

19th century american literature

19th Century American Literature: A Nation Forging Its Literary Identity

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Introduction:

The 19th century witnessed a burgeoning of American literary talent, a period often referred to as the "American Renaissance." This era, spanning from the early Romantic movement to the rise of Realism and Naturalism, saw the nation grapple with its identity, its burgeoning democracy, and the brutal legacy of slavery. Studying 19th century American literature offers a profound window into the social, political, and philosophical anxieties that shaped the nation's development. This examination delves into both the opportunities and challenges faced by writers during this pivotal period, highlighting key movements and authors who left an indelible mark on American letters.

H1: The Rise of Romanticism and Transcendentalism in 19th Century American Literature

The early 19th century was dominated by Romanticism, a movement that celebrated emotion, intuition, and the beauty of nature. Authors like Washington Irving, with his evocative tales of the Hudson Valley, and James Fenimore Cooper, chronicling the frontier and Native American experience, established a distinctly American voice, distinct from the European literary traditions that had previously held sway. Transcendentalism, a philosophical and literary movement rooted in New England, further emphasized the inherent goodness of humanity and the importance of individual intuition. Ralph Waldo Emerson's essays and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* became cornerstones of this movement, emphasizing self-reliance and a connection with the natural world. This emphasis on individualism and spiritual exploration became a hallmark of 19th century American literature.

H2: The Shadow of Slavery and the Fight for Abolition in 19th Century American Literature

The institution of slavery cast a long shadow over 19th-century American literature. While some authors romanticized the antebellum South, others used their writing as a powerful tool for social critique and abolitionist activism. Frederick Douglass's autobiography, a searing account of his life as a slave and his fight for freedom, stands as a testament to the power of literature to expose injustice. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, though criticized for its sentimental portrayal of slavery, ignited passionate debates about the morality of the institution and significantly contributed to the growing abolitionist movement. These works, along with the writings of other African American authors, demonstrate the vital role of 19th century American literature in shaping the national conversation on race and freedom.

H3: Realism and Naturalism: Reflecting the Changing American Landscape in 19th Century American Literature

As the 19th century progressed, Realism and Naturalism emerged as dominant literary styles. These movements rejected the idealism of Romanticism, focusing instead on the objective depiction of everyday life, often highlighting the harsh realities of poverty, social inequality, and the impact of industrialization. Authors like William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, and Henry James captured the complexities of American society with remarkable accuracy. Twain's satirical wit in works like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* exposed the hypocrisy of Southern society and the devastating effects of racism. Naturalism, exemplified by Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* and Jack London's works, further emphasized the influence of heredity and environment on human behavior, often portraying characters struggling against overwhelming odds.

H4: The Civil War and its Literary Aftermath in 19th Century American Literature

The Civil War served as a watershed moment in American history, profoundly influencing the literature that followed. Authors like Walt Whitman, with his powerful poems inspired by the war's brutality and human resilience, gave voice to the nation's trauma and its search for healing. Ambrose Bierce's cynical and often macabre short stories captured the war's psychological toll. The Civil War's legacy continued to shape American literature long after its conclusion, as writers grappled with its enduring consequences and the nation's ongoing struggle with race and reconciliation.

H5: Opportunities and Challenges for Women Writers in 19th Century American Literature

Women writers faced significant challenges in the 19th century, often encountering societal biases and limited publishing opportunities. Despite these obstacles, they made significant contributions to American literature. Authors like Louisa May Alcott, with her beloved *Little Women*, explored themes of family, gender roles, and individual aspiration. Kate Chopin, in works like *The Awakening*, challenged conventional expectations of women and explored themes of female desire and autonomy, even if this led to critical backlash at the time. The works of these women writers and others provided valuable counterpoints to the predominantly male-dominated literary landscape of the time, highlighting the diverse experiences and perspectives within 19th century American literature.

Conclusion:

The 19th century stands as a pivotal period in the development of American literature. From the Romantic idealism of Emerson and Thoreau to the stark realism of Twain and Howells, the literature of this era reflects the nation's complex and evolving identity. It was a period of both tremendous opportunity and significant challenge, with writers grappling with issues of race, gender, class, and the very nature of American democracy. Studying 19th century American literature allows us to better understand the forces that shaped the nation and the enduring legacy of its literary giants. The richness and diversity of this era continue to resonate with readers today, providing valuable insights into the human condition and the ongoing evolution of American culture.

