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AMERICAN LITERATURE

Naresh Kumar Yadav



AMERICAN LITERATURE

About the Book

"American Literature" refers to the body of written or literary works produced in the United States and its preceding colonies. It encompasses a vast and diverse array of texts, including novels, short stories, poetry, drama, essays, and nonfiction prose. American literature has a rich and complex history, reflecting the country's cultural, social, and political evolution. American Literature addresses the broad spectrum of new and established directions in all branches of American writing, and includes the work of scholars and critics who have shaped, and who continue to shape, what has become a major area of literary scholarship. 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. The earliest literature about America consists of impressions of America recorded by European explorers after they returned home. Italian explorer Amerigo Vesputi provided some of the earliest European descriptions of the American continent in letters and maps from an expedition in 1499 and 1500; these had appeared in print by 1505. It is clear that American literature at the turn of the 21st century has become democratic and heterogeneous. Regionalism has flowered, and international, or "global," writers refract U.S. culture through foreign perspectives. Multiethnic writing continues to mine rich veins, and as each ethnic literature matures, it creates its own traditions. Creative nonfiction and Memoire have flourished. The short story genre has gained luster, and the short short story has taken root. A new generation of playwrights continues the American tradition of exploring current social issues on stage. The book adopts the current trend in the writing of literary history by foregrounding the early colonial and nationalist writings and the major movements of literatures, while also presenting the traditional Anglocentric trajectory from the American Renaissance to postmodernism.



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by Naresh Kumar Yadav

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Preface

American Literature is its historical depth, which begins with the writings of early American settlers during the Colonial period. This literature reflects the values and beliefs of the time, often focusing on religious and moral themes. Prominent figures like Anne Bradstreet and Jonathan Edwards contributed to this early canon.

American Literature is a vast and diverse body of literary works produced within the geographical and cultural boundaries of the United States, encompassing a wide range of genres and periods. It serves as a reflection of the American experience, mirroring the nation's social, historical, and cultural development.

Literature in the United States today is likewise dazzlingly diverse, exciting, and evolving. New voices have arisen from many quarters, challenging old ideas and adapting literary traditions to suit changing conditions of the national life. Social and economic advances have enabled previously under represented groups to express themselves more fully, while technological innovations have created a fast-moving public forum. Reading clubs proliferate, and book fairs, literary festivals, and “poetry slams” (events where youthful poets compete in performing their poetry) attract enthusiastic audiences. Selection of a new work for a book club can launch an unknown writer into the limelight overnight.

American literature reflects the nation's diverse cultural, social, and historical contexts, addressing issues like race, identity, immigration, and the

American dream. It has made significant contributions to global literature and continues to evolve and respond to the changing dynamics of American society.

The Romantic period in the early 19th century was a pivotal moment in American literature. Authors such as Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville emphasized the importance of emotion, nature, and individualism. They explored the supernatural and the dark aspects of human existence, creating works that continue to captivate readers today.

American literature also experienced a wave of transcendentalist thought during the mid-19th century, with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau leading the way. Transcendentalists celebrated self-reliance, the beauty of nature, and a connection between individuals and the spiritual world, paving the way for a deeper exploration of the American psyche.

As the 19th century progressed, Realism and Naturalism emerged as literary movements. Authors like Mark Twain, Henry James, and Stephen Crane portrayed the complexities of human behaviour and society. They offered realistic depictions of everyday life, often highlighting the struggles of the common person and the impact of social and environmental forces.

The 20th and 21st centuries have seen the evolution of American literature into a truly diverse and inclusive realm. Movements such as the Harlem Renaissance celebrated African American culture and identity. The Beat Generation rebelled against societal norms, while the postmodernists questioned traditional narrative structures. Contemporary American literature encompasses a wide range of voices, addressing issues such as race, identity, immigration, and the American dream. Overall, American Literature is a dynamic and ever-evolving tapestry that captures the essence of the American experience, offering insights into the nation's history, culture, and the ever-changing social landscape.

The book adopts the current trend in the writing of American literary history by foregrounding the early colonial and nationalist writings and the major multicultural literatures, while also presenting the traditional Anglocentric trajectory from the American Renaissance to postmodernism.

—*Author*

Chapter

1

Introduction

Owing to the large immigration to Boston in the 1630s, the high articulation of Puritan cultural ideals, and the early establishment of a college and a printing press in Cambridge, the New England colonies have often been regarded as the center of early American literature. However, the first European settlements in North America had been founded elsewhere many years earlier.

Towns older than Boston include the Spanish settlements at Saint Augustine and Santa Fe, the Dutch settlements at Albany and New Amsterdam, as well as the English colony of Jamestown in present-day Virginia. During the colonial period, the printing press was active in many areas, from Cambridge and Boston to New York, Philadelphia, and Annapolis.

The dominance of the English language was hardly inevitable. The first item printed in Pennsylvania was in German and was the largest book printed in any of the colonies before the American Revolution. Spanish and French had two of the strongest colonial literary traditions in the areas that now comprise the United States, and discussions of early American literature commonly include texts by Álgvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and Samuel de Champlain alongside English language texts by Thomas Harriot and John Smith. Moreover, we are now aware of the wealth of oral literary traditions already existing on the continent among the numerous different Native American groups. Political events, however, would eventually make English the lingua franca for the colonies at large as well as the literary language of choice. For instance, when the English conquered New Amsterdam in 1664,