Tema 3: Writer of the revolutionary period and the early years of the Republic (1776-1820)

*The revolutionary period (1776-1783):*

* Age of reason.
* Age of reason in North America.
* Writers of the revolutionary period: essays, letter, poetry… they wanted to transmit the ideals of independence. It was necessary to create a literary tradition. Writers wanted to be professional writers and be paid.

*Literature of the early years of the New Nation:*

* Intellectual atmosphere. They were trying to create an American tradition (they were obsessed with this) but imitating the British writers and literature.
* General literary framework.
* The origins of America fiction, they were influenced by the Puritan’s.
* Poetry and early African American literature.

*European enlightenment:*

Reason:

* Rationality tradition
* The natural rights of the individual

Nature:

* Belief in progress through science.
* Separation of powers.

**End of the Puritan period: Age of reason:**

To avoid superstition Emphasis on reason (rationalism).

Religious dogma Scientific approach to reality.

European absolutism monarchies → A new democratic nation

(Aristocratic system). with separation of powers.

Puritan emphasis on Human depravity → Human progress.

and predestination.

Elect visible Saints → Self-made man.

*St. Jean de Crevecoeur: Letters from an American Farmer (1782):*

“What is an American? A new race of men”: An idealization of American and life. Idealizing British colonies. This was written before the independence. We can see how he talks about British individuals, describing the differences with the Americans. So, he suggest that the European is an aristocratic society, a privileged one, with rich people and very poor people and he says that in American we are not going to find rich people and poor people; in the colonies there are not privileges for the people, there are just opportunities for everybody, no privileges. Poor people can improve their lives with these opportunities. The importance of individuals: individualism. Each person work for themselves, as farmers, independent farmers working for their family.

He talks about the different areas: the differences between the people who live in the frontiers (they are hunters, no farmers), the coast and central (farmers).

The Americans believe they have to improve their nation working hard.

*St. Jean de Crevecoeur: Letters from an American Farmer (1782)* *“What is an American? A new race of men”:*

American land of opportunities. Peace, wealth and pride.

Industry, prosperity and tolerance.

Horror of slavery + white planter’s brutality.

Themes:

The nature of American characters:

* The work ethic.
* The responsibility of the individual.
* Anti-intellectualism.
* The farmer as a prototype of the American character.
* The treatment of slaves.
* The view of new immigrants and their ethnicity.

*Benjamin Franklin:*

His father was candle maker. He had 17 brothers. He learned the printer job thanks to his brother.

The first self-made man: autobiographer, essayist, pamphleteer, printer, politician, librarian, publisher, educationalist, natural scientist, inventor, statesman, letter writer, humourist and scientist.

His first famous work was: “Poor Richard’s Almanack”: selfcare publication.

*“Remarks concerning the savages of North-America”.*

*Autobiography (1771-1780).*

“Franklin’s *Autobiography* is one of the capital texts of eighteenth century literature. It served to formulate the notion of the American Dream by portraying the United States as a land of opportunity for anyone who wanted to start a new life and break with the past”.

*Benjamin Franklin: Poor Richard’s Almanack; Autobiography (1771-1780):*

Good order of universe, progress of humanity, science & good sense.

Tema 3: Writer of the revolutionary period and the early years of the Republic (1776-1820)

THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD:

* The Age of Reason.
* The Age of Reason in North America.
* The American Revolution.
* Writing of the Revolutionary Period.

LITERATURE IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE NEW REPUBLIC (AFTER THE END OF THE WAR OF AMRICAN REVOLUTION AND INDEPENDENCE):

* Intellectual atmosphere.
* General Literary Framework.
* The origins of American Fiction.
* Poetry.

EARLY AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE.

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THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD: The Age of Reason:

The European Enlightenment:

* Reason: it had to be applied to everything and every concept. New perspective, the “the reason perspective”. Rationalism.
* Nature: empirical observation/perspective. Nature was observed by a scientific perspective.
* Faith in progress through scientific development.
* The natural rights of the individual. The defence of equality, freedom, and fraternity (Rosseau).
* The separation of powers (Montesquieu, Locke). Base of the Parliamentary systems: justice, legislative power, and executive power.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD: The Age of Reason in North America:

End of the Puritan period. Not because Puritans disappear. There was a new approach to reality, a new approach to the human being that was becoming more prominent than the Puritans. It was at the end of the 17 century and beginning of the 18 centuries, when the arrival this rationalism theory and principles came from Europe. Rationalistic philosophies arrived to the New World at the beginning of the 18 century, and it promoted the foundation of some of the most important colonies in America.

