

OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE

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There were several reasons why literature was considered a venue for safeguarding history. With its rich and expansive words written by insanely talented writers that portray the essence of the world, it shows that words are more than enough to convey messages in a multi-dimensional view. This is also true for American literature, a country that was built with multi-faceted perceptions of different literary stories that spanned throughout the history of colonization.

During the early days, American literature was derived from the idea of colonial literature. Its influences were taken from the colonial settlement that broke out peace and prosperity within the motherland and provoked sparks of influence for writers to write against Englishmen. One of the earliest colonial literary works was by John Smith in his chief books, *The True Relation of Virginia* (1608) and *The General Histories of Virginia, New England and The Summer Isles* (1624), which gave rise to the nature of colonization and its colonizing opportunities for Englishmen.

Consequently, it sparked American writers to create literary works that commemorate America as a land of economic promise, thus creating stressed opinions that prod the colonists to leave their homeland. In its rising political warfare between the state and church, it created writers with different opinions that either stand amongst the status quo or write in radical principle. Pamphlets of Roger Williams: *A Key into the Language of America* (1643), *Queries of Highest Consideration Proposed to Mr. Williams* (1644), *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of*

Conscience Discussed & c. (1644) discussed the significance of separation between church and state and was thus a key figure in eradicating religious imposition and developing religious freedom in America.

From then on, a series of literary works were published, such as Bay Psalm, a set of translations of the biblical Psalms, and the poetry of Phillis Wheatley, which spearheaded the birth of American literature. Shortly after the revolution, it inspired more writers to come up with literary production. The American Revolution also meant a change in the systematic ideologies presented in the country, which also led to the rise of the puritanical ideals of Winthrop and Bradford toward the power of mind and rational thought.

It was a testament that theocracy was no longer a leading ideology in America and was thus replaced with enormous scientific, economic, social, and philosophical changes that accentuated democratic principles. This was the rise of a human-centered world, a world that gave rise to human's intellectual abilities.

In the post-war period, certain changes have been imposed because of the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson, the 3rd President of the United States, empowered the country with his autobiography "The Notes on the State of Virginia," and his many letters placed him in a spot as one of the most talented early American writers.

However, one thing that will always remain a fact is that British literary works were an inspiration for American writers. It was their springboard to emulate and flourish in the literary world. As good as it sounds; it also created adversity for them. A lost identity that perhaps happened when you truly emulate someone's identity you forgot to make your own hence created a sphere of existing European's forms and style productions that were subjected to critical evaluation and were deemed inferior.

Albeit the inferiority, the American writers had an increasing desire to produce uniquely American literature productions. Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant, James Fenimore Cooper, and Edgar Allan Poe were the earliest American writers who projected their American identities to create their own unique style.

SECTION ON FAMOUS WRITERS

AMERICAN WRITER AND HUMORIST

Mark Twain (1835 – 1910)

Quote: "There are basically two types of people: People who accomplish things, and people who claim to have accomplished things."

His name was Samuel Langhorne Clemens, but he was widely known by his pseudonym "Mark Twain," an internationally known literary artist in America. It started when, at the age of fourteen, he became an apprentice to the publisher of the Missouri Courier. From that point on, being a printer was the start of his link. A link that he mentioned took him to the East, then to Nevada and California, to Hawaii, to Europe, back to Buffalo, to Hartford, nine more years in Europe, and finally two more years in Redding, Connecticut, where he died. He wrote a lot of literary pieces, but among his works, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and its sequel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), cemented his legacy in the literary world, eventually branding him as the "Father of American Literature."

Contrary to what people thought about Mark Twain, he was more than just a writer. He was a licensed river pilot after being apprenticed by Horace Bixby, a Confederate soldier, after being invited by his brother Orion; he also became a prospector and miner because of the sudden wealth in the Nevada Mountains. After that, he also became a reporter on the *Territorial Enterprise*, but he realized that he was happier in journalism, where he could freely write and show his talent. His writing prowess earned him fame, wealth, and prestige. He was so insanely sought out that on his return, he received offers from 18 invitations to lecture in the various parts of the Union but unfortunately declined them all. Sam Clemens loved the Western brand of humor: the practical joke, the extravagant, improbable tale, the Native American legends, and the coarse and ribald story.

