

Literary Analysis

L2 S2



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Objectives

The three chapters of this course introduce three periods of American literature to L2 students of English. They define, discuss, identify, and clarify the characteristics of Colonial, Revolutionary, and Romantic texts. They also enable students to obtain necessary knowledge about the budding and development of American literature, and assure a better understanding through linking the chosen sample-texts with their socio-political and cultural contexts. More specifically, the lectures mainly aim to:

- Introduce American literature to L2 students of English.
- Identify the characteristics of colonial literature, the literature of revolution, and romantic literature.
- Differentiate between the characteristics of colonial literature and the literature of revolution
- Associate different authors with colonial, revolutionary, and romantic discourses
- Define the difference between American romanticism and British romanticism
- Explain the reasons behind the creation of each studied text
- Apply the principles of literary criticism into excerpts chosen from the studied texts
- Analyze a literary text by examining its type and context.
- Evaluate texts related to John Smith, Thomas Paine, and Washington Irving.

Introduction



Lecture Mind Map

Pre-requisites:

In order to better understand the three chapters in this lecture, students should be *familiar* with:

- A background knowledge of the *American War of Independence*.
- The principles of European *Enlightenment*.
- A basic knowledge of *literary analysis*.

I American Romanticism

1. Exercice : pre-test

[solution n°1 p.9]

Based on your knowledge of European Romanticism, what do you think are its main characteristics that American Romanticism would copy?

- immense importance to nature and individualism
- celebration of strong rulers and absolute power of the king

2. Introduction

What is American Romanticism?

- The Romantic Period in the history of American literature stretches from the end of the 18th century to the outbreak of the CW*, which started with the publication of **Washington Irving's** "The Sketch Book" and ended with **Whitman's** "Leaves of Grass".
- In this period, a new emphasis was placed upon the **imaginative and emotional** qualities of literature, a liking for the **picturesque**, the **exotic**, the **sensuous**, the **sensational**, the **supernatural** and **remote past** was fostered, and an increasing attention to the **psychic states** of their characters was paid, and above all, the **individual** and the **common man** was exalted.
- Dr. F. H. Hedge, an American transcendentalist, thought the essence of romanticism was **aspiration**, having its origin in wonder and mystery.
- Among the aspects of the "romantic" movement in England may be listed as
 - sensibility
 - primitivism
 - love of nature
 - sympathetic interest in the past, especially the medieval mysticism
 - individualism.

[cf. American Romantic Literature]

3. Exercice

[solution n°2 p.9]

How can you define Romantic literature in America? and what are its main characteristics?

4. Washington Irving

4.1. Who was Washington Irving?

Irving was born April 3, 1783, New York, New York, U.S.—died November 28, 1859, Tarrytown, New York), writer called the “first American man of letters.” He is best known for the short stories “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.”

He wrote a series of whimsically satirical essays over the signature of Jonathan Oldstyle, Gent., published in Peter Irving's newspaper, the Morning Chronicle, in 1802–03. He made several trips up the Hudson, another into Canada for his health, and took an extended tour of Europe in 1804–06.



Washington Irving

4.2. Irving's Major Works

4.2.1. The History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty, by Diedrich Knickerbocker

His *The History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*, by Diedrich Knickerbocker by Diedrich Knickerbocker (1809) was a **comic** history of the Dutch regime in New York, prefaced by a **mock**-pedantic account of the world from creation onward.

4.2.2. The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent (1819–20)

The *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent* (1819–20), is a collection of stories and essays that mix **satire** and **whimsicality** with **fact and fiction**. Most of the book's 30-odd pieces concern Irving's impressions of England, but six chapters deal with American subjects. Of these, the tales "***The Legend of Sleepy Hollow***" and "***Rip Van Winkle***" have been called **the first American short stories**. They are both Americanized versions of German folktales. The main character of "Rip Van Winkle" is a henpecked husband who sleeps for 20 years and awakes as an old man to find his wife dead, his daughter happily married, and America now an independent country. The tremendous success of *The Sketch Book* in both England and the United States assured Irving that he could live by his pen. In 1822 he produced *Bracebridge Hall*, a sequel to *The Sketch Book*. He traveled in Germany, Austria, France, Spain, the British Isles, and later in his own country.

Fundamental

The major themes of the story have to do with the status of ***America as a free nation***. Before he fell asleep America was a colony under the control of the ***tyrannical rule of Great Britain***. The period of his sleep was the period of the ***revolution*** and during the post-revolution period he went back to his country and his people to find his wife dead (who could be read as a symbol of the British control) and talks of freedom and democracy which were new to him. The descriptions of nature reveal the ideals of escapism and isolation which are favoured by the romantic authors. Rip found happiness and peace in nature, he felt safe from the clamours of his wife and could explore the beauty of the supernatural when he met the little elves. The Hudson river is also a reference to legend and to the past, when it's referred to as "majestic" and "silent", qualities of the great leader Henry Hudson.

[cf. pdf]

Exercices solution

> **Solution n° 1**

Exercice p. 5

Based on your knowledge of European Romanticism, what do you think are its main characteristics that American Romanticism would copy?

- immense importance to nature and individualism
- celebration of strong rulers and absolute power of the king

Answer 1 is the correct one. Romanticism is a literary and intellectual wave that gave all importance to the individual and considered nature as the one strong source of all good. It is a literary wave that put the good of individuals and their rights at the top of all rights. As a new budding nation, America adopted many characteristics of British Romanticism as a tool to empower individuals' freedom and the freedom of all America as a growing nation.

Check the lecture of L2 ASCC entitled "American War of Independence" in case of failure to answer the question. Focus mostly on the part that tackles "reasons behind the American revolution".

> **Solution n° 2**

Exercice p. 5

How can you define Romantic literature in America? and what are its main characteristics?

Romanticism in American literature is a literary movement that took place in America between 1800s to 1865. It is a movement during which authors shifted their focus from politics to emotions, imagination, and nature, paying more attention to human feelings and the individual psychology.

Abbreviation

C V: Civil War

Resource credits

Washington Irving p. 7
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