

## AMERICAN RENAISSANCES

From *American Renaissance* (1941), F. O. Matthiessen, vii, xi-xii:

“The starting point for this book was my realization of how great a number of our past masterpieces were produced in one extraordinarily concentrated moment of expression. It may not seem precisely accurate to refer to our mid-nineteenth century as a re-birth; but that was how the writers themselves judged it. Not as a re-birth of values that had existed previously in America, but as America’s way of producing a renaissance, by coming to its first maturity and affirming its rightful heritage in the whole expanse of art and culture.

The half-decade of 1850-55 saw the appearance of *Representative Men* (1850), *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), *Moby-Dick* (1851), *Pierre* (1852), *Walden* (1854), and *Leaves of Grass* (1855) [Matthiessen overlooks *The Blithedale Romance* (1852)]. You might search all the rest of American literature without being able to collect a group of books equal to these in imaginative vitality. ‘The history of an art,’ as Ezra Pound has affirmed, ‘is the history of masterwork, not of failures or mediocrity’....Emerson’s theory of expression was that on which Thoreau built, to which Whitman gave extension, and to which Hawthorne and Melville were indebted by being forced to react against its philosophical assumptions.”

\*

1919 *Winesburg, Ohio*  
1920 *The Age of Innocence*  
1922 *The Waste Land*  
1922 *Babbitt*  
1924 *Desire under the Elms*  
1924 *in our time*  
1925 *An American Tragedy*  
1925 *The Professor’s House*  
1925 *The Great Gatsby*  
1926 *The Sun Also Rises*  
1929 *A Farewell to Arms*  
1929 *The Sound and the Fury*

Michael Hollister (2020)