



Unit Two:

American Romanticism

1800-1855



Unit Objectives:

- ▶ Understand and identify elements of literary movements
- ▶ Engage and use academic vocabulary in regards to literary elements
- ▶ Paraphrase main ideas, summarize information, take notes
- ▶ Clarify meaning of archaic vocabulary
 - ▶ Use context clues to determine word meaning



Historical Context

- ▶ The struggle for nationalism, lack of communication, and too many political parties threatened the peace of America.
- ▶ America threatening an internal division between the North and the South
- ▶ Huge need for innovations and improvements (oncoming Industrial Revolution)
- ▶ Abolitionists movement



Historical Context

- ▶ 1793: Eli Whitney develops Cotton Gin
- ▶ 1812-14: The War of 1812 w/ Britain
- ▶ 1828: Noah Webster
 - ▶ and An American Dictionary of the English Language
- ▶ 1832: Samuel Morse Telegraph
- ▶ 1848: Gold Rush



The Literary Philosophies so far...

Classicism (dominant way of thinking)

Age of Faith (focus on religion and self)

Age of Reason (focus on reason, intellect, government)

Romanticism (from homeless to Harvard)

Transcendentalism (focus on the individual)

American Gothic Fiction (Americanized)



Romanticism vs. Classicism

➤ Classicism

- Until the 1800s, if someone was asked *What is the universe like?* The answer would have been "a ladder"
 - Very traditional and conservative
- This was called the "Great Chain of Being"



Romanticism vs. Classicism

- ▶ This classicism hierarchy was also applied to human life,
(King, Nobles, Merchants, Farmers, Vagabonds/Criminals)
- ▶ And to life within the family,
(Husband, wife, children, servants,
- ▶ And to the self.
(Reason, Passion)



Romanticism vs. Classicism

- ▶ It was believed that these hierarchies were placed by God and to disturb them was a sin.
- ▶ This also functioned as the justification for a static, aristocratic society.
 - ▶ Why does this matter? What does this mean?

Romanticism vs. Classicism

- ▶ After 1800, an educated citizen of the world might claim that the universe resembles a Tree, something always growing and changing.

- ▶ Rebelling against the strict Puritanism and Age of Reason...





Romanticism vs. Classicism

- Romantics believe:
 - That everyone could rise as high as his/her potential would allow
 - That one should be free of social expectations imposed on the individual
 - That one should appreciate the beauty, strangeness, and mysteries of the natural world (AMERICA) instead of trying to conquer them.

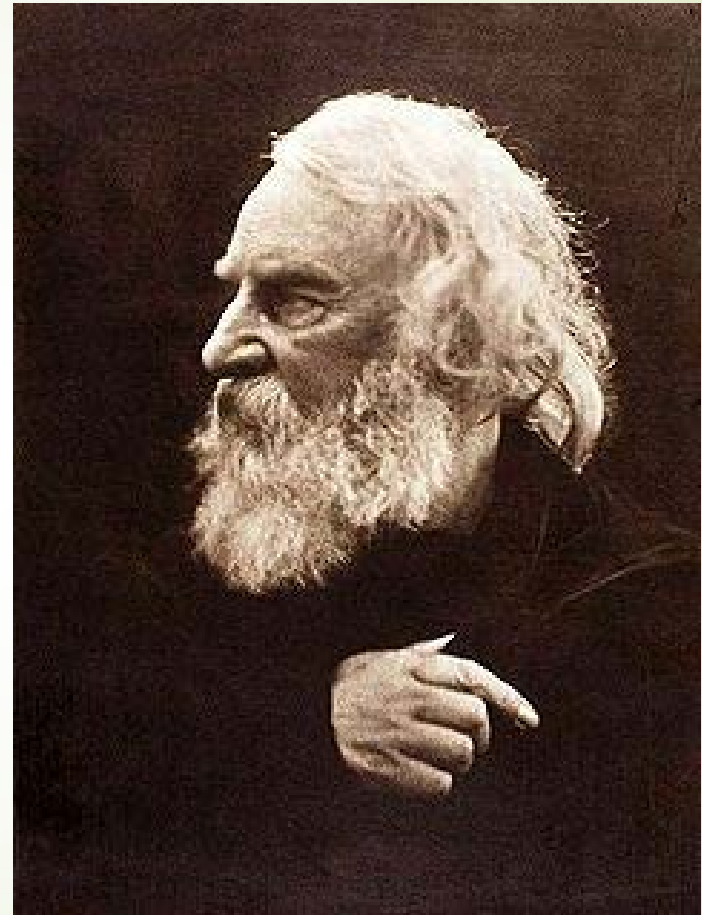
Washington Irving (Romantic)

- ▶ Desired a distinctly American Literature
- ▶ Pioneer of the short story
- ▶ Impressed with the shared histories, beliefs, and tales that many had carried over from their countries.
- ▶ Goal was to mix realistic details with elements of the supernatural



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Romantic)

