

THE THREE R's

RELIGION

REASON

&

ROMANCE

Interesting title

The Literature of America's First Three Centuries

By

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So far ^{SLAVE} America has a total of five major literary periods. The first three were important for they were the first steps that lead to the present-day style of ^{AMERICAN} literature. At first American literature was devoted exclusively to God and other religious subjects. This period was called the Puritan Age. It was popular in the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century a change from God to man occurred. During these years there was the belief in human reason and natural order. This second age was called the Neo-Classical Age. Then as the nineteenth century arrived romantic and individualistic feelings filled the minds of American writers. This, the last literary period to be discussed, was called the Romantic Movement. CLARIFY

Before one looks at the literature of each period, it is helpful to know what popular theories and beliefs were practiced by the people of each period. First of all, the Puritans had three major guidelines or watchwords that they followed. They were sobriety (awareness), justice (lawfulness), and piety (deep religious belief).

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The major theory that the Puritans believed in was the Doctrine of Theology. It can be divided into four parts: Total Depravity - Adam is a sinner for eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge; therefore, everyone is a sinner, because he is a child of Adam. Limited Atonement - God selects a few good people, the elect, and has their souls saved. Irresistible Grace - it is predetermined whether someone goes to heaven or to hell. Predestination - the belief that anything anyone did was predetermined. The fourth part, Predestination made life boring for the Puritans since they felt they had no control over their lives.

The Puritans claimed the right of the individual to read and interpret the Bible for himself. Yet in the fundamentals of their faith they usually found themselves in large agreement with the teachings of John Calvin. The five points of Calvinism may be stated as follows: First, God elects individuals to be saved. Second, He designs complete redemption only for those elect. Third, fallen man is incapable of true faith and repentance.

EXPLAIN
interpret
of
this
theory!

good
point.

(3)

Fourth, God's grace is sufficient for the salvation of the elect. Fifth, a soul once regenerated is never ultimately lost.¹ The Puritans agreed with Calvin mainly because his teachings seemed confirmed by the Bible.

Match tense subject

Arminianism and Antinomianism are two theories that were heresies of Calvinism and the Doctrine Theology. Arminianism contradicted Irresistible Grace and Predestination by saying that what one did in life affected the world around him and decided whether he went to heaven or hell; Antinomianism contradicted the beliefs of the Puritans, because Antinomianism stated that one may see God while alive on earth (have a revelation). The Puritans believed that ~~no~~ one must only see God after he is dead.

Clarify your wording

Keep paper past tense

As might be expected, the literature of seventeenth century expressed the earlier described Puritan beliefs; They were God centered.

Since it was necessary to get children started in the "right direction", The Puritans published The New England Primer. This school book of early America engraved Puritan ideals on the American mind. The book taught children to read in order to understand the Bible.

god

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An excerpt from the Primer was used to teach the children the alphabet by using religious poems.²

A - In Adam's fall
We sinned all.

Y - Youth forward slips
Death soonest nips.

explain restriction
Dec!

America's first best-seller was The Bay Psalm Book. It translated the whole book of psalms into a form that could be sung in Puritan church services. Written by three Puritan ministers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, it was considered unpopular by many, because of its awkwardness.

QUOTATIONS
HERE

~~ALIX~~ The most popular style of literature of the Puritans was the sermon.

There were poems, but there were few for the Puritans were not very educated. Most of their literature was hard to understand.

For these reasons Anne Bradstreet's simplicity and force that was rarely found in her contemporaries made her the first notable poet in American Literature.

wording

In her poem The Flesh and the Spirit,

There is a discussion between whether earthly

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Why was she considered outlandish?

pleasures are better (Flesh) or cultivating the intelligence is better (Spirit). The Flesh and the Spirit each gave their reasons as to which is more important.

Abstract
Michael Wigglesworth is another simpatetic author and is most famous for his epic poem The Day of Doom. The criteria for most Puritan epic poems are that they contain a journey, a battle or confrontation, a protagonist and/or antagonist, and the supernatural. In this poem Wigglesworth said that there will be a Day of Doom ~~ix~~ in which God will make an appearance on earth. He will make a final judgement on all people, dead or alive, and either send them to heaven or to hell giving salvation to the good and punishment to the bad. In stanza seventeen God summons the dead.³

Before His throne a trumpet is blown,
proclaiming th' Day of Doom;
Forthwith He cries, "Ye dead arise,
and unto judgement come."
No sooner said; but 'tis obeyed;
sepulchres opened are:
Dead bodies all rise at His call,
and's mighty power declare.

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From the poem one can tell that Michael Wigglesworth was a believer in Arminianism, because in the poem God made his judgement based upon the person's deeds in life. One will recall that the Arminians felt that one determines his own destiny by his actions on earth.

god

explain more about the poem.

