

1. REVOLUTION AND AFTER

In the 18th century the Puritan heritage was changing and adapting to the „Age of Reason“. The population increased, there were armed conflicts with the Indians and rise of slavery. American Enlightenment emphasized reason and practical sides of life, preferred science over religion, democracy over monarchy and rationality rather than tradition. The Enlightenment thinkers and writers proclaimed justice, liberty, and equality as the natural rights of man. Consequently, they became more liberal in the matters of religion and politics.

The public figures became more liberal and more political. The main tendencies and beginnings of new American era are reflected in the thinking and work of two prominent thinkers Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) and Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) who were both familiar with the preaching of Cotton Mather.

Edwards studied at Yale University and was greatly interested in the philosophy of John Locke and scientific research of Isaac Newton. He was interested in the theory of atoms, studied nature of sounds, colors and stars. He spoke Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He served as a missionary among Indians. He saw the laws of nature as derived from God, who is through nature showing his wisdom and care. He thus managed to combine scientific research with religious faith and prepared the way to Transcendentalism. His best known sermons and treatises include *Freedom of the Will* (1754) where he defends Calvinistic doctrines of foreordination, original sin and punishment.

As a leader of Great Awakening, which was a religious revival movement in the forties, Edwards tried to save puritanism for the next century. Though his sermons were varied and Edwards constantly spoke of God's mercy, his most famous sermon is called "Sinners in the hands of Angry God" (1741) meant to bring more settlers back to the Puritan vision of life. Edwards planned to write *The History of the Work of Redemption* but died after inoculation against smallpox which should have demonstrated to his students at Princeton University his faith in science.

Unlike Edwards, Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) put the main emphasis on practical sides of life. He was a publisher, scientist, inventor, diplomat and writer. He founded the Pennsylvania Hospital, Pennsylvania University, Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery and first public library in America. Franklin was also using plain style but with secular aim. He was trying to teach moral lessons on the basis of common sense. He started publishing essays in the style of British Neo-classical journalism in his brother's magazine *New England Courant*.

In the years 1753–58 Franklin was publishing *Poor Richard's Almanack* under a pseudonym Richard Saunders. This annual brochure included advice in how to get money and keep it, popular proverbs and encouragement. The books gained wide audience. Franklin believed that good work is more important than all-day prayers. As he said: "The noblest question in the world is What good may I do in it?"

Franklin adopted the Aristotelian idea of God as the First Mover. Serving God meant for Franklin serving men. One of the essential terms for Franklin was virtue which is not based on religious self-denial but on the ability to think rightly. Franklin lists 13 virtues: temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquillity, chastity, and humility. This can be achieved by everyone.

Yet Franklin realized that preaching and moralizing does not have a large effect, he therefore decided to write an autobiography. *Memoires De La Vie Privee* (Paris, 1791) was translated into English and published under the title *The Private Life of the Late Benjamin Franklin, LL.D. Originally Written By Himself, And Now Translated From The French* (London, 1793) where he would show on his own life what he means. He became the model of a new self-made man and this term forms the basis of American dream. He is describing his faults, showing that nobody is perfect from nature. Virtue is something to be learned. He believed that everyone has the ability to recognize good from bad and after that noone can do anything seriously wrong.

His most famous work is the *Autobiography* (1771), which was, however, still unfinished at the time of his death. It is divided into three parts: account of his youth and adolescence; his early attempts at moral perfection; and his mature life, when he used all his knowledge and experience to become successful and prosperous. Franklin presents his life as a model for all Americans, showing that everybody can live up to his dreams if he works for it. As he remarked: "Having emerged from the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world, and having gone so far through life with a considerable share of felicity, the conducting means I made use of, which, with the blessing of God, so well succeeded, my posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own situations, and therefore fit to be imitated." (Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1) It is written in "the plaine style" but adapted, modernized, but mainly secularized.

For Franklin, the important thing was to be a good and useful citizen. This idea was elaborated in his essay "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America" (1784). America is in most aspects superior to England, yet there is still one thing lacking: the arts. As Franklin remarked in a letter to Miss Mary Stevenson (Philadelphia, March 25, 1763):

Of all the enviable things England has, I envy it most its people. Why should that petty Island, which, compared to America, is but like a stepping-stone in a brook, scarce enough of it above water to keep one's shoes dry; why, I say, should that little Island enjoy, in almost every neighbourhood, more sensible, virtuous, and elegant minds, that we can collect in ranging a hundred leagues of our vast forests? But it is said that Arts delight to travel westward. You have effectually defended us in this glorious war, and in time you will improve us. After the first cares for the necessities of life are over, we shall come to think of embellishments. (Franklin, *Works*, 246)

POLITICAL WRITING

The writing of that time mostly reflected the struggle for independence. The main forms were thus essays and pamphlets. One of the essential concepts of Enlightenment was the rise of nationalism. As a good politician Franklin realized that America needed well organized political and cultural life. He wanted to raise patriotic and nationalistic feelings. He was one of the members of Continental Congress who drafted the Declaration of Independence and signed The Treaty of Alliance with France, The Treaty of Peace with England and the Constitution.

