University of Mohamed Boudief

Department of Letters and English Language

Level/ Second year G 1, 2, and 3

Module: American Literature

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LESSON TWO:

Early National Period of American Literature: Democratic Origins and Revolutionary Writers

1776-1820

The hard-fought American Revolution against Britain (1775-1783) was the first modern war of liberation against a colonial power. The triumph of American independence seemed to many at the time a divine sign that America and its people were destined for greatness. Military victory fanned nationalistic hopes for a great new literature. Yet with the exception of outstanding political writing, few works of note appeared during or soon after the Revolution.

American books were harshly reviewed in England. Americans were painfully aware of their excessive dependence on English literary models. The search for a native literature became a national obsession. As one American magazine editor wrote, around 1816, “Dependence is a state of degradation fraught with disgrace, and to be dependent on a foreign mind for what we can ourselves produce is to add to the crime of indolence the weakness of stupidity.”

Cultural revolutions, unlike military revolutions, cannot be successfully imposed but must grow from the soil of shared experience. Revolutions are expressions of the heart of the people; they grow gradually out of new sensibilities and wealth of experience. It would take 50 years of accumulated history for America to earn its cultural independence and to produce the first great generation of American writers: Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, and Emily Dickinson. America’s literary independence was slowed by a lingering identification with England, an excessive imitation of English or classical literary models, and difficult economic and political conditions that hampered publishing.

Revolutionary writers, despite their genuine patriotism, were of necessity self-conscious, and they could never find roots in their American sensibilities. Colonial writers of the revolutionary generation had been born English, had grown to maturity as English citizens, and had cultivated English modes of thought and English fashions in dress and behaviour. Their parents and grandparents were English (or European), as were all their friends. Added to this, American awareness of literary fashion still lagged behind the English, and this time lag intensified American imitation. Fifty years after their fame in England, English neoclassic writers such as Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, Oliver Goldsmith, and Samuel Johnson were still eagerly imitated in America.

Moreover, the heady challenges of building a new nation attracted talented and educated people to politics, law, and diplomacy. These pursuits brought honour, glory, and financial security. Writing, on the other hand, did not

pay. Early American writers, now separated from England, effectively had no modern publishers, no audience, and no adequate legal protection. Editorial assistance, distribution, and publicity were rudimentary.

Until 1825, most American authors paid printers to publish their work. Obviously only the leisured and independently wealthy, like Washington Irving and the New York Knickerbocker group, or the group of Connecticut poets knows as the Hartford Wits, could afford to indulge their interest in writing. The exception, Benjamin Franklin, though from a poor family, was a printer by trade and could publish his own work.

Charles Brockden Brown was more typical. The author of several interesting Gothic romances, Brown was the first American author to attempt to live from his writing. But his short life ended in poverty.

The lack of an audience was another problem. The small cultivated audience in America wanted well-known European authors, partly out of the exaggerated respect with which former colonies regarded their previous rulers. This preference for English works was not entirely unreasonable, considering the inferiority of American output, but it worsened the situation by depriving American authors of an audience. Only journalism offered financial remuneration, but the mass audience wanted light, undemanding verse and short topical essays — not long or experimental work.

The absence of adequate copyright laws was perhaps the clearest cause of literary stagnation. American printers pirating English best-sellers understandably were unwilling to pay an American author for unknown material. The unauthorized reprinting of foreign books was originally seen as a service to the colonies as well as a source of profit for printers like Franklin, who reprinted works of the classics and great European books to educate the American public.

Printers everywhere in America followed his lead. There are notorious examples of pirating. Matthew Carey, an important American publisher, paid a London agent — a sort of literary spy — to send copies of unbound pages, or even proofs, to him in fast ships that could sail to America in a month. Carey's men would sail out to meet the incoming ships in the harbour and speed the pirated books into print using typesetters who divided the book into sections and worked in shifts around the clock. Such a pirated English book could be reprinted in a day and placed on the shelves for sale in American bookstores almost as fast as in England.