Foundation of important universities: Yale (1701), Princeton (1746). This also promoted the rationalistic philosophies

Foundation of the American Philosophical Society, by Benjamin Franklin in imitation of the English Philosophical Society. The main activities of this society were related to the science and invention.

Secular age:

* Emphasis on human reason (rationalism) and the human mind to avoid superstition (and God’s will).
* Scientific/empirical approach to reality vs. religious dogma.
* Emphasis on the creation of a human community based on the defence of the natural rights, rather than on God’s will.
* Stress on building a new democratic nation (Separation of Powers) in contrast with European absolutist monarchies and aristocratic systems.
* Reliance on the possibility of human progress contrast with the puritan stress on human depravity and predestination.
* The self-made man vs. the Elect/Visible Saints: faith in the social, economic and self-improvement of the individual through hard work, education…
* Individualism: in was possible for an individual to improve, to achieve progress in life.

Religious approach:

* Deism (it was an attempt on connect reason and religion): “the Works of nature in every part of them sufficiently evidence a deity” (John Locke). God manifest himself on people’s works. For Deist, the revelation of God was open to everybody, not only “the chosen/elected people”, like puritans believed. Deism was not widely spread in the United States, it was imported from Europe and just arrived at some intellects like Benjamin Franklin or Thomas Jefferson. Common people believed in this Great Awakening.
* The Great Awakening (despertar): moral exaltation, conversion through passion and arisen emotions (see passage above from Jonathan Edwards’s “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”). Started in the first years of the 19 century, but it kept developing on the 19 century.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD: The American Revolution:

Three causes:

* Economic tension with Great Britain. The British Government dislike the taxes that Americans colonists had to pay, and the colonies were forced to pay. Americans did not want to pay taxes that had been imposed by a government that was so far away and where they did not have representation. No taxation without no representation.
* Philosophical framework: The Declaration of Independence. (Rationalism, Enlightenment, The Age of Reason). The defence of the rights of the individual to choose their rules and the separation of Powers.
* A growing national and democratic feeling: “We, the people of the United States of America” = the basis of the American democracy. American that travelled to Europe and brought to some ideas back. Common people were ready to fight, as they wanted all to escape from Europe, searching for a better life, and having the possibility of self improvement.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD: The Literature of the Revolutionary Period:

No literary purpose.

Personal narratives (sometimes written by soldiers). Revolution became present in everyday life, these texts were deeply influenced by the Puritan’s captivity narratives and in this texts soldiers usually described the atrocity, cruelty… of the British prisons.

Travel writing (mainly related to the westward expansion). Even during the Revolutionary period, the United States kept moving to the west.

Political documents in defence of the Independence as a nation: essays, pamphlets, letters… even poems, promoting Independence and the ideals of the enlightenment. We can also find some connection with the Roman Republic.

Thomas Paine’s pamphlet “Common sense”. Published in 1776, some moths before the Declaration of Independence. He said that it was of commons sense that some colonials became independent from Britain, because of the abuses committed.

Thomas Jefferson’s “Declaration of Independence”. It was revised by a committee composed by 5 men, then was passed by congress in July to 1776. There were some changes, but it was from him. Defence of the natural rights of the individual: liberty, equality, and happiness. He uses the bases of the Enlightenment. He accused the King of Britain because of several abuses and because violating the separation of powers in the colonies.

LITERATURE IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE NEW REPUBLIC: Intellectual atmosphere:

Political and economic independence.

Search for a cultural tradition:

* The NEW world. Two interrelated attitudes:
* American youthfulness, vitalism, honesty, innocence vs. European decadence, artificiality and sophistication.
* American newness causing a feeling of uncertainly: need to build a national history, a national glorious past. Inspiration from:
* The Bible.
* Classic myths.
* Greek and Romans heroes.
* Period of discovery and exploration: rereading of history in legendary terms: Joel Barlow “The Columbiad” (1807) and “The vision of Columbus” (1787): recreation the history of discovering and exploration of North American in legendary terms.
* Messianic character of the new nation.

LITERATURE IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE NEW REPUBLIC: General Literary Framework:

Need of a literary tradition.

Obstacles:

* Practical life.
* Preference for the British masters, British writers. English writers were more popular.
* Absence of a copyright law. Printers could reprint the works of British writers without paying the copyright, but if they wanted to print the works of American writers, most of the times they had to pay them.

Two perspectives:

* Conservative position: US art and literature condemned to mediocrity (in contrast with European artistic greatness).
* Literary nationalists: the Connecticut or Hartford Wits, that were groups of intellectuals who:
* Were Yale University students (1760s – 1770s).
* Intent on endowing the USA with an International literary stand.
* Joel Barlow: “The Hasty Pudding” (1796): where he compares with a metaphor of the pudding the American vitality vs. European decadence.

