This seminar will take a look at the historical, social, and cultural background, from which the period referred to as ‹American Renaissance› could emerge. Far from being alienated from their context, authors such as Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman were also, in large part, created by it.

The seminar is divided into three parts: First, it will investigate to what extent canonized authors in the era from 1830 to 1860 utilized modes of stereotyping and how they infused their works with dominant or subversive patterns of aestheticization. The emergence of a ‹national literature› in this period will be linked to changes in the rhetorical strategies of popular discourse. Second, the course will discuss works written by authors not enumerated by Matthiessen (for example, Douglass, Dickinson, and Poe) to explore the interrelationships between these and other texts as far as subversive themes (abolitionism, women’s rights, secularity, urbanization, the conservation of nature) are concerned. Third, we will delve into the broad field of popular art and culture to examine the role of painting (The Hudson River School) and mass entertainment (P. T. Barnum’s sensational culture).

Credit requirements: Regular attendance and thoughtful participation in class (30%), an oral presentation as part of an expert group (25%), and a final paper (45%).

Required reading: A course reader is available in the copy-shop at Königin-Luise-Str. Additional texts can be found in Handapparat 24 in the library.

Semantic papers: The seminar paper will be 17 to 20 pages long. It will make an original argument about one or more of the ‹texts› we’ve been reading, present this argument coherently and logically, and use both close readings and secondary sources to support it. Every paper should include a «works cited» list of at least six secondary sources. The paper is due September 30, 2006.

! Note: There is no extension of this deadline. Late essays will not be accepted!
Syllabus:

21. April 2006  Introduction: What's Beneath the American Renaissance?

28. April 2006  Fashionable Science: Thomas Cole (Hudson River School Pt I)

05. May 2006  Emerson and the Discovery of the Self
Secondary text: Jay Grossman, «Re-reading Emerson» xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

12. May 2006  Poe's Literary Journeys into the Dark

H. Melville, «Hawthorne and His Mosses» (1850): 2714-2726.

26. May 2006  Slavery and the Rewriting of Race
Read and prepare: Frederick Douglass, «Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass» (1845): Ch.1-II, IX-XI.

02. June 2006  Sensational Designs: Commercialism and Subversion
Double Session 2 p.m. – 6 p.m. !!
Pt II:


23. June 2006  Transcendental Utopias


07. July 2006  Educational Enterprise: Frederic Church and Emily Dickinson
Double session 2 p.m. – 6 p.m. !!
Pt I:
Pt II:

21. July 2006  Final discussion: After the American Renaissance

— Final Paper due September 30, 2006 —

! Note: There is no extension of this deadline. Late essays will not be accepted! 