Because imported authorized editions were more expensive and could not compete with pirated ones, the copyright situation damaged foreign authors such as Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens, along with American authors. But at least the foreign authors had already been paid by their original publishers and were already well known. Americans such as James Fenimore Cooper not only failed to receive adequate payment, but they had to suffer seeing their works pirated under their noses. Cooper's first successful book, The Spy (1821), was pirated by four different printers within a month of its appearance.

Ironically, the copyright law of 1790, which allowed pirating, was nationalistic in intent. Drafted by Noah Webster, the great lexicographer who later compiled an American dictionary, the law protected only the work of American authors; it was felt that English writers should look out for themselves.

Bad as the law was, none of the early publishers were willing to have it changed because it proved profitable for them. Piracy starved the first generation of revolutionary American writers; not surprisingly, the generation after

them produced even less work of merit. The high point of piracy, in 1815, corresponds with the low point of American writing. Nevertheless, the cheap and plentiful supply of pirated foreign books and classics in the first 50 years of the new country did educate Americans, including the first great writers, who began to make their appearance around 1825.

THE AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT

The 18th-century American Enlightenment was a movement marked by an emphasis on rationality rather than tradition, scientific inquiry instead of unquestioning religious dogma, and representative government in place of monarchy. Enlightenment thinkers and writers were devoted to the ideals of justice, liberty, and equality as the natural rights of man.

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)

Benjamin Franklin, whom the Scottish philosopher David Hume called America's "first great man of letters," embodied the Enlightenment ideal of humane rationality. Practical yet idealistic, hard-working and enormously successful, Franklin recorded his early life in his famous Autobiography. Writer, printer, publisher, scientist, philanthropist, and diplomat, he was the most famous and respected private figure of his time. He was the first great self-made man in America, a poor democrat born in an aristocratic age that his fine example helped to liberalize.

Franklin was a second-generation immigrant. His Puritan father, a chandler (candle-maker), came to Boston, Massachusetts, from England in 1683. In many ways Franklin's life illustrates the impact of the Enlightenment on a gifted individual. Self-educated but well-read in John Locke, Lord Shaftesbury, Joseph Addison, and other Enlightenment writers, Franklin learned from them to apply reason to his own life and to break with tradition — in particular the old-fashioned Puritan tradition — when it threatened to smother his ideals.

While a youth, Franklin taught himself languages, read widely, and practiced writing for the public. When he moved from Boston to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Franklin already had the kind of education associated with the upper classes. He also had the Puritan capacity for hard, careful work, constant self-scrutiny, and the desire to better himself. These qualities steadily propelled him to wealth, respectability, and honour. Never selfish, Franklin tried to help other ordinary people become successful by sharing his insights and initiating a characteristically American genre — the self-help book.

Franklin's Poor Richard's Almanack, begun in 1732 and published for many years, made Franklin prosperous and well-known throughout the colonies. In this annual book of useful encouragement, advice, and factual information, amusing characters such as old Father Abraham and Poor Richard exhort the reader in pithy, memorable sayings. In "The Way to Wealth," which originally appeared in the Almanack, Father Abraham, "a plain clean old Man, with white Locks," quotes Poor Richard at length. "A Word to the Wise is enough," he says. "God helps them that help themselves." "Early to Bed, and early to rise, makes a Man healthy, wealthy, and wise." Poor Richard is a psychologist ("Industry pays Debts, while Despair encreaseth them"), and he always counsels hard work ("Diligence is the Mother of Good Luck"). Do not be lazy, he advises, for "One To-day is worth two tomorrow." Sometimes he creates anecdotes to illustrate his points: "A little Neglect may breed great Mischief....For want of a Nail the Shoe was lost; for want of a Shoe the Horse was lost; and for want of a Horse the Rider was lost, being overtaken and slain

by the Enemy, all for want of Care about a Horse-shoe Nail." Franklin was a genius at compressing a moral point: "What maintains one Vice, would bring up two Children." "A small leak will sink a great Ship." "Fools make Feasts, and wise Men eat them."

