2025-06-02 美国文学史.md

Week 1–2 Summary: Colonial America and the Rise of Nationhood

🥼 I. American Puritanism (17th Century)

Historical Context

- Early 1600s: English Puritan settlers in New England
- Goal: Build a purified, godly society ("City upon a Hill")
- Theocracy: Church and civil life intertwined

Core Beliefs

- Predestination, Original Sin, Total Depravity
- Practical idealism; moral code + social regulation
- Typology: reading contemporary events as biblical parallels
- Puritanism as a mindset, not just a doctrine

Key Figures and Texts

- William Bradford Of Plymouth Plantation: Historical account of Puritan migration and hardships
- Anne Bradstreet Contemplations: Devotional poetry linking nature to divine praise
- Jonathan Edwards Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God: Vivid sermons invoking fear and submission before God's will

II. The Age of Nationhood (Late 18th Century)

Historical Context

- American independence from Britain
- Need to define national identity, culture, and literature
- Writers were still culturally English required conscious effort to "Americanize"

Mey Ideas

- Literature as nation-building tool
- Quest for American uniqueness: divine mission + political destiny
- Emergence of American language (e.g., Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary: 5,000+ new American words)

👤 III. Representative Authors of Early Nationhood

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790)

- Works: Autobiography, Poor Richard's Almanac
- Embodiment of the American Dream: rationalism, self-improvement
- Style: clear, witty, practical; adapted Enlightenment ideas for everyday use
- Not poetic but influential in moral and civic thought

William Hill Brown - The Power of Sympathy (1789)

- First American novel (epistolary form)
- Tragic love story aimed at female readers
- Didactic: reinforced virtue, social responsibility, ideal womanhood
- Fiction used as moral education for new citizens

IV. The Shift Toward Fiction and Myth-Making (Early 19th Century)

Washington Irving (1783–1859)

- Works: "Rip Van Winkle," "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"
- Blended American settings with European Romanticism and folklore
- Used humor, nostalgia, and allegory to explore identity before and after Revolution
- One of the first American writers to gain global recognition

b James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851)

- Works: The Leatherstocking Tales
- Invented the American historical romance and "Western" genre
- Themes:
 - Nature vs. civilization
 - o Freedom vs. law
 - o Wilderness vs. Eden
- Helped mythologize American frontier as part of national identity

V. Thematic Threads for Essay Use

Theme	How to Expand
Nation-building Literature used to construct cultural uniqueness and moral vision	
Puritan legacy	Enduring moral themes, sermon rhetoric, and providential worldview
Gender & fiction	Novels targeting women as readers and moral subjects
American exceptionalism	"Promised land" imagery, divine mission, wilderness myth

Here is a **structured and essay-ready summary for Weeks 3–4** of your American Literature course, covering **American Romanticism**, **Transcendentalism**, and **its dark counterparts**. This format includes: historical context, core ideas, major figures and works, and thematic highlights — ideal for exam writing or memory revision.



Week 3–4 Summary: American Romanticism & Transcendentalism

I. American Romanticism (Early-Mid 19th Century)

Historical Background

- Emerged in response to Enlightenment rationalism
- Emphasized emotion, imagination, subjectivity, and the individual
- American Romanticism borrowed from European Romanticism (1798 UK: Lyrical Ballads)
- Included historical fiction, sentimental fiction, and early Transcendentalism

Key Traits

- Nature as sublime, mysterious, and moral
- Interest in American myth and legend (e.g. frontier, past heroes)
- Development of fiction as a national form

James Fenimore Cooper

- Leatherstocking Tales
- Father of American historical romance
- Themes: nature vs. civilization, freedom vs. law, Eden vs. wilderness

II. Transcendentalism (1830s-1860s)

"A spiritual rebellion against reason and tradition"

Core Beliefs

- Imagination > reason, intuition > logic
- Nature is divine, symbolic of the over-soul
- The individual self is sacred and autonomous
- Rejection of institutional religion (esp. Puritanism)

