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"Reception Study, Genre Study, and Literary History"

The connection between text and audience is, of course, something that writers have repeatedly recognized and that reception-studies scholars in literary criticism, book history, and cultural and media studies have been examining increasingly over the last thirty years. Yet despite this attention to the role of reception in the life of texts, many literary critics and scholars remain somewhat puzzled about reception studies as an activity and a field. What help can reception study be in addressing the kinds of concerns that are often central to literary study, including questions about genre and the shape of literary history itself? Offering an extended, particularized illustration involving the intersection of reception study, genre study, and literary history, James Machor will focus on one of the most important and long-lasting staples in narratives of American literary history: the claim that romances and sentimental and domestic fiction dominated the U.S. literary marketplace before the Civil War, but that after the war, realism and naturalism became the leading forms of fiction in the second half of the century.

James Machor is the author of *Reading Fiction in Antebellum America: Informed Response and Reception Histories, 1820-1865* (Johns Hopkins UP, 2011) and editor of *Reception Study: From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies* (Routledge, 2001), *New Directions in American Reception Study* (Oxford UP, 2008) and *Readers in History: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Contexts of Response* (Johns Hopkins UP, 1993).