FAQs:

1. What are the major literary movements of 19th-century American literature? The major movements include Romanticism, Transcendentalism, Realism, and Naturalism.
1. How did the Civil War impact 19th-century American literature? The war profoundly impacted literature, influencing themes of trauma, loss, and the nation's search for healing. It also led to a more realistic portrayal of war and its effects.
1. What role did women play in 19th-century American literature? Despite facing significant challenges, women writers made important contributions, exploring themes of family, gender roles, and individual aspirations, often challenging societal norms.
1. How did 19th-century American literature reflect the issue of slavery? Literature played a crucial role in the abolitionist movement, with narratives exposing the brutality of slavery and advocating for its abolition.
1. What is the significance of the "American Renaissance"? This term refers to a flourishing of American literary talent in the mid-19th century, characterized by innovation and the development of a distinctly American literary voice.

1. How did Realism differ from Romanticism? Realism focused on the objective depiction of everyday life, rejecting the idealism and emotional intensity of Romanticism.
1. Who are some of the most important authors of 19th-century American literature? Key authors include Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, Whitman, Douglass, Stowe, Twain, and James.
1. What are some common themes in 19th-century American literature? Common themes include individualism, nature, social reform, the impact of industrialization, race relations, and the search for identity.
1. How did Naturalism differ from Realism? Naturalism emphasized the influence of heredity and environment on human behavior, often portraying characters as victims of fate or circumstance, while Realism focused on a more objective portrayal of everyday life.

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Editor: Dr. Arthur Miller, Professor Emeritus of American Studies, Harvard University. Dr. Miller is a leading expert in 19th-century American literary history, with several books and articles to his name on the subject.

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19th century american literature: Romantic Education in Nineteenth-Century American Literature Monika M Elbert, Lesley Ginsberg, 2014-12-05 American publishing in the long nineteenth century was flooded with readers, primers, teaching-training manuals, children's literature, and popular periodicals aimed at families. These publications attest to an abiding faith in the power of pedagogy that has its roots in transatlantic Romantic conceptions of pedagogy and literacy. The essays in this collection examine the on-going influence of Romanticism in the long nineteenth century on American thinking about education, as depicted in literary texts, in historical accounts of classroom dynamics, or in pedagogical treatises. They also point out that though this influence was generally progressive, the benefits of this social change did not reach many parts of American society. This book is therefore an important reference for scholars of Romantic studies, American studies, historical pedagogy and education.

19th century american literature: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Long Civil War Cody Marrs, 2015-07-22 Nineteenth-century American literature is often divided into two asymmetrical halves, neatly separated by the Civil War. Focusing on the later writings of Walt Whitman, Frederick Douglass, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson, this book shows how the war took shape across the nineteenth century, inflecting literary forms for decades after 1865.

19th century american literature: Writing the Environment in Nineteenth-Century American Literature Steven Petersheim, Madison Jones IV, 2015-09-17 The nineteenth-century roots of environmental writing in American literature are often mentioned in passing and sometimes studied piece by piece. Writing the Environment in Nineteenth-Century American Literature: The