Key Figures and Ideas

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

- Called the "Father of American Thought"
- Editor of The Dial; essayist and philosopher
- Major works:
 - Nature "The universe is the externalization of the soul"
 - The American Scholar Declaration of intellectual independence
- Style: aphoristic, poetic, visionary
- Belief in the divinity of man, hope, and self-reliance
- · Criticism: overly optimistic, blind to evil

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)

- Follower of Emerson; lived at Walden Pond
- Walden experiment in simplicity, self-sufficiency, communion with nature
- Civil Disobedience protest against unjust government (inspired Gandhi, MLK)
- Nature as moral guide; life reduced to essentials

III. Reactions Against Transcendentalism: Dark Romanticism

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864)

- Mixed Puritan legacy with romantic allegory
- Believed in the dark side of the soul: sin, guilt, ambiguity
- Symbolism + psychological depth

Major Works:

- The Scarlet Letter A becomes ambiguous: angel? adulteress?
- Young Goodman Brown Forest journey as spiritual crisis; distrust rooted in Puritan doctrine
- Themes: moral ambivalence, ancestral guilt, failed idealism

Herman Melville (1819–1891)

- Moby Dick (1851) metaphysical epic; tragic humanism
- Nature is **not nurturing** but chaotic and indifferent
- Ishmael as wanderer; Ahab as obsessive anti-hero
- Themes:
 - Alienation (man vs. nature/society/self)
 - Self-reliance vs. solipsism (danger of extreme individualism)
 - Universe as godless, purpose as futile

Symbolism in Moby Dick:

- · Pequod as America itself
- Moby Dick as unknowable truth or fate
- Ahab = unchecked will, destructive self-centeredness

IV. Sentimental Fiction: Moral Emotion as Political Force

Harriet Beecher Stowe – Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852)

- Triggered social empathy; helped stir the Civil War
- Fiction as moral persuasion: dramatized cruelty of slavery
- Not "high literature" but historically impactful

• Uses sympathy, pity, and Christian virtue to move readers

V. Poets of Romanticism / Transcendentalist Influence

🗣 Walt Whitman (1819–1892)

- Leaves of Grass celebration of body, nation, life
- Transcendental optimism, democratic spirit
- Revolutionized poetic form: free verse, inclusive subject matter
- · Embraced the ugly and the ordinary; later reputation suffered from excess
- Believed in poetry as a song for America

🌞 Emily Dickinson (1830–1886)

- Wrote 1775 poems; only 7 published in lifetime
- Introverted, concise, symbolic, emotionally potent
- Style: dashes, slant rhyme, ambiguity, minimalism
- Themes: death, faith, inner life, beauty and pain
- "Every word is a picture scene"
- "Pain is the air of Dickinson's life" Harold Bloom

💀 VI. Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849)

- Master of macabre, mystery, and melancholy
- First to theorize short story as a complete form ("unity of effect")
- Major themes:
 - Death of beautiful women = most poetic topic
 - Aesthetic beauty + psychological horror
- Also originator of detective fiction
- Known for precise structure, haunting rhythm, lyrical beauty
- Example works: The Raven, The Fall of the House of Usher, Ligeia
- Beauty = what moves us to tears

Essay Review Prompts (Week 3–4)

- 1. What are the main tenets of American Transcendentalism?
- 2. Compare Emersonian self-reliance with Melville's view of extreme individualism.
- 3. How does Hawthorne critique the optimistic view of human nature in Transcendentalism?
- 4. Why is Uncle Tom's Cabin considered a turning point in American fiction?
- 5. What symbolic meanings emerge from Moby Dick and the figure of Ahab?