Franklin's Autobiography is, in part, another self-help book. Written to advise his son, it covers only the early years. The most famous section describes his scientific scheme of self-improvement. Franklin lists 13 virtues: temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquillity, chastity, and humility. He elaborates on each with a maxim; for example, the temperance maxim is "Eat not to Dullness. Drink not to Elevation." A pragmatic scientist, Franklin put the idea of perfectibility to the test, using himself as the experimental subject. To establish good habits, Franklin invented a reusable calendrical record book in which he worked on one virtue each week, recording each lapse with a black spot. His theory prefigures psychological behaviourism, while his systematic method of notation anticipates modern behaviour modification. The project of self-improvement blends the Enlightenment belief in perfectibility with the Puritan habit of moral self-scrutiny.

Franklin saw early that writing could best advance his ideas, and he therefore deliberately perfected his supple prose style, not as an end in itself but as a tool. "Write with the learned. Pronounce with the vulgar," he advised. A scientist, he followed the Royal (scientific) Society's 1667 advice to use "a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions, clear senses, a native easiness, bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness as they can." Despite his prosperity and fame, Franklin never lost his democratic sensibility, and he was an important figure at the 1787 convention at which the U.S. Constitution was drafted. In his later years, he was president of an antislavery association. One of his last efforts was to promote universal public education.

Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur (1735–1813)

Another Enlightenment figure is Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, whose Letters from an American Farmer (1782) gave Europeans a glowing idea of opportunities for peace, wealth, and pride in America. Neither an American nor a farmer, but a French aristocrat who owned a plantation outside New York City before the Revolution, Crèvecoeur enthusiastically praised the colonies for their industry, tolerance, and growing prosperity in 12 letters that depict America as an agrarian paradise — a vision that would inspire Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and many other writers up to the present.

Crèvecoeur was the earliest European to develop a considered view of America and the new American character. The first to exploit the "melting pot" image of America, in a famous passage he asks:

> *What then is the American, this new man? He is either a European, or the descendant of a European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations....Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause changes in the world.*

THE POLITICAL PAMPHLET: Thomas Paine (1737-1809)

The passion of Revolutionary literature is found in pamphlets, the most popular form of political literature of the day. Over 2,000 pamphlets were published during the Revolution. The pamphlets thrilled patriots and threatened loyalists; they filled the role of drama, as they were often read aloud in public to excite audiences. American soldiers read them aloud in their camps; British Loyalists threw them into public bonfires. Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* sold over 100,000 copies in the first three months of its publication. It is still rousing today. "The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind," Paine wrote, voicing the idea of American exceptionalism still strong in the United States — that in some fundamental sense, since America is a democratic experiment and a country theoretically open to all immigrants, the fate of America foreshadows the fate of humanity at large.

Political writings in a democracy had to be clear to appeal to the voters. And to have informed voters, universal education was promoted by many of the founding fathers. One indication of the vigorous, if simple, literary life was the proliferation of newspapers. More newspapers were read in America during the Revolution than anywhere else in the world. Immigration also mandated a simple style. Clarity was vital to a newcomer, for whom English might be a second language. Thomas Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration of Independence is clear and logical, but his committee's modifications made it even simpler. The Federalist Papers, written in support of the Constitution, are also lucid, logical arguments, suitable for debate in a democratic nation.

NEOCLASSISM: EPIC, MOCK EPIC, AND SATIRE

Unfortunately, "literary" writing was not as simple and direct as political writing. When trying to write poetry, most educated authors stumbled into the pitfall of elegant neoclassicism. The epic, in particular, exercised a fatal attraction. American literary patriots felt sure that the great American Revolution naturally would find expression in the epic — a long, dramatic narrative poem in elevated language, celebrating the feats of a legendary hero.

Many writers tried but none succeeded. Timothy Dwight, (1752- 1817), one of the group of writers known as the Hartford Wits, is an example. Dwight, who eventually became the president of Yale University, based his epic, The Conquest of Canaan (1785), on the Biblical story of Joshua's struggle to enter the Promised Land. Dwight cast General Washington, commander of the American army and later the first president of the United States, as Joshua in his allegory and borrowed the couplet form that Alexander Pope used to translate Homer. Dwight's epic was as boring as it was ambitious. English critics demolished it; even Dwight's friends, such as John Trumbull (1750-1831), remained unenthusiastic. So much thunder and lightning raged in the melodramatic battle scenes that Trumbull proposed that the epic be provided with lightning rods. Not surprisingly, satirical poetry fared much better than serious verse. The mock epic genre encouraged American poets to use their natural voices and did not lure them into a bog of pretentious and predictable patriotic sentiments and faceless conventional poetic epithets out of the Greek poet Homer and the Roman poet Virgil by way of the English poets. In mock epics like John Trumbull's goodhumored M'Fingal (1776-1782), stylized emotions and conventional turns of phrase are ammunition for good satire, and the bombastic oratory of the Revolution is itself ridiculed. Modeled on the British poet Samuel Butler's