- ▶ Child prodigy
- ▶ First American writer to be honored in Poets' Corner of London's Westminster Abby
- ▶ Believed nature was the reflection of the human spirit (celebrated nature)



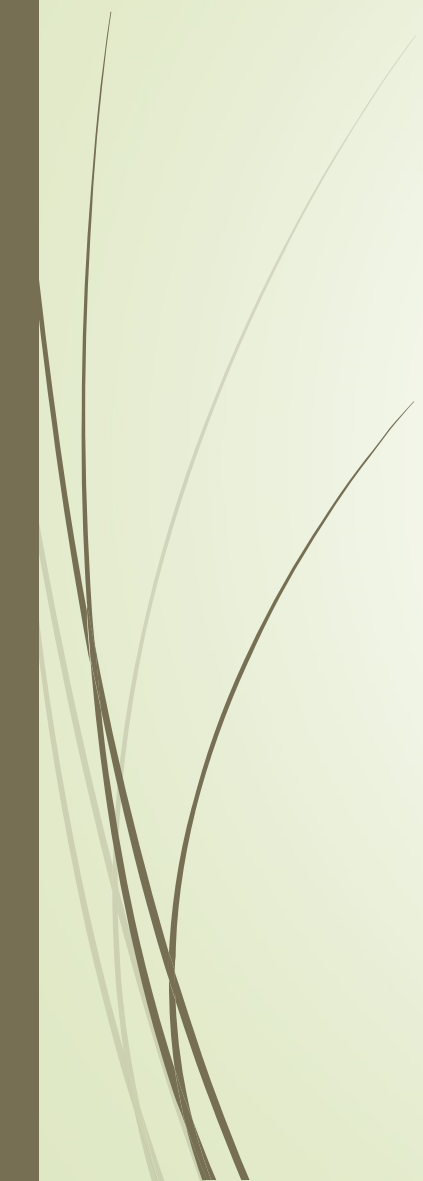


Transcendentalist

- Philosophical movement took place in and around Boston in the 1830s
 - Purely American!
 - Entire base of knowledge is developed based on one's surroundings and experiences
 - Knowledge comes to us from the outside and helps us develop and ability to reason and understand
 - Under this theory, literally, "all men are created equal"

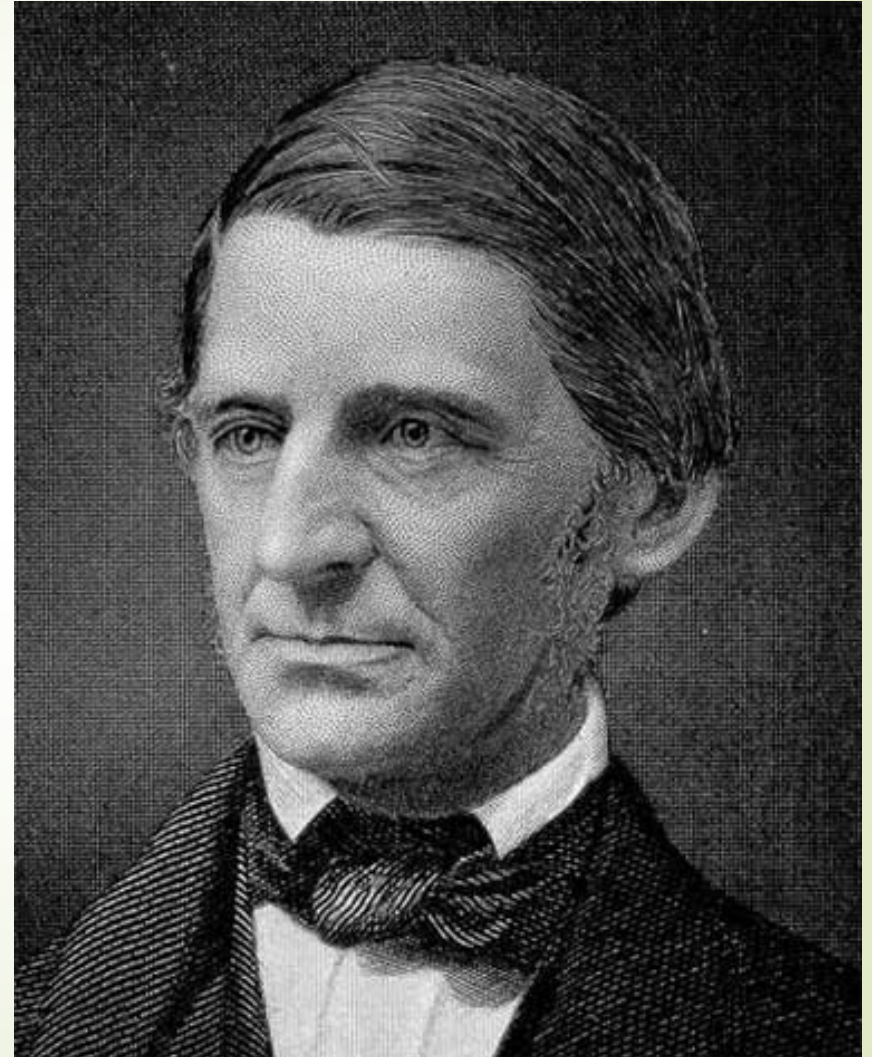


Transcendentalism

- In essence, four main values:
 - Intuition,
 - self-reliance,
 - nature,
 - individualism
- 