Week 5 Summary: Realism and Local Colorism (Post-Civil War America)

I. Historical Context

- Civil War aftermath (1861–1865): Loss, disillusionment, industrialization, and a crisis in moral values
- Decline of Transcendental optimism: Doubts about man's inherent goodness, divine nature, or a benevolent God
- Closing frontier: Dream of endless American expansion falters
- Reaction against Romanticism and Sentimentalism: Realism rises to depict truth, not idealism

嶐 II. Realism: "Represent Life Honestly"

Core Tenets

- Objective, detailed representation of everyday life
- · Rejection of idealism and romantic fantasy
- Focus on moral complexity, psychological depth, social detail

III. Key Realist Writers

William Dean Howells (1837–1920)

- The Rise of Silas Lapham (1885): A businessman loses his fortune but finds ethical redemption
- Advocated truth as beauty
- Emphasized psychological realism and moral dilemmas

Number 1916 | Henry James (1843–1916)

Phases & Style

- International Theme: American innocence vs. European sophistication
 - Daisy Miller, The Portrait of a Lady
- Later works: complex relationships, drama, point-of-view techniques
 - The Ambassadors, The Golden Bowl
- Known for:
 - "The Art of Fiction" → fiction should represent life, not "reality"
 - o Prime sensibility: the author's intelligence and sensitivity shape truth
 - Early adopter of stream-of-consciousness and psychological realism
 - Pioneered open endings

Key Work: The Portrait of a Lady

- Isabel Archer's idealism and tragic self-awareness
- Drama of consciousness; tension between self-fulfillment and social constraint
- Recurring theme: individual's choice vs. social manipulation

No. Local Colorism: Realism with Regional Detail

Definition

- Realism rooted in **regional setting**, dialect, lifestyle, customs
- Popular from 1860s–1890s
- Celebrates the diversity of American life

→ Mark Twain (1835–1910)

- Background: Steamboat pilot; coined "Mark Twain" (two fathoms deep)
- Language: American vernacular, humor, satire
- Key Works:
 - The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876)
 - The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884)

Huckleberry Finn Highlights

- First-person narrative: Huck's authentic voice
- Themes:
 - o Morality vs. society's values
 - Freedom, friendship (Huck and Jim)
 - American hypocrisy, racism, and conscience
- Historical Impact:
 - Marked the end of New England literary dominance
 - Celebrated authentic American themes, setting, and voice
 - Influenced Hemingway, Faulkner

Kate Chopin (1851–1904)

- Rediscovered in 1960s-70s (feminist revival)
- Depicted Louisiana's Creole society, French Catholic influences
- Style: sensual, bold, emotionally honest

Key Work: The Awakening (1899)

- A woman's pursuit of sexual and emotional independence
- Scandalized critics: explored female desire and infidelity

- Set in **New Orleans** with strong sense of place
- Pathbreaking: depicted women as sensuous, not merely moral figures
- Quote: "Beyond awakening there is no transcendence."

V. Key Themes Across Realism and Local Colorism

Theme	Realist Expression	
Moral ambiguity	No easy answers; characters shape fate through choice	
Individual vs. society	Huck's inner truth vs. laws; Isabel's ideals vs. Merle/Osmond	
Loss of optimism	Frontier gone; faith in American Dream falters	
Regional identity	Dialect, setting, social detail = national mosaic	
Gender and power	Kate Chopin challenged male-centric realism	
Language & voice	Vernacular speech → authentic America	

Essay Review Prompts

- 1. Compare Huck Finn and Isabel Archer as realist characters: What moral choices define them?
- 2. How do Henry James and William Dean Howells differently represent morality and realism?
- 3. Discuss the feminist dimensions in Kate Chopin's The Awakening.
- 4. How does Huckleberry Finn use local color and satire to critique American society?

Here is a well-structured, markdown-friendly, essay-ready **summary of Week 6: Realism and Naturalism**, focused on definitions, distinctions, historical context, key figures, and thematic content. It is optimized for efficient recall and flexible use in essays.

Week 6 Summary: Realism and Naturalism in American Literature

🔰 I. Historical Background

- **Realism**: Emerged after the **Civil War (1861–1865)**, responding to the collapse of idealism and transcendental optimism.
- Naturalism: Followed Realism in the late 19th century, shaped by Darwinism, industrial capitalism, and the closing of the frontier.
- Rapid industrialization, urban poverty, and scientific determinism led to a shift from realism to naturalism—a bleaker, more deterministic worldview.

