

# Essay on poe hawthorne and melville

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



The romantic school of American literature was formed by the turn of the second and the third decade of the XIX century. The beginnings of American romanticism are to do with the “ American dream” – dream about free, just and happy society. The writers of that time were disappointed with the post-revolutionary development of the country. They start seeking for romantic ideal that could oppose the inhuman reality and remain outside the everyday bourgeois practice. This ideal could differ in every writer’s works, but what there is one feature, that makes them alike, and that is idealization of the bourgeois lifestyle’s denial. Romantic school remained the prevailing one until the end of The Civil War between the South and the North in 1865. In the formation of American romanticism one can discern three periods: early romantic period in 1820-1830, mature romantic period in 1840-1850 and late romantic period in the sixties of the XIX century.

The mature American romanticism is notable for dramatic, even tragic tones, multiple meanings and complexity. The famous and eminent writers of this period are E. A. Poe, N. Hawthorne, H. Melville, H. W. Longfellow, W. G. Simms, R. W. Emerson and H. D. Thoreau.

Edgar Allan Poe is one of the most brilliant figures in the world’s literature and belongs to the classics. Poe had a many-sided talent – his heritage includes prose, poetry, critical articles and reviews along with the work, that are not easy to be related to one or another category, for instance, scientific astronomic poem in his prose “ Eureka”. In each of these fields of literature Poe was an innovator far ahead of his time, who gave guidelines for the literature development forward the decades.

Although Poe’s writings have common traits with the works of

contemporaries, some of his ideas and views were specific for that period of time. He had always considered himself a southerner, and the ideas of the “southern aristocracy” influenced his social and political views, that were doubtlessly conservative. Unlike his contemporaries – Nathaniel Hawthorne, who was loyal to democratic views to the end of his life, and Herman Melville, who in his work “Mardi” uncovered the “slavery sores” of the American social and political structure, Poe disapprovingly thought of The Great French Revolution and stood up for slavery. In his work “Mellonta Tauta”, his hero, storyteller from 2848, says: “the first circumstance which disturbed, very particularly, the self-complacency of the philosophers who constructed this “Republic,” was the startling discovery that universal suffrage gave opportunity for fraudulent schemes the matter was put to an abrupt issue by a fellow of the name of Mob, who took everything into his own hands” (Poe, p. 136).

In Poe’s poetry, the factful moments often give way to the frame of mind. It is often created not with the help of the real images, but by the use of various, vague, obscure, appearing on the verge where reality and dreams come together, associations. Poe’s poetry causes a strong emotional reaction. The contemporaries were saying that, for instance, “The Raven” made their flesh creep.

Poe’s poesy is distinctively filled with desperate melancholy and feeling of doom of everything what is pure and beautiful. These are the first lines of his poem “Lenore”:

## **Ah, broken is the golden bowl!**

The spirit flown forever!

Let the bell toll! — A saintly soul

Glides down the Stygian river! (Mabbott, Poe, p. 334-335)

As opposed to Poe's manner, Melville alternates the calm narrative chapters with the dramatic ones, which he uses in culminations of the novel. This is exactly how the composition of his masterpiece – the novel "Moby Dick" – is built up, reminding of the ocean – first being illusionary calm, then turning into a threatening splash.

The symbolism is used by all three writers. In Poe's writings one can observe such a symbolic form, as sound symbolism, when one or another sound is taken as "clear, joyful", or "dark, gloomy", independently of the meaning of word. Poe demonstrated the magic of the poem, using numerous repeats of words and even lines, what can be clearly seen in "The Raven":

### **“ And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain**

Thrilled me — filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;

So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating

“ 'Tis some visiter entreating entrance at my chamber door —

Some late visiter entreating entrance at my chamber door; —

This it is and nothing more.” (Mabbott, Poe, p. 365)

The proprietor of the "American Review", where the poem first appeared in 1845, George Colton, noticed, that "much of the melody of "The Raven" arises from alliteration, and the studious use of similar sounds in unusual places". (Walker, p. 141)

Hawthorne in turn liked using spatial symbols, such as a prison, a scaffold, a road, a wood or a brook. In his magnum opus - the novel "The Scarlet Letter" - he made an efficient use of a contrast technique: an ugly jail and a bush of wild roses, Pearl's bright pagan dress and Dimmesdale's dark garment.

At last, Melville used symbols, associations and allegories as the background to show the connection between reality and allusion, life and existence, microcosm and macrocosm. This was reflected in the meaningful subtitle of his novel "White-Jacket; or The World in a Man-of-War", which Melville wrote using the elements of his biography.

Poe, Hawthorne and Melville were contemporaries; they had a certain opinion on each other's writing styles. For instance, Poe noted, that "The style of Mr. Hawthorne is purity itself. His tone is singularly effective - wild, plaintive, thoughtful, and in full accordance with his themes Upon the whole we look upon him as one of the few men of indisputable genius to whom our country has as yet given birth". (Graham's Magazine, p. 254)

Herman Melville highly appreciated Hawthorne's writings too. On his opinion, it was better to suffer a defeat when taking a way of originality, then to succeed in copying others. He called America to value its writers and gift them with glory. His fate, along with the Poe's and Hawthorne's fates, is the clear evidence of how urgent was this call-up, which, unfortunately, was not heard.

The writers of the mature American romanticism differed in their creating, but their clue ideas were alike, and those were the ideas of romantic

humanism. They had left a priceless heritage – example for the followers and treasures of the world's literature for all.

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