

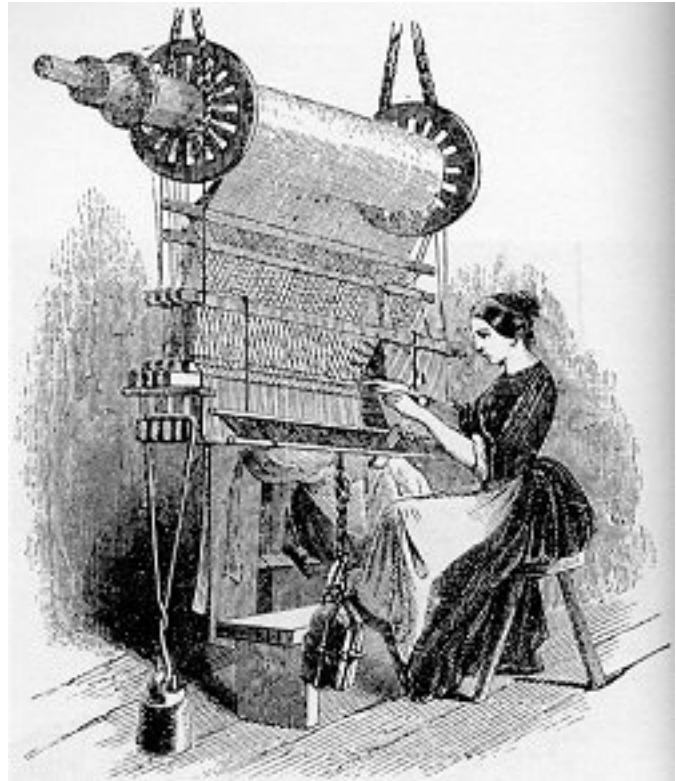
EN 4903/6903

American Literature, 1800-1860: The Professionalization of Authorship

Dr. Bonnie O'Neill

MWF 10-10:50

This course covers one of the most politically and culturally eventful periods in the history of the U.S. Of particular interest to us, the professionalization of authorship in the period makes it possible for certain writers, including women, to make their living by their pens; in turn it makes it possible for Emerson and others to imagine that American letters may finally emerge on the national scene as American political and economic power have done. The professionalization of authorship, moreover, parallels other changes in American culture, especially the transformation from an agrarian to an industrial economy, the boom in immigration, growing discord over slavery, and agitation for women's rights. What does it mean to be a professional writer, and what is the function of authorship in a culture in the midst of radical cultural transformation? How does



literary labor compare to other forms of labor? Is writing “women’s work”? Our course will examine a variety of works from this rich period, concentrating especially on novels and short stories, slave narrative, and the radical transformation of poetry. Students are encouraged to look for both unity and contrast among the texts—not just the continuous threads of theme, style, persona, and worldview across the works, but also for breakages in those threads.

Readings will include the following:

- Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book* (1820)
- Edgar Allan Poe, selected tales and poems (1830s-40s)
- Lydia Maria Child, *Letters from New York* (1843-5)
- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845)
- Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* (1852)
- Fanny Fern, *Ruth Hall* (1855) and selected newspaper sketches
- Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855)