However, he didn't know what was coming for him—a disaster, starting with squandering his wealth, leading to the failure of his Paige-typesetter and the bankruptcy of his publishing company. His daughter, Susan, died while he was living in England. A few years after his return, his wife, Olivia Langdon, also took her last breath, as did another daughter named Jean. He faced the loneliness of old age and suffered from terrible bad luck. The life of Samuel

Langhorne Clemens was not a fairytale, not easy, and not a smoothly paved road. With his different experiences during the numerous jobs he took, from meeting people from different walks of life to sharing cultures with the places he visited, he has been able to view the world differently. A world full of imagination that he uses to make people laugh and entertain.

ONE OF MARK TWAIN'S FAMOUS WORK

Genre: Novel, Adventure Fiction "**The Adventures of Tom Sawyer**" (1876)

SUMMARY

An imaginative and mischievous boy named Tom Sawyer lives with his Aunt Polly and his half-brother, Sid, in the Mississippi River town of St. Petersburg, Missouri. After playing hooky from school on Friday and dirtying his clothes in a fight, Tom is made to whitewash the fence as punishment on Saturday. At first, Tom is disappointed by having to forfeit his day off. However, he soon cleverly persuades his friends to trade him small treasures for the privilege of doing his work. He trades these treasures for tickets given out in Sunday school for memorizing Bible verses and uses the tickets to claim a Bible as a prize. He loses much of his glory, however, when, in response to a question to show off his knowledge, he incorrectly answers that the first two disciples were David and Goliath.

Tom falls in love with Becky Thatcher, a new girl in town, and persuades her to get "engaged" to him. Their romance collapses when she learns that Tom has been "engaged" before—to a girl named Amy Lawrence. Shortly after being shunned by Becky, Tom accompanies Huckleberry Finn, the son of the town drunk, to the graveyard at night to try out a "cure" for warts. At the graveyard, they witness the murder of young Dr. Robinson by the Native-American "half-breed" Injun Joe. Scared, Tom and Huck run away and swear a blood oath not to tell anyone what they have seen. Injun Joe blames his companion, Muff Potter, a hapless drunk, for the crime. Potter is wrongfully arrested, and Tom's anxiety and guilt begin to grow.

Tom, Huck, and Tom's friend Joe Harper run away to an island to become pirates. While frolicking around and enjoying their newfound freedom, the boys become aware that the community is sounding the river for their bodies. Tom sneaks back home one night to observe the commotion. After a brief moment of remorse at the suffering of his loved ones, Tom is struck by the idea of appearing at his funeral and surprising everyone. He persuades Joe and Huck to

do the same. Their return is met with great rejoicing, and they become the envy and admiration of all their friends.

Back in school, Tom gets himself back in Becky's favor after he nobly accepts the blame for a book that she has ripped. Soon Muff Potter's trial begins, and Tom, overcome by guilt, testifies against Injun Joe. Potter is acquitted, but Injun Joe flees the courtroom through a window.

Summer arrives, and Tom and Huck go hunting for buried treasure in a haunted house. After venturing upstairs they hear a noise below. Peering through holes in the floor, they see Injun Joe enter the house disguised as a deaf and mute Spaniard. He and his companion, an unkempt man, plan to bury some stolen treasure of their own. From their hiding spot, Tom and Huck wriggle with delight at the prospect of digging it up. By an amazing coincidence, Injun Joe and his partner find a buried box of gold themselves. When they see Tom and Huck's tools, they become suspicious that someone is sharing their hiding place and carry the gold off instead of reburying it.

Huck begins to shadow Injun Joe every night, watching for an opportunity to nab the gold. Meanwhile, Tom goes on a picnic to McDougal's Cave with Becky and their classmates. That same night, Huck sees Injun Joe and his partner making off with a box. He follows and overhears their plans to attack the Widow Douglas, a kind resident of St. Petersburg. By running to fetch help, Huck forestalls the violence and becomes an anonymous hero.

