

EN 4990 / EN 6990: Special Topic

Nineteenth-Century American Literature

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Not long after the United States gained independence from Great Britain, nationalistic fervor coupled with the rise of market capitalism contributed to the proliferation of literature in a variety of forms. During the so-called “American Renaissance,” from about 1845-1860, many now-classic works of American literature reimagined familiar genres and challenged readers intellectually and aesthetically. At the same time, works by women commanded large audiences, and the “best seller” emerged as a new category designating popular success. The upheavals of the Civil War and Reconstruction ushered in new aesthetics that prized realism, as well as reassessments of the economic and social prospects for marginalized Americans. This course will bring together American literature from the nineteenth century in a variety of genres and forms as we consider their literary and cultural significance.

This course aims to give students a thorough overview of the literature of the nineteenth-century U.S., including developments in major genres (the novel and poetry in particular) and literary movements (Romanticism and the Gothic, realism, and naturalism). Readings will include works by Catharine Maria Sedgwick, William Apess, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Jacobs, Walt Whitman, Rebecca Harding Davis, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Charles Chesnut.