Hudibras, the mock epic derides a Tory, M'Fingal. It is often pithy, as when noting of condemned criminals facing hanging:

No man e'er felt the halter draw.
With good opinion of the law.

M'Fingal went into over 30 editions, was reprinted for a half-century, and was appreciated in England as well as America. Satire appealed to Revolutionary audiences partly because it contained social comment and criticism, and political topics and social problems were the main subjects of the day. The first American comedy to be performed, The Contrast (produced 1787) by Royall Tyler (1757-1826), humorously contrasts Colonel Manly, an American officer, with Dimple, who imitates English fashions. Naturally, Dimple is made to look ridiculous. The play introduces the first Yankee character, Jonathan.

Another satirical work, the novel Modern Chivalry, published by Hugh Henry Brackenridge in installments from 1792 to 1815, memorably lampoons the excesses of the age. Brackenridge (1748-1816), a Scottish immigrant raised on the American frontier, based his huge, picaresque novel on Don Quixote; it describes the misadventures of Captain Farrago and his stupid, brutal, yet appealingly human, servant Teague O'Regan.

POET OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: Philip Freneau (1752-1832)

One poet, Philip Freneau, incorporated the new stirrings of European Romanticism and escaped the imitativeness and vague universality of the Hartford Wits. The key to both his success and his failure was his passionately democratic spirit combined with an inflexible temper.

The Hartford Wits, all of them undoubted patriots, reflected the general cultural conservatism of the educated classes. Freneau set himself against this holdover of old Tory attitudes, complaining of "the writings of an aristocratic, speculating faction at Hartford, in favour of monarchy and titular distinctions." Although Freneau received a fine education and was as well acquainted with the classics as any Hartford Wit, he embraced liberal and democratic causes.

From a Huguenot (radical French Protestant) background, Freneau fought as a militiaman during the Revolutionary War. In 1780, he was captured and imprisoned in two British ships, where he almost died before his family managed to get him released. His poem "The British Prison Ship" is a bitter condemnation of the cruelties of the British, who wished "to stain the world with gore." This piece and other revolutionary works, including "Eutaw Springs," "American Liberty," "A Political Litany," "A Midnight Consultation," and "George the Third's Soliloquy," brought him fame as the "Poet of the American Revolution."

Freneau edited a number of journals during his life, always mindful of the great cause of democracy. When Thomas Jefferson helped him establish the militant, anti-Federalist National Gazette in 1791, Freneau became the first powerful, crusading newspaper editor in America, and the literary predecessor of William Cullen Bryant, William Lloyd Garrison, and H.L. Mencken.

As a poet and editor, Freneau adhered to his democratic ideals. His popular poems, published in newspapers for the average reader, regularly celebrated American subjects. "The Virtue of Tobacco" concerns the indigenous plant, a mainstay of the southern economy, while "The Jug of Rum" celebrates the alcoholic drink of the West Indies,

a crucial commodity of early American trade and a major New World export. Common American characters lived in "The Pilot of Hatteras," as well as in poems about quack doctors and bombastic evangelists.