LITERATURE IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE NEW REPUBLIC: The Origins of American Fiction:

Obstacles in the development of American fiction:

-Emphasis on practical life.

-Absence of a copyright law.

-Puritanism:

* Fiction = lie. Fiction could cause unhealthy emotions in people.
* Two conventions:
* Stress on the “reality” of the story.
* Disguising “unhealthy emotions” as moral warnings.

-Early American fiction. They tried to adequate themselves to the Puritans by 2 means: -The tendency to underlie the reality of the story by means of relating the story with some well-known fact or saying that the story was a manuscript that was found somewhere. -The tendency to disguise the possible unhealthy emotions of fiction as moral warnings.

* Imitative of the British novels: sentimental, gothic, picaresque, epistolary and adventure novels:
* Sentimental fiction:
* Influence of Richardson’s “Pamela” (1st published in America by Franklin in 1744, before the revolution).
* Conventions of British sentimental fiction:
* Sensational story but with a claim to reality.
* Didactic, moral purpose, moral warning.
* Sentimental tone.
* Middle-class setting.
* Topics related mainly to women’s experiences. So political topics were not common.
* Heroine suffering hardships as a consequence of a moral transgression. This moral transgression was the principal plot → a beautiful woman that is seduced and then, abandoned to suffer the consequences of her fault, being to late for her and dying at the end.
* Rural vs. urban. The woman is from the rural and is seduced by the city.
* Examples of early American sentimental fiction:
* William Hill Brown, “The power of Sympathy” (1789). Based on a true story: the corpse a women was founded, epistolary novel where we can find the contrast between the countryside and the city.
* Susanna Haswell Rowson, “Charlotte Temple” (Charlotte was born and raised in the England countryside but she dies in poverty in the streets of New York), “A Tale of Truth” (1791).
* Hannah Walker Foster, “The Coquette” (1797): epistolary novel.

This are examples of the early sentimental fiction, but it kept developing during the 19 century. Mostly read by women.

* Adventure and Picaresque Novels (most of the times they followed the model of English witers as Daniel Defoe, Lawrence…):
* Hugh Henry Brachenridge, “Modern Chivalry” (1792 - 1815).
* Royall Tyler, “The Algerine Captive” (1797).
* Gilbert Imlay, “The Emigrants” (1793).
* Gothic fiction, specially related to the development of the Romantic movement:
* Mystery and terror.
* Medieval ruins, castles, dilapidated mansions with secret passageways.
* Wicked villains, long-lost heirs, characters of mysterious origins.
* Supernatural events and terror, but with a rational explanation.
* Charles Brockden Brown:
* Incidents related to the American contexts.
* Criticism of rationalism and the Enlightenment.
* “Wieland” (1789), “Arthur Mervyn” (1800), “Ormon”, “Edgar Huntly” (1801).

LITERATURE IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE NEW REPUBLIC: Poetry:

Imitative poems.

Subordinated to the political and historical context:

* Expression of the values of the new republic.
* American values vs. British values.
* Invoking a new culture but resorting to the British forms.
* Prospect poems: a muse usually tells the poet that the American search happiness will be rewarded. Normally, at the end of this poems a new republic and peace are achieved. Other prospect poems that show an apocalyptic vision of the future, the problems that the republic will need to face.
* The Connecticut Wits: Timothy Dwight, John Trumbull, Joel Barlow… Normally they have a public carrer.
* Philip Freneau: “The Wild Honeysuckle”, “The Indian Burying Ground”(ideals of the new Republic, he was a prisoner on one of the British prisons).

EARLY AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE.

Slavery in the British colonies since 1619, “The Jesus” was a boat of slaves that arrived to Virginia. There was slavery in all the colonies of North America. Black slaves were taken from Africa to America in terrible conditions and this journey was called “The Middle passage”, and many people died because of several diseases. When they arrived to America they were sold and sent to live to different places that they knew nothing about them.

These African people tried to transmit the African heritage to the next generations that were born in America. At first they were transmitted in an oral way: songs, tales, folklore… but after it was combined with adaptations of the European culture, especially the Bible.

Revolution: slavery = source of controversy. Some intellectuals suggested that African American African slaves were not completely human, they did not have the same moral and intellectual skill as white people, so for them they were between animals and human beings. They needed the protections of their White masters.

The northern states abolish the slavery (more or less) at the time that they became independent, but slavery was not abolished in the South because there was more necessary for economic reasons.

Slave narratives: autobiographical + cruelty of slavery (written by slaves, they became to be written and published in the 18 century). Olaudah Equiano: “The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano”; “Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself” (written in the 18 century in the colonial period). It tells the story of a slave that can get his freedom.

Poetry: Philis Wheatley.