

ENGL 7/8294: Studies in 19th-Century American Literature

Sketch, Tale, Story, History, Novella: Short Form American Literature of the 19th Century

We will investigate the flourishing of short form literature during the 19th century, from its beginnings in the sketches of Sarah Josepha Hale and Washington Irving through the modern short stories of Kate Chopin and Charles Chesnutt. By looking at their circulation in magazines and gift books, we will put two of the century's most celebrated writers, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe, into contexts that illuminate overlooked aspects of their work. We will also undertake case studies of understudied short form genres: novellas by Herman Melville, Frederick Douglass, and Louisa May Alcott; and episodic histories by Caroline Kirkland and Sarah Winnemucca. Finally, we'll revisit many familiar authors in order to investigate Christopher Looby's claim that "there is something fundamentally queer about the most distinctively American literary genre," the short story. The first objective of the course is to examine the development and proliferation of genre: we will explore how the implicit rules of various fictional forms (including tales, sketches, parables, allegories, satires, short stories, and novellas) are gradually established, and we will investigate how writers experiment with these rules. The second objective of the course is to study this short fiction as a response to and reflection of historical conditions: with particular attention to the ways in which these texts work through problems of race, gender, class, sexuality, and the marketplace, we will investigate how they compose American culture in the nineteenth century.

Primary Texts:

Washington Irving, *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon* (1819-20)
Sarah Josepha Hale, *Sketches of American Character* (1838)
Edgar Allan Poe, *Essential Tales and Poems* (1830s-40s)
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Tales* (1830s-40s)
Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno" (1855); "Bartleby the Scrivener" (1853)
Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave* (1852)
Louisa May Alcott, *Behind a Mask* (1866)
Caroline Kirkland, *A New Home . . . Who'll Follow?* (1839)
Sarah Winnemucca, *Life Among the Piutes* (1883)
Kate Chopin, *Bayou Folk and A Night in Acadie* (1890s)
Charles Chesnutt, *Conjure Tales and Stories of the Color Line* (1890s)
Looby, Christopher, ed. *The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman, and Other Queer 19th-Century Short Stories*

Secondary readings will include Rita Felski, Toril Moi, Michael Warner, Kristie Hamilton, Melanie Kirkpatrick, Meredith McGill, and Eve Sedgwick.