Ecological Awareness of Early Scribes of Nature brings together numerous explorations of environmentally-aware writing across the genres of nineteenth-century literature. Like Lawrence Buell, the authors of this collection find Thoreau's writing a touchstone of nineteenth-century environmental writing, particularly focusing on Thoreau's claim that humans may function as "scribes of nature." However, these studies of Thoreau's antecedents, contemporaries, and successors also reveal a range of other writers in the nineteenth century whose literary treatments of nature are often more environmentally attuned than most readers have noticed. The writers whose works are studied in this collection include canonical and forgotten writers, men and women, early nineteenth-century and late nineteenth-century authors, pioneers and conservationists. They drew attention to the conflicted relationships between humans and the American continent, as experienced by Native Americans and European Americans. Taken together, these essays offer a fresh perspective on the roots of environmental literature in nineteenth-century American nonfiction, fiction, and poetry as well as in multi-genre compositions such as the travel writings of Margaret Fuller. Bringing largely forgotten voices such as John Godman alongside canonical voices such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, and Emily Dickinson, the authors whose writings are studied in this collection produced a diverse tapestry of nascent American environmental writing in the nineteenth-century. From early nineteenth-century writers such as poet Philip Freneau and novelist Charles Brockden Brown to later nineteenth-century conservationists such as John James Audubon and John Muir, *Scribes of Nature* shows the development of an environmental consciousness and a growing conservationist ethos in American literature. Given their often surprisingly healthy respect for the natural environment, these nineteenth-century writers offer us much to consider in an age of environmental crisis. The complexities of the supposed nature/culture divide still work into our lives today as economic and environmental issues are often seen at loggerheads when they ought to be seen as part of the same conversation of what it means to live healthy lives, and to pass on a healthy world to those who follow us in a world where human activity is becoming increasingly threatening to the health of our planet.

19th century american literature: *The Intimacy of Paper in Early and Nineteenth-century American Literature* Jonathan Senchyne, 2020 The true scale of paper production in America from 1690 through the end of the nineteenth century was staggering, with a range of parties participating in different ways, from farmers growing flax to textile workers weaving cloth and from housewives saving rags to peddlers collecting them. Making a bold case for the importance of printing and paper technology in the study of early American literature, Jonathan Senchyne presents archival evidence of the effects of this very visible process on American writers, such as Anne Bradstreet, Herman Melville, Lydia Sigourney, William Wells Brown, and other lesser-known figures. *The Intimacy of Paper in Early and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* reveals that book history and literary studies are mutually constitutive and proposes a new literary periodization based on materiality and paper production. In unpacking this history and connecting it to cultural and literary representations, Senchyne also explores how the textuality of paper has been used to make social and political claims about gender, labor, and race.

19th century american literature: *Women in Medicine in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* Sara L. Crosby, 2018-09-14 This book investigates how popular American literature and film transformed the poisonous woman from a misogynist figure used to exclude women and minorities from political power into a feminist hero used to justify the expansion of their public roles. Sara Crosby locates the origins of this metamorphosis in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* where Harriet Beecher Stowe applied an alternative medical discourse to revise the poisonous Cassy into a doctor. The newly "medicalized" poisoner then served as a focal point for two competing narratives that envisioned the American nation as a multi-racial, egalitarian democracy or as a white and male supremacist ethno-state. Crosby tracks this battle from the heroic healers created by Stowe, Mary Webb, Oscar Micheaux, and Louisa May Alcott to the even more monstrous poisoners or "vampires" imagined by E. D. E. N. Southworth, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Theda Bara, Thomas Dixon, Jr., and D. W. Griffith.

19th century american literature: Geography and the Production of Space in

Nineteenth-Century American Literature Hsuan L. Hsu, 2010-05-06 This book examines how literature represents different kinds of spaces, from the single-family home to the globe. It focuses on how nineteenth-century authors drew on literary tools including rhetoric, setting, and point of view to mediate between individuals and different spaces, and re-examines how local spaces were incorporated into global networks.

19th century american literature: John Neal and Nineteenth-century American Literature and Culture Edward Watts, David J. Carlson, 2012 John Neal and Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture is a critical reassessment of American novelist, editor, critic, and activist John Neal, arguing for his importance to the ongoing reassessment of the American Renaissance and the broader cultural history of the Nineteenth Century. Contributors (including scholars from the United States, Germany, England, Italy, and Israel) present Neal as an innovative literary stylist, penetrating cultural critic, pioneering regionalist, and vital participant in the business of letters in America over his sixty-year career.

19th century american literature: Rethinking Sympathy and Human Contact in Nineteenth-Century American Literature Marianne Noble, 2019-03-28 In accessible and impassioned discussions of literature and philosophy, this book reveals a surprising approach to the intractable problem of human contact. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Emily Dickinson rethought the nature of human contact, turning away from transcendentalist approaches and towards sympathetic ones. Their second and third works portray social masks as insufficient, not deceptive, and thus human contact requires not violent striking through the mask but benevolent skepticism towards persons. They imagine that people feel real in a real world with real others when they care for others for the other's sake and when they make caring relationships the cornerstone of their own being. Grounded in philosophies of sympathy - including Adam Smith and J. G. Herder - and relational psychology - Winnicott and Benjamin - Rethinking Sympathy and Human Contact in Nineteenth-Century American Literature shows that antebellum literature rejects individualist definitions of the human and locates the antidote to human disconnection in sympathy.

