

Seminar 1: The Civil War in U.S. Literature
Fall 2018

Dr. Catherine Parrish

Two Sections:

- 1) T/R 2:00-3:15
- 2) Tuesday 5:00-6:15/6:30-7:45

Course Description: The Civil War was the most transformative event in U.S. history, with long-reaching impacts on race and gender relations, economics, politics, technology, law, medicine, and religion, as well as art (not only literature, but also visual arts and music). The Civil War is frequently used as the dividing point marking the death of Romanticism (the transformative, hopeful optimism of Emerson's Transcendentalism, for instance) and the birth of Realism, with its starker, more photographic capturing of things as they "really are," and Naturalism, where, far from imagining that individuals can transform self and society, as Emerson promised, they were instead buffeted and destroyed by forces beyond their control and even, usually, beyond their understanding.

Walt Whitman stated that the "real war would never get into the books." Many critics have agreed: Daniel Aaron referred to the Civil War as *The Unwritten War* because so little "great literature" emerged directly from it. Indeed, the most famous Civil War novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, was written after the war by a man who had not (yet) seen battle. However, recent critics like Randall Fuller have insisted that the war had a more powerful impact than previously thought. Electronic archives now make out-of-print books, collections of letters, slave narratives, and diaries accessible and shed new light on 19th-century responses to the Civil War. We'll read a variety of those works; we will also read more recent works to explore the way America continued to argue about and interpret the Civil War.

Students will perform independent research, read carefully selected academic secondary source-work, and report their findings to the class. There will be two short (3- to 5-page) papers, as well as one research paper proposal leading to a complete draft and the final version of a 12-page research paper using at least four scholarly secondary sources.

Works Read:

Selections from *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*

From John DeForest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion From Secession to Loyalty*

Poetry by Henry Timrod, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier,

Emily Dickinson, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman

From Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes*

WPA Narratives/interviews with formerly enslaved citizens

Louisa May Alcott, *Hospital Sketches*

Mark Twain's "A Private History of a Campaign That Failed"

Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*

William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*

20th/21st century poetry by Allen Tate, Robert Lowell, and Natasha Trethewey