Ralph Waldo Emerson (Transcendentalist)

- ▶ 1803 – 1882
- ▶ Philosopher, minister,
▶ scholar
- ▶ famous for Self-Reliance
- ▶ Believes God's spirit
▶ is in all people





Henry David Thoreau (Transcendentalist)

- 1817 – 1862
- Writer; Social Protestor; Tree Hugger
- Put in jail for civil disobedience while protesting the Mexican-American War
- Famous for writing social criticism (Walden Pond), observations of nature, hymns

American Gothic

(AKA "The Brooding Romantics")

- Considered "anti-transcendental"
 - Belief in the human capacity for evil
- Desire to depict humanity's deepest, darkest fears and otherwise unspeakable evils –both real and imagined.
- Still be considered "Romantic" because of their emphasis on the individual, emotion, and nature...

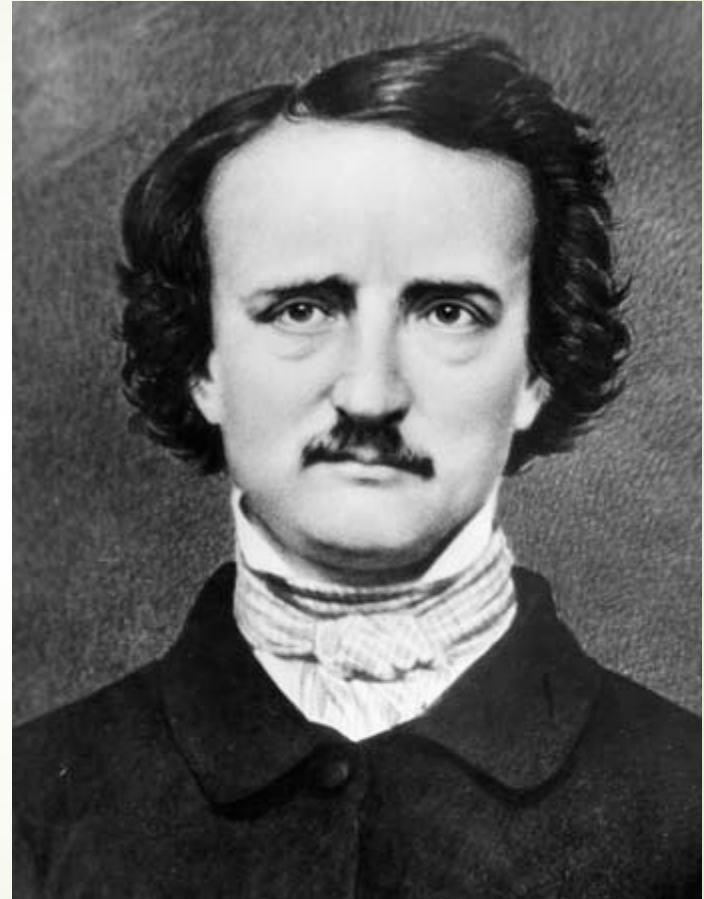


American Gothic

- ▶ Typical elements of American Gothic Fiction:
 - ▶ Settings include old houses or family estates
 - ▶ Reader/main character is looking for secrets lying within a supernatural environment
 - ▶ May involve a ghostly legend and/or unexplainable supernatural events
 - ▶ Damsels in distress are frequent
 - ▶ Omens, foreshadowing, and dreams play a large role in the story
 - ▶ Use highly charged emotions

Edgar Allan Poe

- ▶ Credited with giving the short story and the detective story its form
- ▶ Famous for having his narrators be criminals or insane
- ▶ Plots always involved extreme situations: live burials, mental torture, vengeance from the grave...



Edgar Allan Poe

- A huge, racy myth surrounds the life of Poe that is untrue!
- Biography...
 - Poe was abandoned by his father and when his mother died he lived with a wealthy tobacco family.
 - He attended the Univ. of VA but was kicked out for his gambling debts.
 - Was well known for his periods of emotional instability and bouts of drunkenness.
 - When Poe was 24, his wife died –leading him into a downward emotional spiral.



Nathaniel Hawthorne (Am. Gothic)

- 1804 – 1864
- Always wanted to be a writer
- Grew up and lived isolated and secluded
 - believed that too much focus on the individual was destructive
 - Believed that people could not be left alone and expected to be good



Things to think about:

- Is the price of progress ever too high?
- Is it patriotic to protest one's government?
- Does everyone have a "dark side"?
- Where do people look for the Truth?