II. Key Differences: Realism vs. Naturalism

Aspect	Realism	Naturalism
View of life	Objective, truthful, slice of life	Deterministic, bleak, driven by external forces

Aspect	Realism	Naturalism
Influence	Reaction to Romanticism	Grew out of Realism; influenced by Darwin, Marx
Focus	Moral complexity, social realism	Human beings as victims of heredity, environment
Tone	Observational, restrained	Pessimistic, often fatalistic
Agency	Some moral or personal autonomy	No free will: biological, social determinism

- III. Key Concepts in Naturalism
 - Biological Determinism → Charles Darwin
 - Economic Determinism → Karl Marx
 - Human as animal, instincts > reason
 - Amoral universe: nature is indifferent, not nurturing
 - Literature as laboratory report: third-person, detached, omniscient
- IV. Major Writers & Works
- Stephen Crane (1871–1900)
 - Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (1893)
 - First uncompromising American naturalist novel; poverty, degradation, no moral judgment
 - The Red Badge of Courage (1895)

Civil War psychological novel; heroism questioned; war as meaningless suffering *Finale*: nature is indifferent, not redemptive ("sun shines anyway") **Theme**: instinct > reason, man = animal in extreme conditions

- The Open Boat (1897)
 - Survival narrative; highlights **indifference of nature**, futility of human will
- 💂 Frank Norris (1870–1902)
 - The Octopus (1901)
 - Pacific Railroad = monstrous capitalism Nature and commerce conspire to crush individuals
- Theodore Dreiser (1871–1954)
 - Sister Carrie (1900)

Rise of a working-class girl → success = hollow; desire = endless, environment = overpowering **Nihilistic tone**: aspiration turns to absurdity

• An American Tragedy (1925)

Based on a real murder case; fate, class, ambition crush the individual

Jack London (1876–1916)

• Naturalistic survivalist fiction:

To Build a Fire, The Call of the Wild Man = beast, instincts in wilderness

Upton Sinclair (1878–1968)

• The Jungle (1906)

Exposé of meatpacking industry; poverty, labor exploitation Prompted food safety reforms in U.S. law

****** O. Henry (1862–1910)

- Known for twist endings, urban realism, sentimentality
- Not considered a major naturalist due to romanticized tone

V. Thematic Framework

Theme	Expression in Naturalist Texts	
X Free Will	Humans shaped by heredity, environment	
Instinct vs. Society	Passion & need crash against social forces	
Wature	Amoral, indifferent, not benevolent	
Determinism	No control over fate (biological or economic)	
6 Alienation	Individuals trapped in hostile universe	
W Illusion vs. Reality	Glory, love, wealth = ultimately hollow	

VI. Key Literary Techniques

- Third-person omniscient narration
- Detailed description of setting, weather, physicality
- Detached tone: like scientific observation
- Symbolism of nature: sun, river, machinery = indifferent forces

- VII. Sample Essay Questions (Review Prep)
 - 1. Compare the philosophical foundations of realism and naturalism.
 - 2. How does Stephen Crane depict courage in The Red Badge of Courage?
 - 3. Discuss how naturalism in Sister Carrie shows the limits of ambition.
 - 4. Analyze how naturalistic writing uses nature to subvert transcendental optimism.
- WEEK 7: Imagism and Postwar Poetry
- I. Historical Background & Emergence of Imagism
 - Poetry boom (1912-1922) amid dislocation, fragmentation, modern chaos
 - Imagism = reaction against Victorian verbosity and rigid forms
 - Core aim: precise, clear, momentary revelation through image
- II. Three Phases of Imagism

Phase	Key Ideas
1908–1909	T.E. Hulme begins theorizing the image (moment of truth)
1912–1914	Ezra Pound codifies 3 principles:

- Direct treatment of subject
- Economy of language
- Free verse as musical phrase | | 1914–1917 | Amygism: Amy Lowell continues the movement |
- What Is an Image?

"An intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." —Ezra Pound "A point of excitement converted into a line of vision." —T.E. Hulme

Example: Ezra Pound, In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd; Petals on a wet, black bough.