Tom and Becky get lost in the cave, and their absence is not discovered until the following morning. The men of the town begin to search for them, but to no avail. Tom and Becky run out of food and candles and begin to weaken. The horror of the situation increases when Tom, looking for a way out of the cave, happens upon Injun Joe, who is using the cave as a hideout. Eventually, just as the searchers are giving up, Tom finds a way out. The town celebrates, and Becky's father, Judge Thatcher, locks up the cave. Injun Joe, trapped inside, starves to death.

A week later, Tom takes Huck to the cave and they find the box of gold, the proceeds of which are invested for them. The Widow Douglas adopts Huck, and, when Huck attempts to escape civilized life, Tom promises him that if he returns to the widow, he can join Tom's robber band. Reluctantly, Huck agrees.

IMPACT

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer influenced the succeeding literary writers to create masterpieces that depict emotionally striking themes while inculcating a great lesson for everyone. Twain definitely challenged the perception of a child by creating realistic experiences for childhood stories paving the way for representation. The journey from childhood innocence to the adulthood maturity has given a platform for people to see the beauty of character development. While, subtle Twain criticized the social norms placed in the society creating a disharmony because of the strict schooling, rigid social hierarchies, and hypocrisy within community.

The novel rooted in the themes friendship, adventure, and moral growth has allowed people globally to connect with the story. Great evidence was the multiple versions adapted spanning from animal musical film, American novel film, and comedy drama film.

AMERICAN WRITER AND A POET

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

Quote: "Words have no power to impress the mind without the exquisite horror of their reality."
(Marginalia, a collection of Poe's notes and reviews)

Edgar Allan Poe, born on January 19, 1809, in Boston, Massachusetts, was a prominent American writer and poet known for his haunting stories and poems. His well-known works, like "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Raven," and "The Fall of the House of Usher," continue to captivate readers with their dark and mysterious themes. Despite his literary success, much of Poe's life remains shrouded in mystery.

Poe's childhood was challenging. His father, David Poe Jr., left the family, and his mother, Elizabeth Arnold Poe, died of tuberculosis when he was just two years old. He was taken in by John and Frances Allan in Richmond, Virginia. While he grew close to Frances, his relationship with John was difficult. John wanted Poe to join the family business, but Poe was passionate about writing and pursued it despite the obstacles.

As a young man, Poe faced many struggles. He attended the University of Virginia but had to leave due to financial problems. He joined the U.S. Army and later went to West Point but was

expelled for not following the rules. Despite these setbacks, Poe continued to write and move from city to city, seeking opportunities. His dedication eventually paid off, as he began to receive recognition and awards for his work.

Poe's later years were marked by personal tragedy. His wife, Virginia Clemm Poe, whom he married when she was just 13, died of tuberculosis in 1847, deeply affecting him. Poe's health and financial situation continued to deteriorate, but he remained committed to his writing. He died on October 7, 1849, in Baltimore under mysterious circumstances. Despite the hardships he faced, Poe's contributions to literature have left a lasting impact, and his works continue to be admired today.

ONE OF EDGAR ALLAN POE'S FAMOUS WORKS

Genre: Gothic Fiction **"The Fall of the House of Usher"** (1839)

SUMMARY

In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," the narrator, who doesn't have a name, goes to visit his old friend Roderick Usher. Roderick lives in a big, gloomy mansion that looks like it's falling apart, just like Roderick's health. He's suffering from a strange illness that makes him feel both physically and mentally unwell. Roderick asked the narrator to come and keep him company because he's feeling very lonely and anxious.

Roderick's twin sister, Madeline, also lives with him in the mansion. She's very sick with a rare condition that makes her look like she's dead, even though she's still alive. When Madeline dies, Roderick decides to put her body in a hidden vault inside the mansion instead of burying her right away. This choice adds to the eerie feeling in the house, making everything feel even more unsettling and spooky.

