**Gothic Literature.**

Unlike romantic essayists and poets, Romantic fiction authors were haunted by fear and mistrust of nature around them and of themselves. Even the optimistic idea – known as Manifest Destiny, of America as the true free nation, which ought to be an example for the rest of the world, was based on individual success: The nation is perfect because the people are perfect. Therefore, Failure of the nation basically means failure of everyone. Indeed, the nineteenth century witnessed hard times for Americans. It was time of rise in slavery, struggle for abolition, slaves were running away through underground railroad; it was also time of Indian removal, economic crisis, rapid industrialization and urbanism. Four of the greatest American authors express this fear of the other and the self: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Washington Irving and Edgar Allen Poe.

The last two authors, Washington Irving and Edgar Allen Poe, wrote Gothic literature following the European tradition: With dark mysterious castles, evil monks, demons and ruins, horrific picture and grotesque, and a deep concern of the supernatural. However, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and later followed by Herman Melville, introduced completely novel style of romanticism. Unlike English romanticism, Romantic fiction in the US is not about love stories, but about characters greater than life. American Romantic heroes are often lonely, haunted by dark powers and strange ties: Hawthorne’s Arthur Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne, and Melville’s Captain Ahab. Their fate is usually dark and mysterious, some critics argue that it grew out of their own unconscious. The plot in Hawthorne’s and Melville’s is somehow related to the authors’ psyche.

These American authors struggle to create their own romantic setting for the absence of settled traditional community in the United States as it is in England or France. In the US, romantic literature was a journey in the characters’ psyche rather than the collective culture of a whole community. Since Shakespeare, to Charles Dickens and Jane Austen, the characters were tragic and noble because of an aristocratic bloodline or gained wealth. However, for American authors, there was no such social structure, the plot in their novels as their characters is structured according to individual psychology and natural environment. This is noticeable in the plot followed by English Romantic literature: It is rich, detailed, full of realistic description of social life and activities. On the other hand, American romantic literature is about round and complicated characters, and realistic description of natural environment rather than social one.

The characters, like the authors and like most Americans, had to invent themselves and their nobility. Most successful authors depended on their own imagination and psychological complexity to invent their own forms, themes and style. The notion of the perfect form has been almost absent in American literature. This made American Romantic literature dark and gothic, where most heroes face loneliness and death. As the nation was experiencing a time of war and social change, both authors question very basic notions that people took for granted: Hawthorne questioned our very definition of good and evil, our faith in religion and science; while Melville questions man’s relation to God and man’s relation with himself.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864): many of his plots are set in *Puritan* Salem Massachusetts. His greatest work –*The Scarlet Letter,* astonished readers for his choice of remote historical and physical setting, its ambiguity and complex plot (where the reader is not aware of the events flaw). Even the themes Hawthorne deal with are novel and considered as a taboo like religious freedom, social oppression and sexuality. In addition to his mistrust of puritanism, Hawthorne expresses equal skepticism toward natural science. He was troubled by the absolute faith in anything, be it science or religion; this in specific influenced Herman Melville a lot.

Herman Melville (1819-1891): Similarly, Melville introduced new setting (a cannibal but hospitable tribe in, remote and inhabited islands in *Typee*, fishing boat and ocean in *Moby Deck)*. The themes are also new and astonishing. In *Typee*, the author is questioning our whole system of evaluation and appreciation by portraying a cannibal tribe as a complex and structured culture. In *Moby Deck*, he completely changed the Romantic concept of nature (from being hope, and calamity, unity to a destructive power, out of human understanding). Nature, which is presented in the whale, is complex and every element in it is related to another in a complex web of correspondences. This results in a very complicated system out of man reach, and whether it is good or evil, human or inhuman, one can never explain. This was naturalism before it appears with Emile Zola and Stephen Crane. Also, the author uses reflexivity to address problems he has with writing the novel (quote p39). The author comments on the novel as an incomplete work is so modern. Ahab represents the failure of this idea, for he sought a complete answer, a complete book but did not get any, so the complete answer is nowhere to be found except in death (Ahab).

The white Whale in *Moby Deck* represents ambiguity and uncertainty; and being white, it in a way reflects the blankness of a paper where one can write/discover their own truths, fears, evil side and so on. *Moby Deck* represents the struggles, fears and unknown future that Americans experienced during the 1850s: immigrants, slaves, and working class, all of those were uncertain and afraid of the future, just like Ahab’s crew. Even the Pequod (Ahab’s fishing boat) is a name of an Indian tribe: It could be a symbol for America, and the boat/America is doomed just like the Indian tribe.

Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1849): uses a dark and mystic setting. He is considered the inventor of detective novel decades before English authors started to write this genre (mainly Sir Arthur Conan). His short stories and poems are set in dark, horror surrounding, death and life are often combined in a strange way (burying alive, or dead people returning to life),