With the decline of Puritanism Jonathan Edwards delivered his most moving sermon in a desperate attempt to keep people involved in Puritanism. He called it Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. Edwards used fear as the method in his attempt to save the dying religion. In the beginning of his sermon he utilizes the following quotation from the Bible: "Their foot shall slide in due time." This means that one could slide down into hell at any moment. It is "the mere pleasure of God that keeps wicked men at any moment out of hell."⁵ Edwards was determined to

god

keep Puritanism alive. Unfortunately for him it was a futile effort because people were getting less superstitious. It was this lack of fear and belief that caused the Puritan religion to fall, and it was the latter that made all types of literature pertaining

to the subject unpopular. A quotation by Edwards can "sum up" the Puritan Era quite well: "Man should not glory in himself but alone in God."

At the start of the Neo-Classic Age ~~of the eighteenth century~~ people's ideas changed drastically. They decided that man, not God, was really the center of all things. Alexander Pope could have guided one into the changing times with this heroic couplet:

No, then thyself, presume not God to scan,
The proper study of mankind is man.

Explain why transition occurred

In this new age there were no more superstitions because they believed that there was a logical explanation for everything. The motto of this century was to seek that which ^{is} ~~is~~ ^{was} natural, reasonable, and in harmony with science and God.

The Neo-Classicists derived a natural religion called Deism. Its doctrines are as follows: First, there is an all-powerful God. Second, man is required to live life virtuously.

Explain universal order.

Third, in a future life the virtuous will be rewarded, the wicked punished. There was also the belief of the "First Cause." It said that God is the first cause of the

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universes' coming about. He starts things and then stands back and watches. One could see that God did not play a very great role in this period, and this absence of God was reflected in the literature.

Formalize this.

The ^{PRINCIPAL} literary style of the eighteenth century changed from sermons to essays. These essays were concise and organized. There was also poetry which was mostly in the form of the heroic couplet. The heroic couplet was a style that was brought back from the classical period of the Greeks and Romans. Hence, the ^{new} period was called Neo-Classical meaning New ^{else} Classics.

why sig.?

why was it used?

In terms of politics the eighteenth century was called the Revolutionary Period. It was in this century that America was fighting for its freedom from England. In an attempt to sway ^{more} American people to revolt, Thomas Paine wrote the famous pamphlet Common Sense. In his pamphlet he tells American people that this is a truly war and God is on their side (This was most ironic for Paine was an atheist). Then he tells the family man that things are not going to get better, and if he doesn't fight, his children

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will look back on him as a coward. Lastly appears to the fears of everyone by stating that if one doesn't get involved, America would lose the war. By losing everyone would be subjected to punishment and everyone casted into slavery.

FRAG.
SENTENCE.

Another pro-revolutionary writer was the philosopher John Locke who is most noted for his Treatise on Civil Government. It stated the rights of man and where the government's place should be in society. Its five major points are as follows: First, the natural state of man is to be free. Second, man gives his power to the government. Third, the government is devised to protect its people. Fourth, if it abuses its power it must be overthrown. Fifth, if it is not overthrown, the laws of freedom will be disturbed. Locke's paper persuaded the American people that it was their duty to keep things in proper natural balance.

Locke
did
not
want
to
be
preserved

The man considered to be the model of the self-made man was Benjamin Franklin. He was a perfect example of the renaissance man of the time. A person of many faces, Franklin used pen names of Richard Saunders and Father Abraham.

In his Autobiography one sees the simple life that such a rich man lived.⁷ Franklin did not believe in wasting time. He felt that one must do something useful with his life whenever time permitted. Under the name of Richard Saunders he published Poor Richards Almanack which contained a swarm of proverbs that entered the American mind and stuck: "A rolling stone gathers no moss," "Honesty is the best policy," "A penny saved is a penny earned."⁸

Franklin was the greatest literary artist of the eighteenth century. He is also famous for being the only American to sign all four documents that created the Republic: the Declaration of Independence, the treaty of alliance with France, the treaty of peace with England and the Constitution.

One can see that the eighteenth century was an extreme change in the opposite direction. ^{which one?}

One drawback of this era was the fact that many people were not educated enough to understand the ideas and the literature of such learned writers.

subject used
important
described
proverbs

(11)

FRANKLIN
FOUGHT
LIKE
EDWARDS TO
PRESERVE AGE.

In the nineteenth century came the Romantic Age. The rise of Romanticism was brought about because America had patriotic nationalism, a democratic society, self-reliance, and a mood of optimism. The Romantic Age was, in a way, a return to the Puritan Age, but this time it was not ^{as} extreme. God made a return, but this time He was found in nature. Romanticists felt that the secret of life lies not in the head but in the heart, so one must trust his heart (the seat of the soul) not his head (the seat of logic). People that believed this were called Transcendentalists. god

Youth was a major topic in this era because young people were felt not to have been as corrupted by society as aged people were. Romanticists believed that at birth one is closest to God and that it was at this time that one had the greatest contact with the Oversoul (a kind of supernatural force or power). This contradicted Locke's theory on innate ideas in which a person either grows up to be good or evil but at birth he is neither. god!