- 💆 III. Key Imagists and Successors
- Ezra Pound (1885–1972)
 - Leader of Imagism
 - Influences: Chinese, Japanese, Greek poetry
 - Cantos: modern epic, Confucian influence
 - Advocated cultural clarity over Western chaos
- 🔵 William Carlos Williams (1883–1963)

- Physician; localist ("localism leads to culture")
- · Opposed Pound/Eliot's internationalism
- The Red Wheelbarrow: minimalist American image

So much depends / upon / a red wheel / barrow...

T.S. Eliot (1888–1965)

- The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock (1911)
- The Waste Land (1922): landmark of high modernism
- Later works: Ash Wednesday, Four Quartets
- Became conservative after Nobel Prize (1948)

Wallace Stevens (1879–1955)

- Businessman-poet
- Believed beauty arises from ordinary, even sordid life
- Heroism = imposing meaning on chaos

Robert Frost (1874–1963)

- Four-time Pulitzer winner
- Rural New England pastoralism with existential undertones

Carl Sandburg (1878–1967)

- Chicago Poems
- Democratic spirit: "voice of the people"

N. Modernist Innovation: Form and Visuals

▲ E.E. Cummings (1894–1963)

- Poet + painter
- Experimental: typography, syntax, visual form
- I(a: symbol of falling loneliness

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▼ Hart Crane (1899–1932)

• White Buildings (1926), The Bridge (1930): lyric modernism

Marianne Moore (1887–1972)

- · Precision in observation, miniature detail
- · Loved shaped animals, descriptive clarity
- Poetic charm = intellect + observation

V. Themes & Techniques

Theme	Expression	
→ Momentary revelation	Imagistic precision (Pound, Williams)	
O Local vs. global	Williams: rooted in America; Pound: global classicism	
Norm innovation	Free verse, visual shape (Cummings)	
Alienation	Eliot's fragmentation, loneliness	
Precision & control	Moore's measured poetic form	

Review Questions

- 1. Define Imagism. How does it reflect the mood of early 20th-century modernism?
- 2. Choose one poet (e.g., Pound, Williams, Eliot, Moore) and explain how their work reshaped American poetry.
- 3. Discuss the relationship between poetry and image, using examples like *The Red Wheelbarrow* or *In a Station of the Metro*.

WEEK 8: F. Scott Fitzgerald & Ernest Hemingway

🏋 I. **F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940)** — The Writer of the Jazz Age

Historical Background: The Jazz Age

- Term coined by Fitzgerald himself; synonymous with the Roaring Twenties
- Characterized by post-WWI disillusionment, hedonism, and collapse of the American Dream
- Pattern: Pursuit → Disenchantment → Failure
- Fitzgerald and Zelda embodied the youth, glamour, and eventual disillusion of the era

Literary Themes

- Fragility of dreams, spiritual desolation, illusions of wealth and love
- · Aesthetic beauty masking moral decay
- · Obsession with the past

Representative Works

Title	Key Points
This Side of Paradise (1920)	Captures post-WWI spiritual void; debut success; establishes Jazz Age tone
The Beautiful and the Damned (1922)	Autobiographical; wealth destroys love; moral collapse

Title Key Points

The Great Gatsby (1925)

- Narrator Nick observes Gatsby's rise and fall
- Gatsby: tragic embodiment of American Dream
- Pattern: Dream → Illusion → Despair
- "So we beat on, boats against the current..."
- Called "a cultural-historical allegory" of America | | Tender Is the Night (1934) | Psychiatrists, decadence, decline—mirrors Fitzgerald's own breakdown; American excess + spiritual emptiness | |
 The Last Tycoon (1941) | Unfinished novel on Hollywood; posthumously published |

📌 Legacy

- An analyst of American culture
- Captured the soul of the 1920s, and its deep-rooted anxieties
- Gatsby is widely seen as his intellectual masterpiece

⋈ II. Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) — The Lost Generation's Stoic

The Lost Generation

- Coined by Gertrude Stein for post-WWI expatriate writers
- Disillusioned, cynical, rootless-often living in Paris
- Hemingway = representative voice (along with Fitzgerald)

