**AMERICAN ROMANTICISM**

THE NOVEL

FOCUS: AMERICAN ROMANTICISM: THE NOVEL; JAMES FENIMORE COOPER; HERMAN MELVILLE; NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.

* The **novel** - a very important part of American Romanticism;
* Experimentation with form and breaking with many literary conventions;
* Symbolism;
* Nature – a central theme;
* Individualism and imagination;
* Emotion;
* Democracy and freedom;
* The frontier as a place (and as an idea) – a central theme.

**JAMES FENIMORE COOPER** (1789-1851)

**Significance**:

* The founding father of the American historical novel;
* The creator of the myth of the American West.

J. F. Cooper is the **FIRST**…

- … to create a massive body of work.

- … to be a professional writer.

- … to regard literature as a commentary on and corrective of culture.

- … to create a complex and enduring myth of American life.

- … American novelist of manners.

J. F. Cooper is the inventor of three types of novel:

1. The novel of the frontier;

2. The novel of the sea;

3. The international novel (in which European and American culture collide).

**Basic Works**

* ***Precaution*** (1820) a novel of morals and manners that showed the influence of Jane Austen;
* ***The Spy: A Tale of Neutral Ground*** (1821) the first historical romance about the American Revolution;
* In New York City, Cooper founded the **Bread and Cheese Club** and became the center of a circle that included notable painters (Hudson River School) and writers.

***The Leatherstocking Tales***

***The Leatherstocking Tales*** is aseries of five novels about 18th-century life among Indians and white pioneers on the New York State frontier. The main character is [Natty Bumppo](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Natty-Bumppo), who takes on various names throughout the series, one of which – the Leatherstocking:

* *The Pioneers* (1823)
* *The Prairie* (1827)
* *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826)
* *The Pathfinder* (1840)
* *The Deerslayer* (1841)
* The American frontier – a place where the Old World and the New World collide. The dangers are great, but this is also a place that offers a second chance to humanity – to live in heaven, to restore the harmony with nature, and be reborn. With the constant movement of the frontier westwards, Cooper sees this heaven disappearing, destroying the people of the forest – the Indians.
* The cowboy western relies on Cooper’s literary techniques and conventions (mighty warriors, almost supernatural protection of the hero from a serious injury, the quest,…)
* Cooper’s portrayal of nature is comparable to that of the Hudson River School painters (harmony, vast panoramas, minute human and animal figures…)
* Emphasis on action and adventure, rather than psychological complexities.

**Natty Bumppo**

* The main character in *The Leatherstocking Tales.*
* An unprecedented American hero of the frontier – true to Christianity and civilization but respecting the Indians and nature.
* A white man who has no Indian blood but has lived so long with them that he is caught between two worlds.
* Significant not as realistic but symbolic character.
* A fictional prototype of the western heroes in popular American fiction and film.

**Cooper and the Sea**

* ***The History of the Navy of the United States of America*** (1839) - history;
* ***Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers*** (1846) – biography;
* ***The Pilot*** (1824), ***The Red Rover*** (1828), ***Afloat and Ashore*** (1844) – novels of the sea.

**Contrastive Reception**

* Influential to European writers, but frequently criticized by his fellow-countrymen;
* Returning from Europe, Cooper was so hurt by a review that he penned *A Letter to His Countrymen,* which was a bitter attack on American provincialism;
* Criticized about his dialogues, identical female character and flat Indian characters;
* Mark Twain tore apart Fenimore's romanticism in *Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offenses* (1895).

**HERMAN MELVILLE** (1819 – 1891)

* His forebears - leading roles in the American Revolution;
* The family enjoyed a prosperous life;
* When they moved to Albany, their business suffered a big hit;
* After his father died, the eldest son, Gansevoort, assumed responsibility for the family and took over their business.
* Herman joined him after two years.
* Herman attended Albany Academy and Albany Classical School and started writing poems, essays and short stories.

**Wanderings And Voyages**

* 1837 - Herman shipped out as cabin boy on a merchant ship;
* 1841 - embarked on his second sea voyage, on the whaler *Acushnet*;
* After 18 months onboard, Melville deserted and lived with the natives of the Marquesas Islands;
* He then arrived in Tahiti and finally Honolulu, Hawaii.

**Writings of Sea Adventures**

* *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846);
* *Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas* (1847);
* *Redburn: His First Voyage*(1849);
* *White-Jacket; or, The World in a Man-of-War* (1850);
* *Moby-Dick* (initially titled *The Whale*) (1851).

***Moby-Dick***

Traveling from Nantucket, Massachusetts, to South America, the *Essex* met its doom in the Pacific Ocean, when a sperm whale attacked and destroyed the ship. The crew, adrift in their small whaleboats, faced storms, thirst, illness and starvation, and were even reduced to cannibalism for survival. However, succeeding in one of the great open-boat journeys of all time, the few survivors were picked up off South America. Their story, spread widely in America in the 19th century, provided inspiration for Melville's tale of a ship captain seeking revenge on an elusive whale.

The opening of the novel is considered to be one of the most iconic in American literature:

*Call me Ishmael. Some years ago - never mind how long precisely - having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world…*

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A Wide Range of Literary Techniques:

* Biblical references
* Shakespearean tragedy techniques
* Encyclopedic elements
* A mixture of various styles
* Adventure story
* Man vs. monster
* Psychological thriller
* Universal themes (religion, fate, revenge, human nature…)

***Moby-Dick*** sold poorly, as did subsequent novels and Melville was about to give up on writing novels.

* ***Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*** (1852)
* ***Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile*** (1855)
* ***The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*** (1857)

**Later Years**

* Delivered lectures throughout the late 1850s;
* A 20-year career as a customs inspector in New York City;
* Turned his creative interests to poetry, publishing the collection ***Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*** (1866);
* ***Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*** (1876) – an epic based on a previous trip to the region.
* Melville had finally begun work on another novel when he died of a heart attack in New York City.

**NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE** (1804–1864)

FROM TRANSCENDENTALISM TO DARK ROMATICISM

* Hawthorne was a founding member of *[Brook Farm](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brook_Farm)*, a utopian experiment in communal living.
* He fictionalized the experiences of *Brook Farm* in his satirical novel [*The Blithedale Romance*](https://americanliterature.com/author/nathaniel-hawthorne/book/the-blithedale-romance/summary)(1852).
* Hawthorne changes from a young transcendental idealist to a Dark Romantic writer.

[***The Scarlet Letter***](https://americanliterature.com/author/nathaniel-hawthorne/book/the-scarlet-letter/summary)(1850)

* One of the first mass-produced novels in America and became an instant bestseller;
* Praised for its sentimentality and moral purity;
* Set in 17th-century Puritan Massachusetts Bay Colony, during the years 1642 to 1649;
* Tells the story of Hester Prynne, who conceives a daughter through an affair and is stigmatized by the Puritan society;
* Explores themes of sin, hypocrisy and guilt.

[***The House of Seven Gables***](https://americanliterature.com/author/nathaniel-hawthorne/book/the-house-of-seven-gables/summary)(1851) - a novel about a New England  family and their ancestral home, which explores themes of guilt, retribution, and atonement and colors the tale with suggestions of the supernatural and witchcraft.

* He also wrote short stories: [*My Kinsman, Major Molineaux*](https://americanliterature.com/author/nathaniel-hawthorne/short-story/my-kinsman-major-molineux) (1832), [*Young Goodman Brown*](https://americanliterature.com/author/nathaniel-hawthorne/short-story/young-goodman-brown) (1835),  [*Feathertop*](https://americanliterature.com/author/nathaniel-hawthorne/short-story/feathertop) (1852) …