One night, during a big storm, Roderick gets more and more scared. He thinks he hears noises coming from the vault, and he's convinced that Madeline might still be alive. The narrator tries to calm him down, but soon they find out that Madeline has indeed come back to life. The sight of her alive and covered in her burial clothes shocks both of them. Roderick dies from the shock and terror, and Madeline's appearance leads to a final, terrifying scene.

In the end, the narrator runs away from the mansion. As he looks back, he sees the house collapsing into the small lake nearby. This dramatic end symbolizes the complete fall of the Usher family and the end of their once grand but now ruined home.

ANALYSIS

In "The Fall of the House of Usher," Edgar Allan Poe uses a lot of clever techniques to make the story feel creepy and unsettling. One of the most interesting things about the story is how it's told through the eyes of an unnamed narrator. I think Poe does this on purpose to make it easier for readers to imagine themselves in the story. Since we don't know much about the narrator except that he's a friend of Roderick Usher, it's like we're stepping into his shoes and experiencing the story firsthand. This makes the eerie atmosphere even more powerful because we feel like we're right there in the spooky mansion.

Poe really knows how to set a gloomy scene. The story starts with a description of a "dull, dark, and soundless day" and a "dreary tract of country." From the beginning, there's a sense of death and decay. The Usher mansion itself seems almost alive, with its "eye-like" windows and its interior described as if it were a living being. The setting plays a huge role in creating the story's dark mood. Everything from the gloomy weather to the dark, winding hallways inside the house adds to the feeling of dread and confinement.

Another thing I noticed is how Poe blurs the lines between the house and the people living in it. The house seems to be as cursed and decaying as its owners. Roderick Usher even believes that the house has a strange influence over him and his sister. This makes me think that Poe is showing how the environment and the people are connected in this story. The Usher family itself is pretty mysterious, too. They seem to be stuck in a cycle of decay and madness, which is reflected in the house's own deterioration.

IMPACT

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" has had a significant impact on literature and culture, influencing the Gothic horror genre. For example, Poe's use of a creepy, old house and themes of decay and madness inspired later writers, such as Shirley Jackson in her book "The Haunting of Hill House." This book, too, features a creepy house and an unsettling atmosphere, demonstrating how Poe's ideas continue to influence and inspire modern horror stories.

AMERICAN NOVELIST AND SHORT STORY WRITER

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804 – 1864)

Quote: "A single dream is more powerful than a thousand realities" (The House of the Seven Gables, 1851)

BIOGRAPHY

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born on July 4, 1804, in Salem, Massachusetts, into a family with deep Puritan roots. His father, a sea captain, died when Nathaniel was only four years old, which significantly impacted his early life. Raised by his mother and other relatives, Hawthorne developed a keen interest in reading and writing from a young age. He attended Bowdoin College in Maine, where he formed lasting friendships with future prominent figures such as poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and future U.S. President Franklin Pierce.

Hawthorne's early career was marked by a struggle for recognition. He published his first novel, "Fanshawe," anonymously in 1828, but it failed to gain much attention. Undeterred, he continued writing and published several short stories and sketches, which were later compiled into collections such as "Twice-Told Tales" (1837) and "Mosses from an Old Manse" (1846).

ONE OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S FAMOUS WORKS

The Scarlet Letter (1850) **Genre:** Historical Fiction

SUMMARY

Nathaniel Hawthorne's most famous work is "The Scarlet Letter," published in 1850. This novel tells the story of Hester Prynne, a woman living in Puritan New England who is condemned for adultery and forced to wear a scarlet "A" on her clothing as a mark of shame. The narrative delves into themes of sin, guilt, redemption, and the hypocrisy of society, exploring the psychological and social consequences of moral transgression.

IMPACT

"The Scarlet Letter" has had a significant impact on literature and culture. It explores themes of sin, guilt, and redemption in Puritan New England. The novel's exploration of moral and ethical dilemmas, along with its complex characters like Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale, has made it a classic in American literature. "The Scarlet Letter" continues to be studied for its deep psychological insights and commentary on societal norms and hypocrisy. It has influenced countless subsequent works of literature and has been adapted into various forms of media, cementing its enduring legacy in literary history.

