

Chapter 1 : American literature - Wikipedia

Read "Americans in British Literature, A Breed Apart" by Christopher Flynn with Rakuten Kobo. American independence was inevitable by , but British writers spent the several decades following the American Revol.

Colonial literature[edit] Because of the large immigration to Boston in the s, the articulation of Puritan ideals, and the early establishment of a college and a printing press in Cambridge , the New England colonies have often been regarded as the center of early American literature. However, the first European settlements in North America had been founded elsewhere many years earlier. During the colonial period, the printing press was active in many areas, from Cambridge and Boston to New York , Philadelphia , and Annapolis. The dominance of the English language was not inevitable. Moreover, we are now aware of the wealth of oral literary traditions already existing on the continent among the numerous different Native American groups. Political events, however, would eventually make English the lingua franca for the colonies at large as well as the literary language of choice. For instance, when the English conquered New Amsterdam in , they renamed it New York and changed the administrative language from Dutch to English. From to , only about separate items were issued from the major printing presses in the American colonies. This is a small number compared to the output of the printers in London at the time. London printers published materials written by New England authors, so the body of American literature was larger than what was published in North America. However, printing was established in the American colonies before it was allowed in most of England. In England, restrictive laws had long confined printing to four locations, where the government could monitor what was published: London, York, Oxford, and Cambridge. Because of this, the colonies ventured into the modern world earlier than their provincial English counterparts. Captain John Smith could be considered the first American author with his works: Topics of early writing[edit] The religious disputes that prompted settlement in America were important topics of early American literature. This work outlined the ideal society that he and the other Separatists would build in an attempt to realize a "Puritan utopia". Other religious writers included Increase Mather and William Bradford , author of the journal published as a History of Plymouth Plantation, "â€” Others like Roger Williams and Nathaniel Ward more fiercely argued state and church separation. Nicholas Noyes was also known for his doggerel verse. John Eliot translated the Bible into the Algonquin language. Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield represented the Great Awakening , a religious revival in the early 18th century that emphasized Calvinism. Less strict and serious writers included Samuel Sewall who wrote a diary revealing the daily life of the late 17th century , [2] and Sarah Kemble Knight. New England was not the only area in the colonies with a literature: The diary of William Byrd and The History of the Dividing Line described the expedition to survey the swamp between Virginia and North Carolina but also comments on the differences between American Indians and the white settlers in the area. At this time American Indian literature also began to flourish. Two key figures were Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine. Major satirists included John Trumbull and Francis Hopkinson. Philip Morin Freneau also wrote poems about the War. During the 18th century, writing shifted from the Puritanism of Winthrop and Bradford to Enlightenment ideas of reason. The belief that human and natural occurrences were messages from God no longer fit with the new human-centered world. Many intellectuals believed that the human mind could comprehend the universe through the laws of physics as described by Isaac Newton. One of these was Cotton Mather. The enormous scientific, economic, social, and philosophical, changes of the 18th century, called the Enlightenment , impacted the authority of clergyman and scripture, making way for democratic principles. The increase in population helped account for the greater diversity of opinion in religious and political life as seen in the literature of this time. In , the population of the colonies numbered approximately , Thirty years later it was more than , By , it reached 1., Even earlier than Franklin was Cadwallader Colden - , whose book The History of the Five Indian Nations, published in was one of the first texts critical of the treatment of the Iroquois in upstate New York by the English. Colden also wrote a book on botany, which attracted the attention of Linnaeus, and he maintained a long term correspondence with Benjamin Franklin. In the post-war period, Thomas Jefferson established his place in American literature through his authorship of the United

States Declaration of Independence , his influence on the United States Constitution , his autobiography, his Notes on the State of Virginia , and his many letters. The Federalist essays by Alexander Hamilton , James Madison , and John Jay presented a significant historical discussion of American government organization and republican values. Fisher Ames , James Otis , and Patrick Henry are also valued for their political writings and orations. Early American literature struggled to find a unique voice in existing literary genre, and this tendency was reflected in novels. European styles were frequently imitated, but critics usually considered the imitations inferior. The First American Novel[edit] In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the first American novels were published. These fictions were too lengthy to be printed as manuscript or public reading. Publishers took a chance on these works in hopes they would become steady sellers and need to be reprinted. This scheme was ultimately successful because male and female literacy rates were increasing at the time. In the next decade important women writers also published novels. Susanna Rowson is best known for her novel, Charlotte: A Tale of Truth, published in London in Charlotte Temple is a seduction tale, written in the third person, which warns against listening to the voice of love and counsels resistance. She also wrote nine novels, six theatrical works, two collections of poetry, six textbooks, and countless songs. Although Rowson was extremely popular in her time and is often acknowledged in accounts of the development of the early American novel, Charlotte Temple is often criticized as a sentimental novel of seduction. Or, the History of Eliza Wharton was published in and was also extremely popular. Eliza is a "coquette" who is courted by two very different men: Unable to choose between them, she finds herself single when both men get married. She eventually yields to the artful libertine and gives birth to an illegitimate stillborn child at an inn. These novels are of the Sentimental genre, characterized by overindulgence in emotion, an invitation to listen to the voice of reason against misleading passions, as well as an optimistic overemphasis on the essential goodness of humanity. Sentimentalism is often thought to be a reaction against the Calvinistic belief in the depravity of human nature. These novels are of the Gothic genre. The first writer to be able to support himself through the income generated by his publications alone was Washington Irving. James Fenimore Cooper was also a notable author best known for his novel, The Last of the Mohicans written in Unique American style[edit] Edgar Allan Poe After the War of , there was an increasing desire to produce a uniquely American literature and culture, and a number of literary figures emerged, among them Washington Irving , William Cullen Bryant , and James Fenimore Cooper. Bryant wrote early romantic and nature-inspired poetry, which evolved away from their European origins.