Freneau commanded a natural and colloquial style appropriate to a genuine democracy, but he could also rise to refined neoclassic lyricism in often-anthologized works such as "The Wild Honey Suckle" (1786), which evokes a sweetsmelling native shrub. Not until the "American Renaissance" that began in the 1820s would American poetry surpass the heights that Freneau had scaled 40 years earlier. Additional groundwork for later literary achievement was laid during the early years. Nationalism inspired publications in many fields, leading to a new appreciation of things American. Noah Webster (1758-1843) devised an American Dictionary, as well as an important reader and speller for the schools. His Spelling Book sold more than 100 million copies over the years. Updated Webster's dictionaries are still standard today. The American Geography, by Jedidiah Morse, another landmark reference work, promoted knowledge of the vast and expanding American land itself. Some of the most interesting, if non-literary, writings of the period are the journals of frontiersmen and explorers such as Meriwether Lewis (1774- 1809) and Zebulon Pike (1779- 1813), who wrote accounts of expeditions across the Louisiana Territory, the vast portion of the North American continent that Thomas Jefferson purchased from Napoleon in 1803.

WRITERS OF FICTION

The first important fiction writers widely recognized today, Charles Brockden Brown, Washington Irving, and James Fenimore Cooper, used American subjects, historical perspectives, themes of change, and nostalgic tones. They wrote in many prose genres, initiated new forms, and found new ways to make a living through literature. With them, American literature began to be read and appreciated in the United States and abroad

Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810)

Already mentioned as the first professional American writer, Charles Brockden Brown was inspired by the English writers Mrs. Radcliffe and English William Godwin. (Radcliffe was known for her terrifying Gothic novels; a novelist and social reformer, Godwin was the father of Mary Shelley, who wrote Frankenstein and married English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley.)

Driven by poverty, Brown hastily penned four haunting novels in two years: Wieland (1798), Arthur Mervyn (1799), Ormond (1799), and Edgar Huntley (1799). In them, he developed the genre of American Gothic. The Gothic novel was a popular genre of the day featuring exotic and wild settings, disturbing psychological depth, and much suspense. Trappings included ruined castles or abbeys, ghosts, mysterious secrets, threatening figures, and solitary maidens who survive by their wits and spiritual strength. At their best, such novels offer tremendous suspense and hints of magic, along with profound explorations of the human soul in extremity. Critics suggest that Brown's Gothic sensibility expresses deep anxieties about the inadequate social institutions of the new nation.

Brown used distinctively American settings. A man of ideas, he dramatized scientific theories, developed a personal theory of fiction, and championed high literary standards despite personal poverty. Though flawed, his works are darkly powerful. Increasingly, he is seen as the precursor of romantic writers like Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. He expresses subconscious fears that the outwardly optimistic Enlightenment period drove underground.

Washington Irving (1789-1859)

The youngest of 11 children born to a well-todo New York merchant family, Washington Irving became a cultural and diplomatic ambassador to Europe, like Benjamin Franklin and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Despite his talent, he probably would not have become a full-time professional writer, given the lack of financial rewards, if a series of fortuitous incidents had not thrust writing as a profession upon him. Through friends, he was able to publish his Sketch Book (1819-1820) simultaneously in England and America, obtaining copyrights and payment in both countries.

The Sketch Book of Geoffrye Crayon (Irving's pseudonym) contains his two best remembered stories, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." "Sketch" aptly describes Irving's delicate, elegant, yet seemingly casual style, and "crayon" suggests his ability as a colourist or creator of rich, nuanced tones and emotional effects. In the Sketch Book, Irving transforms the Catskill Mountains along the Hudson River north of New York City into a fabulous, magical region.

American readers gratefully accepted Irving's imagined "history" of the Catskills, despite the fact (unknown to them) that he had adapted his stories from a German source. Irving gave America something it badly needed in the brash, materialistic early years: an imaginative way of relating to the new land.

No writer was as successful as Irving at humanizing the land, endowing it with a name and a face and a set of legends. The story of "Rip Van Winkle," who slept for 20 years, waking to find the colonies had become independent, eventually became folklore. It was adapted for the stage, went into the oral tradition, and was gradually accepted as authentic American legend by generations of Americans.

Irving discovered and helped satisfy the raw new nation's sense of history. His numerous works may be seen as his devoted attempts to build the new nation's soul by recreating history and giving it living, breathing, imaginative life. For subjects, he chose the most dramatic aspects of American history: the discovery of the New World, the first president and national hero, and the westward exploration. His earliest work was a sparkling, satirical History of New York (1809) under the Dutch, ostensibly written by Diedrich Knickerbocker (hence the name of Irving's friends and New York writers of the day, the "Knickerbocker School").

