

# AMERICAN LITERATURE

## UNIT II • MINOR ROMANTICS • PART 2

### KNICKERBOCKERS

## LECTURE NOTES

### WASHINGTON IRVING

He grew up in New York

His Favorite Pseudonyms:

- Diedrich Knickerbocker
- Geoffrey Crayon

A History of New York written by Diedrich Knickerbocker made him a celebrity

He was the first to portray St. Nicholas as a jolly & stout man riding in a sleigh over treetops bringing toys to children

- Prior to this, St. Nick had been portrayed as a tall, thin bishop riding on a white horse

His most famous works:

- Rip Van Winkle
- The Legend of Sleepy Hollow
- were both part of a collection of stories called The Sketch Book

He led a cosmopolitan life and knew the prominent people of the day

He settled along the banks of the Hudson River - where his stories took place - at home called "Sunnyside"



### JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

He grew up in Cooperstown, New York along the banks of the lovely Lake Otsego

Cooper began his writing career on a dare.

- In 1819, while reading a current best-seller to his family, he declared he could write a better book himself!
- His wife playfully dared him to try!
- He accepted the challenge - six months later - at the age of 31 - his first novel *Precaution* was published



#### Characteristics of Cooper's works:

**Drew Extensively from American History** for his setting and characterization

- Cooper stands apart from all preceding American novelists in that no American writer before Cooper drew so extensively on the materials of American history.

**Created the Mythic Image of the American Hero**

- A larger-than-life western frontier hero
- A man armed and solitary
- A plebeian (common man) but worthy of nobility because of his experience and skill as a hunter & fighter
- A man who feels at home in the wilderness and nature

**Story relies on the setting**

- As opposed to some novels where the events could occur in any setting, the events in Cooper's novels rely on the setting.

**A New Representation of Racial Types**

Racial differences are represented as "gifts" of each race

- these "gifts" are the innate or acquired racial & cultural values possessed by an individual or race

A mixture of racial types is seen everywhere in the Leatherstocking Tales, for example:

- Cora is white with a taint of black blood.
- Magua is a mixed blood Indian.
- Natty Bumppo is a white who has been raised by Indians.

**Romantic View of Nature**

- Includes the Romantic attraction to the forest before its destruction by civilization

**Moral Idealism Unique to the Romantic Era Writers**

- Cooper did not reject the religious past of the country, but he fashioned his heroes so actions sprang from deeply ingrained Christian values

## The Leatherstocking Tales

- Most well-known
- A series of five novels each featuring the main hero **Natty Bumppo**

### Book #4 - The Pioneers (1823)

Natty an old man; a hunter half-civilized.

### Book #2 - The Last of the Mohicans (1826)

The best of the Leatherstocking tales.

Here Natty is in the prime of his life.

### Book #5 - The Prairie (1827)

Natty is an old man

He dies seated on a chair on the Rocky Mountains, looking east.

### Book #3 - The Pathfinder (1840)

Now Natty is 35 years old, makes an abortive marriage proposal, but of course the proposal doesn't work out.

Natty never marries, cannot marry. For to marry is to be shackled by domesticity and women.

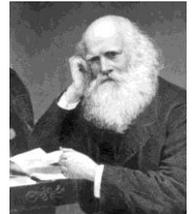
The American frontier hero can never marry a real woman.

- The frontier, the wilderness, the ocean, or the sea is his hero.

### Book #1 - The Deerslayer (1841)

Natty is now young again, at height of his hunting powers.

He hunts in the virgin land, which is his mistress.



## WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

His well-established New England family was staunchly Federalist in politics and Calvinist in religion.

- It was always said that the first Bryant came over on the Mayflower.
- And on the other side, Bryant's mother was also of Mayflower stock, being a descendant of John Alden.

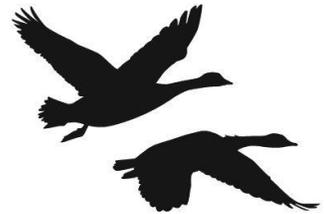
**Thanatopsis** - In 1811, when he was only eighteen years of age he wrote the imperishable poem

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of "Thanatopsis" is its anti-Christian, stoical view of death.

- There is no heaven or hell beyond the grave;
- death ends life, and that is all:
- Thine individual being, shalt thou go/ To mix forever with the elements, /
- To be a brother to the insensible rock/ And to the sluggish clod....

### STRUCTURE OF THANATOPSIS

1. *Lines 1-30: Section One – Doctrine: Nature teaches man the meaning of death*
2. *Lines 31-72: Section Two – The Grounds for the Doctrine: Two consolations offered by nature*  
1 – You will not be alone after you die but in the company of the greats.  
2 – Life here is just temporary anyway, and all will join you there eventually.
3. *Lines 73-81: Section Three – The Application of the Doctrine: How should we approach death in light of nature's teachings?*



**To a Waterfowl** - Bryant displayed a different attitude toward death in "**To a Waterfowl**"

- "Power" (God) is omnipresent and beneficent.

**His Life** - In 1826 Bryant became assistant editor of the **New York Evening Post** and in 1829 editor in chief.

- He served in this capacity for 50 years.

As an editor espousing causes, Bryant had considerable impact on the life of New York and of the nation.

- the antislavery movement
- the "free-soil" concept
- free trade among nations
- helped in the formation of the new Republican party in 1855

Bryant published nine volumes of poetry from 1832 on.

He also translated the *Iliad* (1870) and the *Odyssey* (1871-1872).

He died in New York City on June 12, 1878