Franklin realized the importance and power of written text, that is why he asked Thomas Paine (1737-1809) to write a pamphlet on this topic. His *Common Sense Addressed to the Inhabitants of America* (1776) became the most popular and persuasive American pamphlet. Within three months it sold more than one hundred thousand copies. Paine also published a series of thirteen pamphlets *Crisis*. George Washington ordered his troops to read it to find out what they are fighting for. Paine believes that „the cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind. Many circumstances hath, and will arise, which are not local, but universal, and through which the principles of all Lovers of Mankind are affected, and in the Event of which, their Affections are interested. The laying a Country desolate with Fire and Sword, declaring War against the natural rights of all Mankind, and extirpating the Defenders thereof from the Face of the Earth, is the Concern of every Man to whom Nature hath given the Power of feeling; of which Class, regardless of Party Censure, is the AUTHOR.“ (Paine, *Common Sense*, n.p.)

Moreover, as the text was written by wide audiences, Paine is explaining that he is not using any religious or mystical arguments: „In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense: and have no other preliminaries to settle with the reader, than that he will divest himself of prejudice and prepossession, and suffer his reason and his feelings to determine for themselves that he will put on, or rather that he will not put off, the true character of a man, and generously enlarge his views beyond the present day.“ (Paine, *Common Sense*, 12)

Paine also became a spokesman of Abolitionists and sharp critic of British monarchy. He was accused of treason and sent to France. There he was involved in the French Revolution where he soon found out that overthrowing of monarchy is not sufficient for lawful republic. He protested against the persecution of Louis XVI. And was imprisoned. Paine was saved by American ambassador . In 1794 he attacked Christianity and conventional society structure in *The Age of Reason*. But it was not well accepted.

The Federalist Papers

The Federalist Papers were a series of eighty five political essays published in New York newspapers under a collective pseudonym Publius in 1787–1788. They are attributed to John Jay, James Madison and Alexander Hamilton. The texts were trying to define new principles of government and stated arguments for the general acceptance of the new Constitution.

Political issues were also reflected in poetry.

Philip Freneau (1752-1832) is called the poet of American revolution. In 1771 he published a long patriotic poem „The Rising Glory of America“, which was considerably revised in 1786. Yet he is mainly known for his early nature poems, especially “To a Wild Honeysuckle”, and “The Indian Burying Ground” and thus anticipated the poetry of William Cullen Bryant, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman. Freneau fought as a militiaman during the Revolutionary War. In 1780, he was captured and imprisoned in two British ships, where he almost died before his family managed to get him released. His poem "The British Prison Ship" is a bitter description of the cruelties of the British. This piece and other revolutionary works, including "Eutaw Springs," "American Liberty," "A Political Litany," "A Midnight

Consultation," and "George the Third's Soliloquy," brought him fame as the "Poet of the American Revolution." He served as a translator for the State department under Thomas Jefferson.

Freneau edited a number of journals during his life, like *Jersey Chronicle*, *Time-Piece and Literary Companion*. When Thomas Jefferson helped him establish the militant *National Gazette* in 1791, Freneau became the first powerful editor in America.

After the revolution, American identity became a major issue addressed most famously by Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur (1735-1813) He was born in Normandy, France and received a Jesuit education. He moved to the state of New York and settled on a farm. During the revolution he tried to remain neutral but because of his sympathies for the Loyalists he was imprisoned. He then received permission to leave with one of his sons to Europe. He is known mainly for his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) which he published in London. It is a series of twelve letters written by a fictional narrator on the nature of America and new Americans. It mixes travel descriptions, philosophical and political thoughts and autobiography.

With no Puritan limitations to form or content, American writers started to imitate the English literature, namely the neo-classical poets, such as Alexander Pope, journalistic style of Addison and Steele, Restoration plays, and early novels of Fielding and Richardson. After the Revolution, the first daily newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Packet*, appeared in 1784.