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British forwards, towards, rightwards, etc. In both dialects distribution varies somewhat: The Oxford English Dictionary in suggested a semantic distinction for adverbs, with -wards having a more definite directional sense than -ward; subsequent authorities such as Fowler have disputed this contention. American English AmE freely adds the suffix -s to day, night, evening, weekend, Monday, etc. I used to stay out evenings; the library is closed Saturdays. This usage has its roots in Old English but many of these constructions are now regarded as American for example, the OED labels nights "now chiefly N. In British English BrE , the agentive -er suffix is commonly attached to football also cricket ; often netball ; occasionally basketball and volleyball. AmE usually uses football player. However, this is derived from slang use of to ball as a verb meaning to play basketball. English writers everywhere occasionally make new compound words from common phrases; for example, health care is now being replaced by healthcare on both sides of the Atlantic. However, AmE has made certain words in this fashion that are still treated as phrases in BrE. Examples include AmE first: Generally AmE has a tendency to drop inflectional suffixes, thus preferring clipped forms: Smith, aged 40; skim milk v. Singular attributives in one country may be plural in the other, and vice versa. For example, the UK has a drugs problem, while the United States has a drug problem although the singular usage is also commonly heard in the UK ; Americans read the sports section of a newspaper; the British are more likely to read the sport section. However, BrE maths is singular, just as AmE math is: Some British English words come from French roots, while American English finds its words from other places, e. AmE eggplant and zucchini are aubergine and courgette in BrE. Similarly, American English has occasionally replaced more traditional English words with their Spanish counterparts. This is especially common in regions historically affected by Spanish settlement such as the American Southwest and Florida as well as other areas that have since experienced strong Hispanic migration such as urban centers. Lists of words having different meanings in American and British English , Glossary of American terms not widely used in the United Kingdom , and Glossary of British terms not widely used in the United States Overview of lexical differences[edit] Note: A lexicon is not made up of different words but different "units of meaning" lexical units or lexical items e. Though the use of a British word would be acceptable in AmE and vice versa , most listeners would recognize the word as coming from the other form of English and treat it much the same as a word borrowed from any other language. Words and phrases that have their origins in BrE[edit] Most speakers of AmE are aware of some BrE terms, although they may not generally use them or may be confused as to whether someone intends the American or British meaning such as for biscuit. It is generally very easy to guess what some words, such as "driving licence", mean. However, use of many other British words such as naff slang but commonly used to mean "not very good" are unheard of in American English. Certain terms that are heard less frequently, especially those likely to be absent or rare in American popular culture, e. Divergence[edit] Words and phrases with different meanings[edit] Words such as bill and biscuit are used regularly in both AmE and BrE but mean different things in each form. As chronicled by Winston Churchill , the opposite meanings of the verb to table created a misunderstanding during a meeting of the Allied forces; [8] in BrE to table an item on an agenda means to open it up for discussion whereas in AmE, it means to remove it from discussion, or at times, to suspend or delay discussion. The word "football" in BrE refers to association football , also known as soccer. In AmE, "football" means American football. The standard AmE term "soccer", a contraction of "association football ", is of British origin, derived from the formalization of different codes of football in the 19th century, and was a fairly unremarkable usage possibly marked for class in BrE until relatively recently; it has lately become perceived incorrectly as an Americanism. Similarly, the word "hockey" in BrE refers to field hockey and in AmE, "hockey" means ice hockey. Other ambiguity complex cases [edit] Words with completely different meanings are relatively few; most of the time there are either 1 words with one or more shared meanings and one or more meanings unique to one variety for example, bathroom and toilet or 2 words the meanings of which are actually common to both BrE and AmE

but that show differences in frequency, connotation or denotation for example, smart, clever, mad. In AmE the word pissed means being annoyed whereas in BrE it is a coarse word for being drunk in both varieties, pissed off means irritated. Similarly, in AmE the word pants is the common word for the BrE trousers and knickers refers to a variety of half-length trousers though most AmE users would use the term "shorts" rather than knickers, while the majority of BrE speakers would understand pants to mean underpants and knickers to mean female underpants. Sometimes the confusion is more subtle. In AmE the word quite used as a qualifier is generally a reinforcement: This divergence of use can lead to misunderstanding. Frequency[edit] In the UK the word whilst is historically acceptable as a conjunction as an alternative to while, especially prevalent in some dialects. In AmE only while is used in both contexts. Whilst tends to appear in non-temporal senses, as when used to point out a contrast. In the UK generally the term fall meaning "autumn" is obsolete. Although found often from Elizabethan literature to Victorian literature, continued understanding of the word is usually ascribed to its continued use in America. Holiday greetings It is increasingly common for Americans to say "Happy holidays", referring to all, or at least multiple, winter holidays Christmas, Hanukkah, Winter solstice, Kwanzaa, etc. In Britain, the phrases "holiday season" and "holiday period" refer to the period in the summer when most people take time off from work, and travel; AmE does not use holiday in this sense, instead using vacation for recreational excursions. Some Americans use "I could care less" to mean the same thing. This variant is frequently derided as sloppy, as the literal meaning of the words is that the speaker does care to some extent. However, in answering a question such as "Tea or coffee? Either sounds odd to the other. Equivalent idioms[edit] A number of English idioms that have essentially the same meaning show lexical differences between the British and the American version; for instance: British English not touch something with a bargepole not touch something with a ten-foot pole sweep under the carpet.

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