ENGLISH PLAYWRIGHT AND A POET

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Quote: "To be, or not to be: that is the question." (Hamlet, 1603)

William Shakespeare, often hailed as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's preeminent dramatist, was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564. His literary career spans 38 plays, 154 sonnets, and two long narrative poems, marking a prolific contribution to literature that has influenced countless generations. Shakespeare's works, characterized by their deep understanding of human nature, intricate plots, and rich language, have been performed more often than those of any other playwright.

Shakespeare's early years are somewhat shrouded in mystery, with scant details about his education and the early influences that shaped his literary genius. However, it is widely believed that he attended the King's New School in Stratford, where he would have been introduced to the classical works of Ovid, Virgil, and Seneca, which profoundly influenced his later writings. His marriage to Anne Hathaway in 1582, and the subsequent birth of his three children, provided him with personal experiences that he wove into his plays.

In the late 1580s, Shakespeare moved to London, where he began his successful career as an actor and playwright. By 1594, he was a managing partner in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a leading theatrical company. His works, including comedies, tragedies, and histories, reflect the political and social upheavals of his time, resonating with audiences through their timeless exploration of human emotion and conflict.

ONE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S FAMOUS WORK

Genre: Tragedy "**Hamlet**" (1603)

SUMMARY

Among Shakespeare's vast oeuvre, "Hamlet" stands out as one of his most iconic and frequently performed tragedies. Written around 1600, "Hamlet" delves into themes of revenge, madness, mortality, and the complexities of human nature. The play centers on Prince Hamlet of Denmark, who is driven to avenge his father's murder by his uncle Claudius, now the king and married to Hamlet's mother, Gertrude.

"Hamlet" is notable for its deep psychological complexity, with the eponymous character's soliloquies offering profound insights into his inner turmoil and philosophical musings. The famous "To be, or not to be" soliloquy encapsulates Hamlet's existential struggle and his contemplation of life and death. Shakespeare's masterful use of language, combined with the intricate plot and rich character development, makes "Hamlet" a timeless piece that continues to captivate audiences and scholars alike.

IMPACT

The impact of "Hamlet" on literature, theatre, and popular culture cannot be overstated. It has been translated into numerous languages and adapted into countless films, television shows, and literary works. The play's exploration of universal themes such as revenge, betrayal, and the search for meaning in life has ensured its enduring relevance.

"Hamlet" has significantly influenced the development of Western literature and drama. Its complex characters and psychological depth paved the way for later playwrights and novelists, who sought to explore the human condition in similarly nuanced ways. The play's innovative structure and use of soliloquy have been studied extensively, contributing to the understanding of narrative techniques and character development.

Moreover, "Hamlet" has left an indelible mark on popular culture. Phrases from the play, such as "To be, or not to be," "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark," and "The lady doth protest too much," have entered common parlance, highlighting the play's linguistic impact. Its themes and characters have been referenced and reinterpreted in various art forms, from literature and visual arts to film and music.

ENGLISH NOVELIST

Jane Austen (1775-1817)

Quote: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Pride and Prejudice, 1813)

She was an English writer who first gave the novel its distinctly modern character through her treatment of ordinary people in everyday life. She published four novels during her lifetime: Sense and Sensibility (1811), Pride and Prejudice (1813), Mansfield Park (1814), and Emma (1815). In these and in Persuasion and Northanger Abbey (published together posthumously, 1817), she vividly depicted English middle-class life during the early 19th century. Her novels defined the era's novel of manners, but they also became timeless classics that remained critical and popular successes for over two centuries after her death. These works reflect her enduring legacy.