Signature Writing Style

- Minimalism: crisp, economical language; short sentences
- Emotional restraint: no overt expression; invites reader inference
- Iceberg Theory: 1/8 above water (surface), 7/8 below (meaning)
- Grace under pressure: stoic dignity in face of violence or futility
- Influenced by: war, bullfighting, sport, journalism

Literary Themes

- Existential code: personal choice, stoic courage, acceptance of nothingness
- Man's search for meaning amid a meaningless, brutal world
- Loneliness, loss, impotence (literal and symbolic), ritual as redemption

Representative Works

litle 	Key Points
The Sun Also Rises	Disillusioned expats in France/Spain; bullfighting as ritual; Jake Barnes =
(1926)	emasculated WWI vet; "Isn't it pretty to think so?"

2025-06-02 美国文学史.md

Title	Key Points	
A Farewell to Arms (1929)	Love and war in Italy; "Glory, honor, courage obscene."; stoicism, disillusionment	
For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940)	Spanish Civil War; collective liberty; "No man is an island" — shift from individualism to solidarity	
The Old Man and the Sea (1952)	Santiago's endurance at sea; brotherhood with nature; Nobel Prize winner ; final moral affirmation	
Short Works	Six-Word Stories: powerful compression of meaning (e.g., "For sale: baby shoes, never worn.")	

喀 III. Fitzgerald vs. Hemingway

Fitzgerald	Hemingway
Analyst of American culture	Stylist and stoic
Dream, decadence, decline	War, survival, futility
Romantic + disillusioned	Existential + disciplined
Complex narration (Nick in Gatsby)	Minimal narration, reader fills gaps
Legacy: Jazz Age chronicler	Legacy: Minimalism + existential hero

? Review Questions

- 1. How does Fitzgerald capture the spirit of the Jazz Age?
- 2. Why is The Great Gatsby considered Fitzgerald's greatest intellectual achievement?
- 3. Define the Lost Generation. How does Hemingway exemplify it?
- 4. Discuss Hemingway's Iceberg Theory and how it manifests in his major works.
- 5. Compare Fitzgerald's romanticism with Hemingway's stoicism. Which better reflects post-**WWI America?**

Great — here's a clean and structured summary of Week 9: The West and Midwest from your lecture notes, formatted to match your previous summaries (like Week 8). This version is ideal for essay revision, with historical background, key themes, representative writers/works, and some useful quote hooks for writing.



WEEK 9: The West and Midwest in American Literature

- I. The American West: Mobility, Future, Possibility
- Historical + Mythic Context

- The Western frontier embodies:
 - o Mobility: physical and social movement
 - o Future: openness to renewal
 - o Possibility: new identity, new Eden
- Settlement of the West = both material history and national mythology
- Literary output: the Western, nostalgic fiction, ecological concerns, and epic family sagas

Willa Cather (1873–1947)

Themes

- Nostalgia for the Nebraska prairie, immigrant roots
- Strong female protagonists, symbolizing endurance and rootedness
- Pastoral ideal vs. urban intrusion
- Human-nature relations → ecological consciousness ahead of her time
- Women as spiritually connected to land ("land is like a mother")

Key Works

Title	Features
O Pioneers! (1913)	Homesteading women, strength & resilience
The Song of the Lark (1915)	Female artistic growth; self-realization

My Ántonia (1918)

- Narrated by Jim Burden
- Ántonia = woman + land + memory
- Complex triangle: male narrator, female subject, female author
- · Pastoral myth, gender lens, spiritual intimacy
- Quote: "The idea of you is a part of my mind." |

John Steinbeck (1902–1968)

P Themes

- Nature's indifference, class struggle
- California = broken Eden / false promise
- Immigrant hardships, working-class resistance
- Biblical allusions, social realism, political engagement

👺 Key Works

Title	Features

Title Features

Of Mice and Men (1937)