James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851)

James Fenimore Cooper, like Irving, evoked a sense of the past and gave it a local habitation and a name. In Cooper, though, one finds the powerful myth of a golden age and the poignance of its loss. While Irving and other American writers before and after him scoured Europe in search of its legends, castles, and great themes, Cooper grasped the essential myth of America: that it was timeless, like the wilderness. American history was a trespass on the eternal; European history in America was a reenactment of the fall in the Garden of Eden. The cyclical realm of nature was glimpsed only in the act of destroying it: The wilderness disappeared in front of American eyes, vanishing before the oncoming pioneers like a mirage. This is Cooper's basic tragic vision of the ironic destruction of the wilderness, the new Eden that had attracted the colonists in the first place.

Personal experience enabled Cooper to write vividly of the transformation of the wilderness and of other subjects such as the sea and the clash of peoples from different cultures. The son of a Quaker family, he grew up on

his father's remote estate at Otsego Lake (now Cooperstown) in central New York State. Although this area was relatively peaceful during Cooper's boyhood, it had once been the scene of an Indian massacre. Young Fenimore Cooper grew up in an almost feudal environment. His father, Judge Cooper, was a landowner and leader. Cooper saw frontiersmen and Indians at Otsego Lake as a boy; in later life, bold white settlers intruded on his land. Natty Bumppo, Cooper's renowned literary character, embodies his vision of the frontiersman as a gentleman, a Jeffersonian "natural aristocrat." Early in 1823, in The Pioneers, Cooper had begun to discover Bumppo. Natty is the first famous frontiersman in American literature and the literary forerunner of countless cowboy and backwoods heroes. He is the idealized, upright individualist who is better than the society he protects. Poor and isolated, yet pure, he is a touchstone for ethical values and prefigures Herman Melville's Billy Budd and Mark Twain's Huck Finn.

Based in part on the real life of American pioneer Daniel Boone — who was a Quaker like Cooper — Natty Bumppo, an outstanding woodsman like Boone, was a peaceful man adopted by an Indian tribe. Both Boone and the fictional Bumppo loved nature and freedom. They constantly kept moving west to escape the oncoming settlers they had guided into the wilderness, and they became legends in their own lifetimes. Natty is also chaste, high-minded, and deeply spiritual: He is the Christian knight of medieval romances transposed to the virgin forest and rocky soil of America.

The unifying thread of the five novels collectively known as the Leather-Stocking Tales is the life of Natty Bumppo. Cooper's finest achievement, they constitute a vast prose epic with the North American continent as setting, Indian tribes as characters, and great wars and westward migration as social background. The novels bring to life frontier America from 1740 to 1804.

Cooper's novels portray the successive waves of the frontier settlement: the original wilderness inhabited by Indians; the arrival of the first whites as scouts, soldiers, traders, and frontiersmen; the coming of the poor, rough settler families; and the final arrival of the middle class, bringing the first professionals — the judge, the physician, and the banker. Each incoming wave displaced the earlier: Whites displaced the Indians, who retreated westward; the "civilized" middle classes who erected schools, churches, and jails displaced the lower-class individualistic frontier folk, who moved further west, in turn displacing the Indians who had preceded them. Cooper evokes the endless, inevitable wave of settlers, seeing not only the gains but the losses. Cooper's novels reveal a deep tension between the lone individual and society, nature and culture, spirituality and organized religion. In Cooper, the natural world and the Indian are fundamentally good — as is the highly civilized realm associated with his most cultured characters. Intermediate characters are often suspect, especially greedy, poor white settlers who are too uneducated or unrefined to appreciate nature or culture. Like Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Forster, Herman Melville, and other sensitive observers of widely varied cultures interacting with each other, Cooper was a cultural relativist. He understood that no culture had a monopoly on virtue or refinement.

Cooper accepted the American condition while Irving did not. Irving addressed the American setting as a European might have — by importing and adapting European legends, culture, and history. Cooper took the process a step farther. He created American settings and new, distinctively American characters and themes. He was the first to sound the recurring tragic note in American fiction.