The theories of the Romantic Period were ones that pertained to the styles preferred

in this literary period. Romantic Individualism was a position strongly sided by Ralph Waldo Emerson. He felt that no one should follow another's ideas. He believed in this so highly that he would not allow people to follow his own ideas. Even Jefferson who was from the eighteenth century said something on the subject:

"... Neither believe nor reject anything because other persons... have rejected or believed it,"⁹

Romantic Individualism included that one should be original when he writes a piece of literature. Individualism contrasts greatly from the Neo-Classical imitation of the Greek and Roman styles.

The concept of Imagination was also very important among Romanticists. They felt that they should be a correct way to "dream up" poetic lines. According to Wordsworth this is how it should happen: First, something that the poet sees or experiences stirs an emotion in him. Secondly, this emotion is recollected in the tranquility of meditation, till the actual emotion has become a poetic emotion. Thirdly, this poetic emotion, now grown powerful, spontaneously overflows in expression.¹⁰ It is at this point that the poet writes his poem.

good

CLARIFY

The three topics that attracted the romantic mind were the remote, the strange and the indefinite.

Many Romanticists felt that the essence of literary art was self-expression. The old literary theory that literature should represent an imitation of life was rejected for not exploiting personal and subjective feelings, things crucial to the Romanticists. The Romanticists replaced the eighteenth century theory with one ~~that~~ which ^{said} that literature should be an expression of the poets own feelings. In short, self-expression should reflect the writer himself.

The idea that literary art grows out of experience is Organic Form. According to Edward Young it "may be said to be of a vegetable nature; it grows, it is not made." Coleridge wrote: "The organic form is innate; it shapes, as it develops itself from within, and its fullness is one and the same with perfection of its outward form. Such as the life is, such is the form."¹¹ Romanticists felt that the ideal poem cannot be analyzed; one cannot separate word and thought in such a poem. If one writes with Organic Form, one must not change anything

explain why these attracted.

TRANSMISE Needed

in the poem once it is written, otherwise the words will not have the original meaning. When the words are changed, the meaning obtained at spontaneous overflow is changed.

good point.

A thing that was taken into consideration by Romanticists when they wrote literature was Symbolism. A symbol is not the same as an allegory. An allegory is a fixed, coherent sign such as the cross and the bald eagle, whereas a symbol can stand alone and serve a temporary purpose. Examples of the use of Symbolism can be found in the works of Poe (The Masque of the Red Death), Hawthorne (The Scarlet Letter), Melville (Moby Dick), and others.

give an example.

As an author of the period, Edgar Allan Poe was out of place. A man ahead of his time, Poe felt that form was necessary to keep an atmosphere of excitement around the reader. He also felt that the story should be well planned in advance.

examples
to contrast

If one recalls earlier in this essay, Nature took up a great deal of the topics of the Romantic Age. The three "fanatics" of nature were Ralph Emerson, Henry Thoreau, and Jean Rousseau. In Nature Emerson described nature as being

wonderful, consistent, perpetually youthful in appearance, and perfect. He explained the three ways that he saw as to how to perceive the beauty in nature: First, simply to experience it with the five senses. Second, to experience its spiritual beauty. Third, to contemplate it.

Thoreau took a more primitive side to the subject: First, in order to experience nature one must become part of it. Second, one must be his primitive self. Lastly, one must go back and find his elemental self. If he doesn't go back he will eventually die because he will be ignoring what is wild in nature.

According to Rousseau nature had a personality and can be one's divine or spiritual friend. He said that if one listens to nature it will tell him about beauty. Rousseau also believed that man, by experiencing nature can reawaken his dormant qualities. / CLARIFY

Each of the three literary ages were very different as America searched for the correct theories in both religion and literary art. Through the changes, America

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has acquired a wide variety of ways to express its ideas to the world. Who knows what new changes in America's literature may bring to man's ever-fickle world!

The essay was excellent in places. Your ideas are basically sound + insightful. The weakness in the paper seems to rest in your clarity of expression. You could use a few more quotations toward the end to highlight Romantic tendencies.

Endnotes

Form is
excellent!

1. Norman Foerster, Image of America,
(Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1970),*
p. 9.
2. "The New England Primer," in Anthology of
American Literature, ed. George McMichael, 2nd ed.
(New York: Macmillan, 1980), I,⁺ p. 85.
3. Michael Wigglesworth, "The Day of Doom," in
Anthology, p. 115.
4. Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an
Angry God," in Anthology, p. 236.
5. Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an
Angry God," in Anthology, p. 237.
6. Image, p. 23.

* Hereafter cited as Image

+ Hereafter cited as Anthology

Endnotes

7. Benjamin Franklin, "The Autobiography," in Anthology, pp. 269-379.
8. "Benjamin Franklin," in Anthology, p. 257.
9. Image, p. 63
10. Image, p. 68
11. Image, p. 79