented in words like "storm," "gales," "chillest."

Although there is a clear battle between these two elements, it is clear which one comes out on top as the voice of hope can still be heard through the gales and storms. It is clear that whatever the battles we may face, hope wins through in the end.

Poetry of Harlem Renaissance

"If We Must Die"

Claude McKay Limns

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! We must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

by Langston Hughes

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Literary Terms

Alliteration is the repetition of initial sounds in neighboring words.

Example:

sweet smell of success, a dime a dozen, bigger and better, jump for joy

Anaphora The deliberate repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of several successive verses, clauses, or paragraphs.

One of the devices of repetition, in which the same phrase is repeated at the beginning of two or more lines.

Example: (see: Because I could not stop for Death)

Metaphor the comparison of two UNLIKE things.

Metaphor: Metaphor is a figure of speech where two distinctly different things are compared without using adverbs of comparison, 'as', 'like', etc.

Example:

He is a horse. Thou art sunshine.

Meter

Meter refers to the varying, nevertheless recognizable pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables that occur in regular units in the lines of a verse. Each regular unit is called a *foot*. Depending upon the number of feet in a line, a line can be called *monometer* (if it has one foot), *dimeter* (if it has two feet), *trimeter*, *tetrameter* and so on till *nonameter* (if a line has nine meters in it).

Paradox reveals a kind of truth which at first seems contradictory. Two opposing ideas.

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***

Example:

Stone walls do not a prison make, Nor iron bars a cage.

Personification is giving human qualities to animals or objects. Making inanimates as animates.

Example:

a smiling moon, a jovial sun

Rhyme: When two similar sounding words are repeated in a stanza of a poem, it is known as a rhyme. Rhymes that appear on the end of the lines are called end rhyme which is the most common type of rhyme in poetry. There is also internal rhyme where rhyming words appear in the same line. Apart from this, rhymes can also be divided into masculine rhymes and feminine rhymes. Rhyming words that end with a stressed syllable is called the masculine rhyme, while those that end with an unstressed syllable are known as feminine rhyme.

Example:

Roses are red
Violents are blue
Sugar is sweet
And so are you.

How doth the little crocodile
Improve his shining tail,
And pour the waters of the Nile
On every golden scale!

Simile is the comparison of two unlike things using *like* or *as*

Simile: Simile is a figure of speech in which two objects are compared using adverbs such as "like" and "as".

Example: He eats like a horse.

Stanza is a unified group of lines in poetry.

Theme is the general idea or insight about life that a writer wishes to express. All of the elements of [literary terms](#) contribute to theme. A simple theme can often be stated in a single sentence.

Example: "After reading (this book, poem, essay), I think the author wants me to understand....."

*** مع تحيات هاجس الليل ***