

## MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND THEMES OF COLONIAL PERIOD IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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**Abstract:** The main purpose of writing this article is giving information about colonial period in American literature, its characteristics, main themes and its significant impacts on the development and evolution of literary traditions in the United States.

**Key words:** colonial period, redemption, salvation, divine providence, sermons, poetry, prose, drama.

**Аннотация:** Основная цель написания этой статьи — предоставить информацию о колониальном периоде в американской литературе, его характеристиках, основных темах и существенном влиянии на развитие и эволюцию литературных традиций в Соединенных Штатах.

**Ключевые слова:** колониальный период, искупление, спасение, божественное провидение, проповеди, поэзия, проза, драматургия.

**Izoh:** Ushbu maqolani yozishdan asosiy maqsad Amerika adabiyotidagi mustamlakachilik davri, uning xususiyatlari, asosiy mavzulari va uning Qo'shma Shtatlardagi adabiy an'analarning rivojlanishi va evolyutsiyasiga sezilarli ta'siri haqida ma'lumot berishdir.

**Kalit so'zlar:** mustamlaka davri, qutqarilish, najot, ilohiy inoyat, va'zlar, she'riyat, nasr, drama.

The colonial period in America began with the arrival of European English settlers who established themselves in what is now the USA, leading to the dominance of British colonists in literature. The 1600s witnessed the emergence of American Literature through practical and straightforward non-fiction works. The Revolutionary War marked the end of the Colonial Period and heralded a new era for American Literature, shifting towards a focus on a distinct American identity. While initially influenced by British writings, American Literature gradually started to explore its unique character, with significant growth and emphasis on portraying the essence and potential of America seen in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Colonial period in American Literature refers to the time period from the early 1600s to the late 1700s, when European colonizers began settling in North America. During this time, literature in the colonies was primarily focused on religious and historical themes, as well as exploration and settlement narratives. Many of the early settlers in America were Puritans seeking religious freedom. Their beliefs and values heavily influenced the literature of the time with a focus on morality, faith and the idea of a "city upon a hill". Religion played a central role in the Colonial period as the early settlers were deeply influenced by their religious beliefs and values. The dominant religious group among the early settlers in America were the Puritans who sought to establish a society based on strict moral and religious principles. Puritan beliefs such as predestination and the idea of a covenant with God, shaped the themes and content of much of the literature from this period.

Many works of literature from the Colonial period focused on religious themes such as sin, redemption, salvation and divine providence. Writers often used religious allegory and symbolism to convey moral lessons and explore spiritual truths. Several famous writers and poets have offered their perspectives on the Colonial period in American literature reflecting on the historical context, themes and styles of the literature produced during that time. For example, Nathaniel Hawthorne, a prominent American novelist known for works such as “The Scarlet Letter” and “The House of the Seven Gables” commented on the Puritan influence in Colonial literature, stating: “the Puritans compressed whatever mirth and public joy they deemed allowable to human infirmity. Thereby, so far dispelling the customary cloud that for the space of a single holiday, they appeared scarcely graver than most other communities at a period of general affliction”.<sup>1</sup>

This period was marked by several key characteristics that reflected the historical, social and cultural context of the time. Here are some of the defining features of literature from this period:

- Religious influence: as mentioned earlier, religion played a central role in Colonial American Literature with Puritanism being the dominant religious tradition. Writers often explored religious themes, moral dilemmas and spiritual struggles in their works, reflecting the deeply held beliefs of the early settlers.
- Historical accounts: much of the literature from the Colonial period consisted of historical accounts, travel narratives, and exploration journals that documented the experiences of early settlers in the New World. These works often focused on describing the natural landscape, encounters with Native Americans, and the challenges of establishing colonies in a new and unfamiliar environment.
- Captivity Narratives: Captivity narratives were a popular genre during the Colonial period, recounting the experiences of colonists who were captured by Native American tribes or other groups. These narratives often highlighted themes of survival, cultural clash, and the struggle between different belief systems.

The literature of the Colonial period in America reflected the religious, historical, and cultural influences of the time, providing insight into the beliefs, values, and experiences of early settlers in the New World.

Some main themes of colonial literature include:

1. Exploration and discovery: Colonial literature often explores themes of exploration, discovery, and encounters with new lands, peoples, and cultures.
2. Colonization and empire: Many colonial works address themes of colonization, empire-building, and the impact of European powers on indigenous populations and lands.
3. Power dynamics and oppression: Colonial literature frequently examines power dynamics between colonizers and colonized peoples, as well as themes of oppression, exploitation, and resistance.
4. Cultural clash and hybridity: Colonial literature often explores themes of cultural clash, hybridity, and the blending of different cultures, languages, and traditions in colonial contexts.
5. Representation and Othering: Colonial literature often reflects the ways in which colonized peoples are represented, stereotyped, and "othered" by European colonizers, as well as the ways in which indigenous peoples resist or subvert these representations.

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<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne. “The Scarlet Letter”, Reed & Fields in Boston, Massachusetts, 1850

6. Identity and belonging: Many colonial works address themes of identity, belonging, and the search for a sense of self and community in the context of colonization and displacement. The Colonial period in American literature had significant impacts on the development and evolution of literary traditions in the United States. Some key impacts of the Colonial period on American literature include:

- **Promotion of Religious and Moral Values:** Many writers in the Colonial period, influenced by Puritan ideals and religious beliefs, emphasized themes of morality, piety, and divine providence in their works. This focus on religious and moral values shaped the literary landscape of the time and influenced subsequent generations of American writers.

- **Documentation of Historical Events:** Colonial literature served as a valuable record of historical events, including early settlements, conflicts with Native Americans, and political developments in the colonies. Writers documented these events through journals, letters, sermons, and other forms of writing, preserving important aspects of American history for future generations.

- **Influence of European Literary Traditions:** The literature of the Colonial period was often influenced by European literary traditions, such as English poetry, prose, and drama. Writers like Anne Bradstreet and Jonathan Edwards adapted these traditions to reflect their own experiences and perspectives in the New World, contributing to the development of American literary styles.

- **Emergence of Female Writers:** The Colonial period saw the rise of female writers such as Anne Bradstreet, Phyllis Wheatley, and Mercy Otis Warren, who made significant contributions to American literature. These women challenged traditional gender roles and societal expectations, paving the way for future generations of female writers in America.

- **Legacy for Future Generations:** The literature of the Colonial period laid the foundation for future generations of American writers, influencing genres such as poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. The themes, styles, and perspectives explored by Colonial writers continue to resonate in contemporary American literature, reflecting the enduring impact of this formative period.

In conclusion, the literature of the Colonial period reflects the struggles, triumphs, and cultural values of early American settlers as they navigated the challenges of building a new society in a foreign land. The colonial period left a lasting imprint on the literary landscape of the United States, shaping themes, styles, and narratives that continue to be explored and reinterpreted by writers today. The impacts of this period can be seen in the rich tapestry of American literary traditions that have evolved over centuries, reflecting the diverse voices and experiences that define the nation's cultural heritage.

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