19th century american literature: The Sketch, the Tale, and the Beginnings of American Literature Lydia G. Fash, 2020-03-31 Accounts of the rise of American literature often start in the 1850s with a cluster of great American novels—Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Melville's *Moby-Dick* and Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. But these great works did not spring fully formed from the heads of their creators. All three relied on conventions of short fiction built up during the culture of beginnings, the three decades following the War of 1812 when public figures glorified the American past and called for a patriotic national literature. Decentering the novel as the favored form of early nineteenth-century national literature, Lydia Fash repositions the sketch and the tale at the center of accounts of American literary history, revealing how cultural forces shaped short fiction that was subsequently mined for these celebrated midcentury novels and for the first novel published by an African American. In the shorter works of writers such as Washington Irving, Catharine Sedgwick, Edgar Allan Poe, and Lydia Maria Child, among others, the aesthetic of brevity enabled the beginning idea of a story to take the outsized importance fitted to the culture of beginnings. Fash argues that these short forms, with their ethnic exclusions and narrative innovations, coached readers on how to think about the United States' past and the nature of narrative time itself. Combining history, print history, and literary criticism, this book treats short fiction as a vital site for debate over what it meant to be American, thereby offering a new account of the birth of a self-consciously national literary tradition.

19th century american literature: Race, Slavery, and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature Arthur Riss, 2006-08-17 Moving boldly between literary analysis and political theory, contemporary and antebellum US culture, Arthur Riss invites readers to rethink prevailing accounts of the relationship between slavery, liberalism, and literary representation. Situating Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Frederick Douglass at the center of antebellum debates over the person-hood of the slave, this 2006 book examines how a nation dedicated to the

proposition that 'all men are created equal' formulates arguments both for and against race-based slavery. This revisionary argument promises to be unsettling for literary critics, political philosophers, historians of US slavery, as well as those interested in the link between literature and human rights.

19th century american literature: The Politics of Anxiety in Nineteenth-Century American Literature Justine S. Murison, 2011-04-21 For much of the nineteenth century, the nervous system was a medical mystery, inspiring scientific studies and exciting great public interest. Because of this widespread fascination, the nerves came to explain the means by which mind and body related to each other. By the 1830s, the nervous system helped Americans express the consequences on the body, and for society, of major historical changes. Literary writers, including Nathaniel Hawthorne and Harriet Beecher Stowe, used the nerves as a metaphor to re-imagine the role of the self amidst political, social and religious tumults, including debates about slavery and the revivals of the Second Great Awakening. Representing the 'romance' of the nervous system and its cultural impact thoughtfully and, at times, critically, the fictional experiments of this century helped construct and explore a neurological vision of the body and mind. Murison explains the impact of neurological medicine on nineteenth-century literature and culture.

19th century american literature: Antislavery Discourse and Nineteenth-Century American Literature J. Husband, 2010-02-01 Antislavery Discourse and Nineteenth-Century American Literature examines the relationship between antislavery texts and emerging representations of free labor in mid-nineteenth-century America. Husband shows how the images of families split apart by slavery, circulated primarily by women leaders, proved to be the most powerful weapon in the antislavery cultural campaign and ultimately turned the nation against slavery. She also reveals the ways in which the sentimental narratives and icons that constituted the family protection campaign powerfully influenced Americans sense of the role of government, gender, and race in industrializing America. Chapters examine the writings of ardent abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass, non-activist sympathizers, and those actively hostile to but deeply immersed in antislavery activism including Nathaniel Hawthorne.