AFRICAN AMERICAN VOICES

The increase of slavery started the Abolitionist debates in the North. Moreover, Andrew Jackson not only supported slavery but also passed the Indian Removal Act (1830). The slave narratives started to be published in the late 1700s and reached the peak of popularity before the outbreak of the Civil War. The writers were describing their living condition and often attempts at escape, which would, however, not be the total solution, as their families were left behind and the future in the North was not secure. The author writes mainly for white audience to gain wider sympathy and understanding and also to prove (like other minorities) their social usefulness and adaptability.

Many African Americans felt disappointed by the differences between the slogans of the Revolution promising freedom and equal rights and its insistence of slavery as a legal institution. One of the early opponents of this injustice was Lemuel Haynes (1753-1833), an evangelical minister. His address, 'Liberty Further Extended: Or Free Thoughts on the Illegality of Slave-Keeping' (written early in his career but not published until 1783) refers to the Declaration of Independence and proclaims that the "unalienable rights" should apply to all human beings. Similarly like Haynes, Olaudah Equiano (1745-97) was born in Africa as a free man. He was taken to Barbados and later to Virginia where he was enslaved. In 1776 he regained his freedom. He described his life experience in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Valla, the African, Written by Himself* (1787). In the opening pages Equiano addresses his audience as follows:

My Lords and Gentlemen, permit me with great deference and respect, to lay at your feet the following genuine Narrative; the chief design of which is to excite

your august assemblies a sense of compassion for the miseries which the Slave Trade has entailed on my unfortunate countrymen. By the horrors of that trade I was first torn away from all the tender connexions that were naturally dear to my heart; but these, through the mysterious ways of Providence, I ought to regard as infinitely more than compensated by the introduction I have thence obtained to the knowledge of the Christian religion, and of a nation, which by its liberal sentiments, its humanity, the glorious freedom of its government, and its proficiency in arts and sciences, has exalted the dignity of human nature. (Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, xviii–ix)

Not only is the book dedicated to the white liberalists and politicians, Equiano is, instead of complaints and criticism, praising the country and referring to its democratic ideals. His spiritual autobiography has established the slave narrative as a American form, which has been influencing American and African American writing until the present time.

Another influential representative of the genre was *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845). Douglass (1817–95) was born on a plantation in Maryland. His father was white, presumably his master. Douglass was sent to Baltimore where he learnt to read and write. He escaped to the North where he started to give lectures on slavery and became one of the most prominent antiabolitionist black leaders.

The poetic tradition was established by two African American poets: Jupiter Hammon (1711–ca.1806) and Phillis Wheatley (1753–84). Hammon was born a slave and his collection *Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ, With Penitential Cries* (1760) was the first to be published by African American. He wrote one poem to Wheatley: ‘An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatly, Ethiopian Poetess, in Boston, who came from Africa at eight years of age, and soon became acquainted with the gospel of Jesus Christ’ (1778). Phillis Wheatley published her collection called *Poems* in 1773 in London. The poems were influenced by neo-classicism. Yet, her poems were not very successful and she never published another volume.

EARLY AMERICAN NATIONAL POETRY

After the Revolution American writers felt the need to establish truly American, national culture. They felt it was time to become independent of Britain and Europe not only politically but also on the cultural level. Noah Webster (1758–1843) compiled an *American Dictionary* and readers and spellers for the schools. Webster's dictionaries are still commonly used. And the poets were determined to compose American national poems.

HARTFORD WITS/CONNECTICUT WITS

Timothy Dwight was a grandson of Jonathan Edwards. He was influenced by British neo-classical writers as Alexander Pope and Oliver Goldsmith. His imitative poem *Greenfield Hill: A Poem in Seven Parts* (1794) is a idyllic depiction of American countryside. He published a “national”, patriotic poem *Conquest of Canaan* (1787) which is dedicated to

George Washington, “The Saviour of his Country, The Supporter of Freedom and the Benefactor of Mankind.” It was the first attempt at long national poem.

Joel Barlow wrote patriotic poems, e.g., “The Prospect of Peace” (1778). His most famous poem is “The Hasty Pudding: A Poem in Three Cantos” (1793) celebrating the Americans through celebration of their traditional Yankee meal. His most ambitious project was his attempt at national epic, *The Columbiad* (1807). It is a patriotic poem that attempts at providing the new nation with its own historical narrative. As Barlow commented: “There are two distinct objects to be kept in view in the conduct of a narrative poem: the *poetical* and the *moral* object. The poetical is the fictitious design for the action; the moral is the real design of the poem.” (Barlow, *Columbiad*, vii–viii) Yet the poem does not focus on the life of Columbus himself, but rather, on the free and democratic future of the country which he sees in his visions. The opening of the poem reflects the great debt to traditional epics:

I sing the Mariner who first unfurl'd
An eastern banner o'er the western world,
And taught mankind where future empires lay
In these fair confines of descending day;
Who sway'd a moment, with vicarious power,
Iberia's sceptre on the new found shore,
Then saw the paths his virtuous steps had trod
Pursued by avarice and defiled with blood,
The tribes he foster'd with paternal toil
Snatch'd from his hand, and slaughter'd for their spoil.