WOMEN AND MINORITIES

Although the colonial period produced several women writers of note, the revolutionary era did not further the work of women and minorities, despite the many schools, magazines, newspapers, and literary clubs that were springing up. Colonial women such as Anne Bradstreet, Anne Hutchinson, Ann Cotton, and Sarah Kemble Knight exerted considerable social and literary influence in spite of primitive conditions and dangers; of the 18 women who came to America on the ship Mayflower in 1620, only four survived the first year. When every able-bodied person counted and conditions were fluid, innate talent could find expression. But as cultural institutions became formalized in the new republic, women and minorities gradually were excluded from them.

Phillis Wheatley (c. 1753-1784)

Given the hardships of life in early America, it is ironic that some of the best poetry of the period was written by an exceptional slave woman. The first African-American author of importance in the United States, Phillis Wheatley was born in Africa and brought to Boston, Massachusetts, when she was about seven, where she was purchased by the pious and wealthy tailor John Wheatley to be a companion for his wife. The Wheatleys recognized Phillis's remarkable intelligence and, with the help of their daughter, Mary, Phillis learned to read and write.

Wheatley's poetic themes are religious, and her style, like that of Philip Freneau, is neoclassical. Among her best-known poems are "To S.M., a Young African Painter, on Seeing His Works," a poem of praise and encouragement for another talented black, and a short poem showing her strong religious sensitivity filtered through her experience of Christian conversion. This poem unsettles some contemporary critics — whites because they find it conventional, and blacks because the poem does not protest the immorality of slavery. Yet the work is a sincere expression; it confronts white racism and asserts spiritual equality. Indeed, Wheatley was the first to address such issues confidently in verse, as in "On Being Brought from Africa to America":

'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a Savior too;
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
"Their colour is a diabolic dye."
Remember, Christians, negroes, black as Cain,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

The Declaration of Independence: a public document by Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson 1743–1826 was one of the most accomplished founding fathers. Active in the cause for independence, he was governor of Virginia during the Revolutionary War and U.S. minister to France afterward. He also served the new country as the first secretary of state, the second vice-president, and the third president. As president, he acquired the vast Louisiana Territory west of the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains, essentially

doubling the size of the country. But more important than any political office he held was the lasting impact of Jefferson's ideals of liberty and selfgovernment so eloquently expressed in the Declaration of Independence. Brilliant Legal Mind : The son of a surveyor and gentleman farmer, Jefferson was born into a life of privilege in rural Virginia. Educated at the College of William and Mary, he was tutored in the law and practiced successfully before entering politics at age 26. As a member of the colonial Virginia legislature, he fell in with a group of radicals, among them Patrick Henry. Lacking Henry's oratorical gifts, Jefferson distinguished himself by his legal writing. Significantly, Jefferson's indelible mark on American life came largely from the many legal documents and laws he wrote promoting democracy.

Passion for Learning: Jefferson had an insatiable curiosity about the world and often indulged in what he called his "canine appetite for reading." In addition to devouring works on the classics, history, law, science, and philosophy, he taught himself architecture from books. He designed his elaborate estate at Monticello and the buildings of the University of Virginia, which he also founded as the embodiment of his principles of education and individual freedom.

The Issue of Slavery : Charges of hypocrisy on the issue of slavery have tarnished Jefferson's image as the "apostle of liberty." In his early writings, he denounced slavery and tried unsuccessfully to include the issue in the Declaration. Yet Jefferson always owned slaves—as many as 600 over the course of his lifetime—and in later years, he remained undecided on this issue.

A Quintessential American: Jefferson's problematic stand on slavery mirrored the nation's, which took a long time to rectify. In the end, Jefferson was a man of his time who had a noble vision for the country and the genius to articulate it, even though he did not always live up to his ideals

Literary Analysis: Argument

Jefferson's emphasis in the Declaration of Independence was on the logical argument to be made for independence. An argument expresses an opinion on an issue and supports it with reasons and evidence. Three important parts of an argument are

- the claim: the writer's position on an issue or problem
- support: reasons and evidence provided to prove a claim
- counterargument: arguments to answer opposing views As you read, look for these elements of an argument.