ONE OF JANE AUSTEN'S FAMOUS WORK

Genre: Romance Novel **Pride & Prejudice** (1813)

SUMMARY

The novel opens with one of the most famous lines in English literature: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." The statement is seemingly what Mrs. Bennet thinks as she sets her sights on the newly arrived Bingley, who she is sure will make a suitable husband for one of her daughters. At a ball, Bingley takes an immediate interest in the beautiful and shy Jane. The encounter between his friend Darcy and Elizabeth is less cordial. Although Austen shows them intrigued by each other, she reverses the convention of first impressions: the pride of rank and fortune and prejudice against the social inferiority of Elizabeth's family hold Darcy aloof, while the pride of self-respect and prejudice against Darcy's snobbery hold Elizabeth equally aloof.

IMPACT

The work, which Austen initially titled *First Impressions*, is the second of four novels that Austen published during her lifetime. Although *Pride and Prejudice* has been criticized for its lack of historical context (it is likely set either during the French Revolution [1787–99] or the Napoleonic Wars [1799–1815]), the existence of its characters in a social bubble that is rarely penetrated by events beyond it is an accurate portrayal of the enclosed social world in which Austen lived. She depicted that world, in all its own narrow pride and prejudice, with unswerving accuracy and satire. At the same time, she placed at its center, as both its prime actor and most perceptive critic, a character so well conceived and rendered that the reader cannot but be gripped by her story and wish for its happy denouement. In the end, Austen's novel has remained popular largely because of Elizabeth—who was reportedly Austen's own favorite among all her heroines—and because of the enduring appeal to men and women alike of a well-told and potentially happily ending love story.

ENGLISH NOVELIST AND JOURNALIST

Charles Dickens (1812 – 1870)

Quote: "I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all year" (*A Christmas Carol*, 1843)

He was an English novelist, journalist, short story writer and social critic. He is regarded as the greatest novelist of the Victorian era. His works enjoyed unprecedented popularity during his lifetime and, by the 20th century, critics and scholars had recognized him as a literary genius. His novels and short stories are widely read today.

Dickens was born in Portsmouth, and when his father John was sent to a debtors' prison, he dropped out of school at the age of twelve to work at a factory that produced boots. Three years later, he went back to school and started his journalistic career. Dickens was a tireless letter writer, lectured widely, published hundreds of short tales, five novellas, fifteen novels, hundreds of nonfiction articles, and an unwavering advocate for children's rights, education, and other social changes.

He also edited a weekly journal for twenty years. Dickens's literary career began in 1836 with the serial release of *The Pickwick Papers*, which became a publishing phenomenon after the character Sam Weller was introduced in the fourth episode. This led to the creation of *Pickwick* goods and spin-offs. In a matter of years, Dickens rose to prominence as a global literary figure, renowned for his wit, sarcasm, and astute observations of people and society. Dickens' novels, the majority of which were published in monthly or weekly installments, invented the practice of serial publishing narrative fiction, which went on to become the predominant Victorian mode for novel publication.

His serial publications featured suspenseful cliffhanger endings that kept readers on the edge of their seats. Dickens was able to assess the response of his audience through the installment format, and he frequently adjusted his plot and character development in response.

ONE OF CHARLES DICKENS'S FAMOUS WORK

Genre: Novella "**A Christmas Carol**" (1843)

SUMMARY

"A Christmas Carol" is a timeless novella that tells the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, a miserly old man who is visited by the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet to Come. These supernatural visits lead Scrooge on a journey of self-reflection and transformation, ultimately turning him from a cold-hearted miser into a warm and generous individual.

Impact of "A Christmas Carol":

Revival of Christmas Traditions: "A Christmas Carol" played a significant role in reviving and popularizing Christmas traditions in Victorian England. It emphasized the importance of family, generosity, and the festive spirit, contributing to the modern celebration of Christmas.

Social Awareness: The novella highlighted the plight of the poor and the need for social reform. Dickens' portrayal of Scrooge's transformation encouraged readers to reflect on their own behavior towards others and inspired charitable acts and social responsibility.

IMPACT

Its Cultural Influence: "A Christmas Carol" has become a beloved classic, adapted into countless films, plays, and other media formats. Its enduring themes of redemption, compassion, and the spirit of Christmas continue to resonate with audiences around the world, making it a staple of holiday literature.