Slaves, kings, adventurers, envious of his name,
Enjoy'd his labours and purloin'd his fame,
And gave the Viceroy, from his high seat hurl'd.
Chains for a crown, a prison for a world
Long overwhelm'd in woes, and sickening there,
He met the slow still march of black despair,
Sought the last refuge from his hopeless doom,
And wish'd from thankless men a peaceful tomb:
Till vision'd ages, opening on his eyes,
Cheer'd his sad soul, and bade new nations rise;
He saw the Atlantic heaven with light o'ercast,
And Freedom crown his glorious work at last.

Almighty Freedom! give my venturous song
The force, the charm that to thy voice belong;
Tis thine to shape my course, to light my way,
To nerve my country with the patriot lay,
To teach all men where all their interest lies,
How rulers may be just and nations wise:
Strong in thy strength I bend no suppliant knee,
Invoke no miracle, no Muse but thee.

JOHN TRUMBULL (1750-1831).

His masterpiece was a satire on British loyalists. He called this poem *M'Fingal* after a Scotch Tory. The first part was published in 1775 and thus helped to spread the ideas of the Revolution among wide readership. Trumbull believed in the rise of American culture and literature. In his patriotic poem "Of America" he compares it favourably with Europe:

For pleasing Arts behold their matchless charms,
The first in letters, as the first in arms.
See bolder genius quit the narrow shore,
And realms of science, yet untraced, explore,
Hiding in brightness of superior day,
The fainting gleam of Europe's setting ray.
The sublime Muse shall life her eagle wing;
Of heavenly themes the sacred bards shall sing,

...

And bid their lays with lofty Milton vie;
Or wake from nature's themes the moral song,
And shine with Pope, with Thompson and with Young.
This land her Swift and Addison shall view,
The former honours equal'd by the new;
Here shall some Shakespeare charm his rising age,
And hold in magic chains the listening stage;
(Trumbull, *Poetical Works*, 159)

EARLY AMERICAN NATIONAL PROSE

One of the effects of the Revolution was increased literacy. To the most successful writers belonged Susanna Haswell Rowson and Hannah Webster Foster. Rowson was born in England but moved to America at the age of five. In 1794 she published the first American bestseller *Charlotte Temple*

(1794), a story of a young English woman who is seduced by a evil man, who takes her to America and there he lets her die, pregnant with his child. Only three years later, another writer, Hannah Webster Foster, published *The Coquette*, a sentimental epistolary novel. Due to the lack of clear copyright laws, both writers did not receive much income of their books. Another influential prose book was published by Hugh Henry Brackenridge (1746-1816). His *Modern Chivalry* (1792-1815) was a picaresque narrative in the tradition of Cervantes. The book is set in Pennsylvania and depicts the life in rural areas. The protagonists Captain John Farrago and his Irish servant Teague O'Regan travel and present satirical image of post-Revolutionary America.

BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN DRAMA

Even though the Puritan rule was over, drama was still not appreciated. One of the first American plays was a drama in verse *The Prince of Parthia* written in 1767 by THOMAS GODFREY. Yet, the Continental Congress banned plays in 1774, only patriotic

dialogues were allowed. Most of the popular plays were taken from Europe or were adapted.

The most significant American playwright of the period was ROYALL TYLER, who fought during the Revolution. He published one of the earliest American novels *The Algerian Captive* (1797) and after seeing Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* he wrote a play *The Contrast* (1787). The contrast is satirizing the British manners contrasted with American honesty.

The playwright who wanted to free American theatre from the European dominion was WILLIAM DUNLOP. He was the first theoretician of American theatre. He published *History of the American Theatre* (1832) and *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (1834). He believed that drama was the most universal and international literary form. His best play was *André* (1798), a patriotic play about British officer captured by Americans during the Revolution.

The most prominent feature of the literature of the Revolution was the language, freed from the Puritan "plaine style." The newborn nation was seeking self-definition and total both political and cultural independence. Political pamphlets, newspapers and patriotic poems belong to the most typical production of the era. The main concern was the national construction, not the production of art. That was about to change in the following decades.

FURTHER READING

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