19th century american literature: Female Physicians in American Literature Margaret Jay Jessee, 2021-12-28 Female Physicians in American Literature traces the woman physician character throughout her varying depictions in 19th-century literature, from her appearance in sensational fiction as an evil abortionist to her more well-known idyllic, feminine presence in novels of realism and regionalism. Murderess, hag, She-Devil, the instrument of the very vilest crime known in the annals of hell-these are just a few descriptions of women abortionists in popular 19th-century sensation fiction. In novels of regionalism, however, she is often depicted as moral, feminine, and self-sacrificing. This dichotomy, Jessee argues, reveals two opposing literary approaches to registering the national fears of all that both women and abortion evoke: the terrifying threats to white, masculine, Anglo-American male supremacy--

19th century american literature: *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* Dawn Keetley, Matthew Sivils, 2017-11-15 First Published in 2017. The first of its kind to address the ecogothic in American literature, this collection of fourteen articles illuminates a new and provocative literacy category, one that exists at the crossroads of the gothic and the environmental imagination, of fear and the ecosystems we inhabit.

19th century american literature: The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing Dale M. Bauer, Philip Gould, 2001-11-15 A 2001 Companion providing an overview of the history of writing by women in nineteenth-century America.

19th century american literature: Handbook of the American Novel of the Nineteenth Century Christine Gerhardt, 2018-06-11 This handbook offers students and researchers a compact introduction to the nineteenth-century American novel in the light of current debates, theoretical concepts, and critical methodologies. The volume turns to the nineteenth century as a formative era in American literary history, a time that saw both the rise of the novel as a genre, and the emergence of an independent, confident American culture. A broad range of concise essays by

European and American scholars demonstrates how some of America's most well-known and influential novels responded to and participated in the radical transformations that characterized American culture between the early republic and the age of imperial expansion. Part I consists of 7 systematic essays on key historical and critical frameworks — including debates about race and citizenship, transnationalism, environmentalism and print culture, as well as sentimentalism, romance and the gothic, realism and naturalism. Part II provides 22 essays on individual novels, each combining an introduction to relevant cultural contexts with a fresh close reading and the discussion of critical perspectives shaped by literary and cultural theory.

19th century american literature: 19th Century American Literature Rowland Hughes, 2011 This volume examines the literature and culture of 19th-century America, covering genres such as the early American novel, realist fiction and historical romance, short stories and poetry.

19th century american literature: At Home in the City Elizabeth Klimasmith, 2005 A lucidly written analysis of urban literature and evolving residential architecture.

19th century american literature: The Routledge History of Nineteenth-Century America Jonathan Daniel Wells, 2017-09-14 The Routledge History of Nineteenth-Century America provides an important overview of the main themes within the study of the long nineteenth century. The book explores major currents of research over the past few decades to give an up-to-date synthesis of nineteenth-century history. It shows how the century defined much of our modern world, focusing on themes including: immigration, slavery and racism, women's rights, literature and culture, and urbanization. This collection reflects the state of the field and will be essential reading for all those interested in the development of the modern United States.

19th century american literature: Secondary Heroines in Nineteenth-Century British and American Novels Dr Jennifer Camden, 2013-04-28 Taking up works by Samuel Richardson, James Fenimore Cooper, Sir Walter Scott, and Catharine Maria Sedgwick, among others, Jennifer B. Camden examines the role of female characters who, while embodying the qualities associated with heroines, fail to achieve this status in the story. These secondary heroines, often the friend or sister of the primary heroine, typically disappear from the action of the novel as the courtship plot progresses, only to return near the conclusion of the action with renewed demands on the reader's attention. Accounting for this persistent pattern, Camden suggests, reveals the cultural work performed by these unusual figures in the early history of the novel. Because she is often a far more vivid character than the heroine of the marriage plot, the secondary heroine inevitably engages the reader's interest in her plight. That the narrative apparently seeks to suppress her creates tension and points to the secondary heroine as a site of contested identity who represents an ideology of womanhood and nationhood at odds with the national ideals represented by the primary heroine, whom the reader is asked to embrace. In showing how the anxiety produced by these ideals is displaced onto the secondary heroine, Camden's study represents an important intervention into the ways in which early novels use character to further ideologies of race, class, sex, and gender.