- Title from Burns: "best laid plans..."
- Simple, dramatic structure ("novel-play")
- Tragic power in working-class friendship | | The Grapes of Wrath (1939) |
- Western epic of the Joad family
- Biblical exodus → failed American Dream
- Tom Joad: social rebel, everyman hero
- Quote: "I'll be everywhere... hungry people can eat..."
- Ends with Rose of Sharon's act of compassion | | East of Eden (1952) |
- Epic tale of moral choices and family
- Humanism: "Knowing a man well never leads to hate..." |
- II. The Midwest and the Rise of Psychological Realism
- Sherwood Anderson (1876–1941)

¶ Influence

- Mentor to Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald
- Pioneer of local color + psychological depth
- Inspired short story cycles, epiphanic style
- Winesburg = microcosm of early 20th-century America

Winesburg, Ohio (1919)

Feature	Description	
Structure	25 interconnected stories ("story cycle"); anchored by George Willard	
Focus	Emotional isolation, failure of communication, inner distortion = the Grotesque	
	Poetic realism, naïve simplicity, deep psychological insight	
George Willard	Coming-of-age arc; emotional catalyst; Anderson's alter ego	
√ Grotesques	Ordinary people twisted by repressed desire and inarticulateness; "sweetness of a twisted apple"	
Literary Technique	Epiphany-driven, draws from Joyce's <i>Dubliners</i> ; mix of Gothic + lyrical prose	

III. The New Criticism (1940s+)

Overview

• US literary movement → text-focused analysis

- Rejected historical/authorial context: "work for work's sake"
- Focused on structure, unity, ambiguity, form/content synthesis

Key Thinkers

Name	Contribution
I.A. Richards	Structure over subject; reading without external context
T.S. Eliot	Advocated "objective correlative"
William Empson	Seven Types of Ambiguity (1938)
Cleanth Brooks + Robert Penn Warren	Understanding Poetry (1938)

- Too abstract for novels, history-heavy texts
- Treats literature as science → undervalues subjective and emotional power
- Still widely taught in classroom for close reading technique

Review Prompts

- 1. What does the West symbolize in American literary history? Compare Cather and Steinbeck.
- 2. How does Sherwood Anderson shape modern American storytelling?
- 3. What are the main ideas of New Criticism? How is it useful—and limited?

Week 11 American Drama

🙌 Eugene O'Neill (1888–1953) — The Father of American Tragedy

Historical Context & Significance

- First great American playwright with international stature.
- Won 4 Pulitzer Prizes (e.g. Beyond the Horizon 1920, Anna Christie 1922).
- Awarded Nobel Prize for Literature in 1936.
- Influenced by Greek tragedy, Ibsen, Freud, and modernist techniques.
- His work began in the 1910s, a cornerstone moment for American drama.

Thematic Focus

- The "saving illusion": characters survive through self-deception.
- Tragic view of life: a mix of realism, psychological depth, and symbolism.
- Constant obsession: the search for meaning in a godless, indifferent universe.
- Family trauma and personal guilt often drawn from his own life.

Key Techniques

- Stream of consciousness on stage.
- Realistic detail + mythic structure (ordinary life with tragic dignity).
- Frequent use of fog, darkness, or silence to symbolize isolation and confusion.
- Long monologues reflecting inner torment.

Representative Works

1. The Iceman Cometh (1946)

- Set in a bar full of alcoholics clinging to "pipe dreams."
- Theme: self-delusion is the only thing that keeps people alive.
- o Genre: Tragicomedy.
- Legacy: Influenced absurdist theatre.

2. Long Day's Journey Into Night (written 1941, published 1956)

- Autobiographical masterpiece.
- o A single day in the Tyrone family: morphine-addicted mother, alcoholic father and sons.
- The **fog** = emotional isolation and denial.
- No catharsis: ends in darkness, not clarity.
- o O'Neill shows mediocre, ordinary, even pathetic people as tragic.

3. Mourning Becomes Electra (1931)

- Modern rewrite of Aeschylus's Oresteia.
- Transposes the myth of revenge, incest, and guilt into post-Civil War New England.

4. Desire Under the Elms (1924)

- Rewrites Euripides' Hippolytus.
- Themes of repressed sexuality, family conflict, and ownership of land.

