

## THE FORMATION HISTORY OF LITERATURE IN THE UNITED STATES

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19454193>**Abstract**

Processes that have made American literature into what it is today have been long and complex. American literature had its start in the 17th century in the colonial religious and historical writings of the times. American literature then evolved through the Revolutionary years into a literature that would eventually become uniquely national. This article is a detailed description of the key events of American literature and the cultural and intellectual forces that have shaped these events as found in literary texts, criticism, and historical accounts. Important works by such American literary icons as that of Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, and Ernest Hemingway are a major focus of the paper. The paper concludes with a description of the major characteristics of a uniquely individual literature and national consciousness which reflect the American ideals of democracy, individualism, and pluralism and consequently reflect what has come to be considered the American identity. Understanding the history of American literature also contributes greatly to the understanding of the intellectual and cultural development of America.

**Key Words:** American literature, literary history, colonial literature, romanticism, realism, national identity, cultural development  
**Readings:** Edgar Allan Poe's "The Bells" Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Song of Hiawatha" Herman Melville's Moby Dick (excerpts) (optional)

**Introduction**

Literature always depends on the historical and cultural development of a country. Works of literature tell us about the belief, custom, culture, and social conditions of a society. US literature is an excellent example of a nation evolving a national literature from various cultural resources and significant events that shaped the history of the country. American literature, as a whole, evolved over time and originated in the 17th century with the coming of European settlers to the New World, who established colonies in what was then an undeveloped land. With them came the languages and literature they were familiar with as well as their religious doctrine. As a result, the literature of early America was primarily devoted to the spread of religious ideas, to recording historical events, and to the

individual expression of personal experiences. Many of the ideas that determined the Puritan mind found their way into some of the first American literature [1,15]

As America became a new and independent nation, secular trends in literary thought spread and the focus of American writing began to shift from traditional religious subjects to more secular concerns — often concerned with the new ideas of democracy, freedom, and individualism emerging from the revolutionary era. It eventually evolved into a significant part of world literature.

This article discusses the major developments in American literature, the impact of individual writers and literary movements and provides a historical perspective of the evolution of American literature.

### **Main Body**

During the colonial era in the 17th and early 18th centuries, American literature began to take shape. The majority of literary works created during this period were created by settlers who wanted to chronicle their experiences in the New World. Diaries, sermons, travelogues, letters, and historical chronicles were among these writings. During this time, religious writings were especially prevalent. The Puritans held that moral and spiritual goals should be served by literature. As a result, the relationship between humans and God, self-discipline, and religious contemplation were the main topics of many texts. These works inspired people to uphold moral responsibility and a strong faith while offering guidance for day-to-day living [ 3,6]

Despite being strongly influenced by European traditions, early colonial literature gradually began to reflect the unique experiences of life in America. Writers explored the social organization of colonial societies, the hardships of survival, and the connection between humans and nature. The Rise of National Literature The evolution of American literature underwent a sea change in 1776 with the American Revolution. Writers were inspired to look for a unique national identity by political independence. Literature developed into a significant medium for communicating cultural independence and political beliefs. American writers started to depart from European literary models in the late 18th and early 19th centuries in order to create themes that were representative of American culture and environment [ 2,17].

Philosophical and political writings that contributed to the development of American society's intellectual underpinnings also emerged during this time. Literature became a forum for intellectual discussion and cultural expression rather than just being used for religious instruction. American Literature's Golden Age Because it gave rise to numerous significant authors and literary movements,

the 19th century is frequently referred to as the "golden age" of American literature. Romanticism, which emphasized imagination, emotion, nature, and personal experience, emerged as a major literary movement during this time. Edgar Allan Poe, one of the most well-known authors of the time, introduced gothic symbolism, mystery, and psychological tension in his works. Poe examined themes of fear, death, and the intricacy of the human mind in his poems and stories [ 4,8]. Mark Twain was another significant writer who was instrumental in the growth of American realism. Twain used humor, irony, and social criticism to depict ordinary American life in his novels. His writings offered a realistic portrayal of 19th-century American culture and society. During this time, poetry also underwent tremendous change [ 5,2]. Walt Whitman's introduction of free verse and celebration of democratic ideals transformed American poetry. His poetry highlighted the value of equality, uniqueness, and the wonders of nature [ 6,7].

American literature was impacted by the significant social and political shifts of the 20th century. World wars, industrialization, and cultural change pushed authors to experiment with novel subjects and literary forms. Ernest Hemingway was one of the most important authors of the modern era. His writing is distinguished by its emotional depth, clarity, and simplicity. Themes like bravery, human struggle, and the pursuit of meaning in trying situations are frequently found in Hemingway's writings. American literature also expanded in diversity during this time. As a reflection of the multicultural character of American society, writers from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds started to contribute to the literary landscape. This diversity enriched literature and made it a true reflection of the multicultural nature of American society. Authors such as Langston Hughes, the main figure of the Harlem Renaissance, highlighted African American life and culture, while later writers carried on to expand the chain of perspectives in American literature.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the formation of American literature has been a long and dynamic process. It has evolved from simple religious writings into a rich and diverse literary tradition that reflects the history and culture of the United States. This literary tradition has been greatly influenced by the works of authors like Ernest Hemingway, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, and Edgar Allan Poe. The values, struggles, and aspirations of American society are expressed through these works. By examining the development of American literature, researchers have a big chance to understand deeply the nation's cultural identity and

intellectual heritage, as well as its influence on the rise of literature across the world

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