Reading Skill: Analyse Text Structure

The Declaration of Independence has four main parts:

1. a preamble, or foreword, that announces the reason for the document
2. a declaration of people's natural rights and relationship to government
3. a long list of complaints against George III, the British king
4. a conclusion that formally states America's independence

As you read, use a chart such as the one shown to indicate the line numbers for each part, as well as a brief summary of each.

part	Summary
Preamble Lines 1-5	When one group of people have to form their own government, it is necessary to explain why

Background

In September 1774, 56 delegates met in Philadelphia at the First Continental Congress to draw up a declaration of colonial rights. They agreed to reconvene in May 1775 if their demands weren't met. At this Second Continental Congress, Thomas Jefferson joined Benjamin Franklin and John Adams on the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence. The task of writing it fell to Jefferson. Although Congress made many changes to the list of grievances, Jefferson's declaration of rights remained untouched—an abiding testament to "self-evident" truths for the nation and the world.

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

In Congress, July 4, 1776 When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident:—That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and, accordingly, all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But, when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; and such is now the necessity that constrains them to alter their former systems of government. The history of the present King of Great Britain1 is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having, in direct object, the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these States. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his assent to laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and, when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless these people would relinquish the right of representation in the legislature—a right inestimable to them, and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measure.

He has dissolved representative houses repeatedly, for opposing, with manly firmness, his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused, for a long time after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise; the State remaining, in the meantime, exposed to all dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavored to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the laws for the naturalization of foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands.

He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers.

He has made judges dependent on his will alone for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies, without the consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the military independent of, and superior to, the civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitutions,6 and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us;

For protecting them, by a mock trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these States;

For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world;

For imposing taxes on us without our consent;

For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury;

For transporting us beyond the seas, to be tried for pretended offenses;

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring province, establishing there an arbitrary government, and enlarging its boundaries, so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these colonies;

For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering, fundamentally, the forms of our governments;

For suspending our own legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his protection, and waging war against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns,8 and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow citizens, taken captive on the high seas, to bear arms against their country, to become the executioners of their friends and brethren, or to fall themselves by their hands.

He has excited domestic insurrection amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions.

In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress, in the most humble terms; our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have we been wanting in our attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them, from time to time, of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity; and we have conjured them, by the ties of our common kindred, to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence.

They, too, have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity which denounces our separation; and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends.

We, Therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name and by the authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, Free and Independent States; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved; and that, as free and independent states, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do. And, for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the

protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

ASSIGNMENT

Comprehension

1. Recall Name three complaints that the colonists had against the king.

2. Recall What rights are specified in the Declaration?

3. Clarify What does Jefferson say is the purpose of government?

4. Clarify According to the Declaration, who gives people their rights?

Literary Analysis

5. Draw Conclusions

Which set of reasons for breaking away from British rule strikes you as most important, and why?

• the colonists' philosophical ideals

• the hardships colonists suffered as a result of British policies

• the king's response to colonists' complaints

6. Make Inferences The Declaration clearly takes aim at the abuses of King George to justify the colonists' rebellion. But reread this "They, too, have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity which denounces our separation; and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends.". To what extent does the document hold the British people responsible? What is the new relationship declared between Americans and their "British brethren," and how might it differ from the old?

7. Analyse Diction What is it about Jefferson's diction, or word choice and arrangement, that makes the declaration of rights so memorable? Explain the effects of the following words and phrases: • "We hold these truths to be self-evident" (line 6) • "endowed by their Creator" (line 7) • "unalienable rights" (line 7) • "secure these rights" (line 8)

8. Evaluate Text Structure Review the chart you filled in. How effective is this four-part structure in stating the colonists' case? Would reordering the parts make any difference? Explain your answer.

9. Evaluate Elements of an Argument Identify the major claim and the support given in the Declaration. In your opinion, is the support sufficient for the claim? Does it have to be? Explain your answer.

Literary Criticism

10. Historical Context Jefferson's celebrated statement "All men are created equal" only applied to white men at the time. How has the meaning of Jefferson's statement changed over time? How has it stayed the same?