Key Ideas to Remember

- O'Neill introduced modernism and tragic grandeur to American theater.
- He dramatized the everyday man's suffering as epic.
- His characters rarely achieve redemption; instead, they drift in fogs of their own making.
- He opened the stage to psychological pain, family trauma, and existential dread.

Based on the document, here is a **concise yet complete summary** of:

WEEK 12–13: American Literature After 1945

Historical Background

- Post-1945 America = global superpower + Cold War + Civil Rights Movement + Vietnam War + consumer culture + counterculture.
- Literature reflects disillusionment, rebellion, absurdity, alienation, and later, pluralism and identity
 politics.

Major Post-1945 Literary Trends

1. Postwar Realism & Psychological Exploration

• Realist depictions of everyday life + deep introspection.

➤ Saul Bellow (1915-2005)

- The Adventures of Augie March (1953): "great American novel" vibe
- Jewish-American; blends intellectualism with street smarts.
- Themes: alienation, personal freedom, intellectual survival.

➤ Bernard Malamud

- The Assistant, The Fixer.
- · Focus on ethical dilemmas, Jewish suffering, and redemptive suffering.

2. The Beat Generation (1950s)

- Anti-materialism, spontaneity, Zen Buddhism, drug culture.
- Rejected conformity and celebrated spiritual liberation.

➤ Jack Kerouac

• On the Road: cross-country journey, jazz rhythm prose.

➤ Allen Ginsberg

• Howl: revolutionary poem, obscenity trial, homosexual identity, madness, Whitman influence.

3. Postmodernism (1960s-)

• Self-reflexive, ironic, fragmented narratives. Blurs high/low culture.

➤ Thomas Pynchon

• Gravity's Rainbow: paranoia, entropy, systems theory.

➤ Don DeLillo

• White Noise: media saturation, fear of death, consumerism.

> John Barth / John Hawkes / William Gaddis

• Metafiction, unreliable narrators, "literature about literature."

4. Confessional Poetry

2025-06-02 美国文学史.md

· Personal trauma, taboo topics, mental illness, sexuality.

➤ Sylvia Plath

- Ariel, The Bell Jar (semi-autobiographical).
- Struggles with depression, womanhood, selfhood.

> Anne Sexton

• Explored therapy, suicide, motherhood, and desire.

5. Feminist Literature

• Challenges patriarchy, gender roles, motherhood, sexual freedom.

> Toni Morrison

- The Bluest Eye, Beloved: black female experience, trauma, memory, haunting past.
- Nobel Laureate. Lyrical and mythic.

➤ Margaret Atwood (Canada-US crossover)

The Handmaid's Tale: dystopian critique of patriarchy and theocracy.

WEEK 14: Diversity in American Literature

African American Literature

> Richard Wright

• Native Son: systemic racism, psychological oppression.

> Ralph Ellison

• *Invisible Man*: existential invisibility, identity crisis.

➤ James Baldwin

- Go Tell It on the Mountain, The Fire Next Time.
- Homosexuality, Black identity, Christianity, racial injustice.

➤ Maya Angelou

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings: trauma, resilience, Black womanhood.

➤ Alice Walker

• The Color Purple: epistolary novel about abuse, lesbian love, and liberation.

Native American Literature

➤ N. Scott Momaday

• House Made of Dawn: Pulitzer-winning novel, spiritual alienation, oral tradition.

➤ Leslie Marmon Silko

• Ceremony: WWII veteran's return, Pueblo myths, healing rituals.

➤ Sherman Alexie

- The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven.
- Humor + heartbreak on the reservation.

Chinese American Literature

➤ Maxine Hong Kingston

• The Woman Warrior: blend of memoir and myth; voice of Chinese American girlhood.

➤ Amy Tan

• The Joy Luck Club: mother-daughter relations, immigrant tensions, transgenerational trauma.

Common Themes Across Diverse Writers

- Identity & Voice: Who am I? Who speaks for me?
- Cultural memory: Family, history, trauma.
- Hybridity: Between languages, traditions, nations.
- Alienation and Empowerment: Marginalization vs reclaiming agency.