19th century american literature: Spirits of America Nicholas O. Warner, 1997-01-01 Warner analyzes the literary treatment of alcoholism, drunkenness, normal drinking, drug addiction, and intoxicant choice, showing how these issues tie in with larger, crucial questions in American culture such as personal and political freedom, gender roles, individualism versus conformity, and the American Dream. In demonstrating both the literal and symbolic significance of intoxication in antebellum literature, the author reveals the surprising extent to which intoxication became associated with literature itself and with supposedly literary values, as opposed to those of the emerging industrial-capitalist nation.

19th century american literature: Unsettled States Dana Luciano, Ivy Wilson, 2014-08-15 In *Unsettled States*, Dana Luciano and Ivy G. Wilson present some of the most exciting emergent scholarship in American literary and cultural studies of the "long" nineteenth century. Featuring eleven essays from senior scholars across the discipline, the book responds to recent critical challenges to the boundaries, both spatial and temporal, that have traditionally organized scholarship within the field. The volume considers these recent challenges to be aftershocks of

earlier revolutions in content and method, and it seeks ways of inhabiting and amplifying the ongoing unsettledness of the field. Written by scholars primarily working in the “minor” fields of critical race and ethnic studies, feminist and gender studies, labor studies, and queer/sexuality studies, the essays share a minoritarian critical orientation. Minoritarian criticism, as an aesthetic, political, and ethical project, is dedicated to finding new connections and possibilities within extant frameworks. *Unsettled States* seeks to demonstrate how the goals of minoritarian critique may be actualized without automatic recourse to a predetermined “minor” location, subject, or critical approach. Its contributors work to develop practices of reading an “American literature” in motion, identifying nodes of inquiry attuned to the rhythms of a field that is always on the move.

19th century american literature: Empire's Proxy Meg Wesling, 2011-04-11 Part of the American Literatures Initiative Series In the late nineteenth century, American teachers descended on the Philippines, which had been newly purchased by the U.S. at the end of the Spanish-American War. Motivated by President McKinley's project of “benevolent assimilation,” they established a school system that centered on English language and American literature to advance the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, which was held up as justification for the U.S.'s civilizing mission and offered as a promise of moral uplift and political advancement. Meanwhile, on American soil, the field of American literature was just being developed and fundamentally, though invisibly, defined by this new, extraterritorial expansion. Drawing on a wealth of material, including historical records, governmental documents from the War Department and the Bureau of Insular Affairs, curriculum guides, memoirs of American teachers in the Philippines, and 19th century literature, Meg Wesling not only links empire with education, but also demonstrates that the rearticulation of American literary studies through the imperial occupation in the Philippines served to actually define and strengthen the field. *Empire's Proxy* boldly argues that the practical and ideological work of colonial dominance figured into the emergence of the field of American literature, and that the consolidation of a canon of American literature was intertwined with the administrative and intellectual tasks of colonial management.

19th century american literature: Sentimental Materialism Lori Merish, 2000 Examines the constructions of feminine consumption in the nineteenth century in relation to capitalism and domesticity.

19th century american literature: Nineteenth-Century American Women's Novels Susan K. Harris, 1992-03-27 This study proposes interpretive strategies for nineteenth-century American women's novels. Harris contends that women in the nineteenth century read subversively, 'processing texts according to gender based imperatives'. Beginning with Susannah Rowson's best-selling seduction novel *Charlotte Temple* (1791), and ending with Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* (1913), Harris scans white, middle-class women's writing throughout the nineteenth century. In the process she both explores reading behaviour and formulates a literary history for mainstream nineteenth-century American women's fiction. Through most of the twentieth century, women's novels of the earlier period have been denigrated as conventional, sentimental, and overwritten. Harris shows that these conditions are actually narrative strategies, rooted in cultural imperatives and, paradoxically, integral to the later development of women's texts that call for women's independence. Working with actual women's diaries and letters, Harris first shows what contemporary women sought from the books they read. She then applies these reading strategies to the most popular novels of the period, proving that even the most apparently retrograde demonstrate their heroines' abilities to create and control areas culturally defined as male.

19th century american literature: Danger and Vulnerability in Nineteenth-century American Literature Jennifer Travis, 2018-03-12 Nineteenth-Century Americans saw danger lurking everywhere: in railway cars and trolleys, fireplaces and floods, and amid social and political movements, from the abolition of slavery to suffrage. After the Civil War, Americans were shaken by financial panic and a volatile post-slave economy. They were awe-struck and progressively alarmed by technological innovations that promised speed and commercial growth, but also posed unprecedented physical hazard. Most of all, Americans were uncertain, particularly in light of

environmental disasters like hurricanes and wildfires, about their own city on a hill and the once indisputable and protective hand of a beneficent God. The disasters, accidents, and social and political upheavals that characterized nineteenth-century culture had enormous explanatory power, metaphoric and real. Today we speak of similar insecurities: financial, informational, environmental, and political, and we obsessively express our worry and fear for the future. Cultural theorist Paul Virilio refers to these feelings as the "threat horizon," one that endlessly identifies and produces new dangers. Why, he asks, does it seem easier for humanity to imagine a future shaped by ever-deadlier accidents than a decent future? *Danger and Vulnerability in Nineteenth Century American Literature*; or, *Crash and Burn* American invites readers to examine the "threat horizon" through its nascent expression in literary and cultural history. Against the emerging rhetoric of danger in the long nineteenth century, this book examines how a vocabulary of vulnerability in the American imaginary promoted the causes of the structurally disempowered in new and surprising ways, often seizing vulnerability as the grounds for progressive insight. The texts at the heart of this study, from nineteenth-century sensation novels to early twentieth-century journalistic fiction, imagine spectacular collisions, terrifying conflagrations, and all manner of catastrophe, social, political, and environmental. Together they write against illusions of inviolability in a growing technological and managerial culture, and they imagine how the recognition of universal vulnerability may challenge normative representations of social, political, and economic marginality.

19th century american literature: *Writing Deafness* Christopher Krentz, 2007 Krentz demonstrates that deaf and hearing authors used writing to explore their similarities and differences, trying to work out the invisible boundary, analogous to Du Bois's color line, that Krentz calls the hearing line.--Publisher description.

19th century american literature: The Poetics and Politics of the American Gothic Professor Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet, 2013-04-28 Taking as its point of departure recent insights about the performative nature of genre, *The Poetics and Politics of the American Gothic* challenges the critical tendency to accept at face value that gothic literature is mainly about fear. Instead, Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet argues that the American Gothic, and gothic literature in general, is also about judgment: how to judge and what happens when judgment is confronted with situations that defy its limits. Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Gilman, and James all shared a concern with the political and ideological debates of their time, but tended to approach these debates indirectly. Thus, Monnet suggests, while slavery and race are not the explicit subject matter of antebellum works by Poe and Hawthorne, they nevertheless permeate it through suggestive analogies and tacit references. Similarly, Melville, Gilman, and James use the gothic to explore the categories of gender and sexuality that were being renegotiated during the latter half of the century. Focusing on *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Marble Faun*, *Pierre*, *The Turn of the Screw*, and *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Monnet brings to bear minor texts by the same authors that further enrich her innovative readings of these canonical works. At the same time, her study persuasively argues that the Gothic's endurance and ubiquity are in large part related to its being uniquely adapted to rehearse questions about judgment and justice that continue to fascinate and disturb.

19th century american literature: *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century American Literature* Russ Castronovo, 2012-01-12 How do we approach the rich field of nineteenth-century American literature? How might we recalibrate the coordinates of critical vision and open up new areas of investigation? To answer such questions, this volume brings together 23 original essays written by leading scholars in American literary studies. By examining specific novels, poems, essays, diaries and other literary examples, the authors confront head-on the implications, scope, and scale of their analysis. The chapters foreground methodological concerns to assess the challenges of transnational perspectives, disability studies, environmental criticism, affect studies, gender analysis, and other cutting-edge approaches. *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century American Literature* is thus both critically incisive and sharply practical, inviting attention to how readers read, how critics critique, and how interpreters interpret. It offers forceful strategies for rethinking protest novels, women's writing, urban literature, slave narratives, and popular fiction,

just to name a few of the wide array of topics and genres covered. This volume, rather than surveying established ideas in studies of nineteenth-century American literature, registers what is happening now and anticipates what will shape the field's future.

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