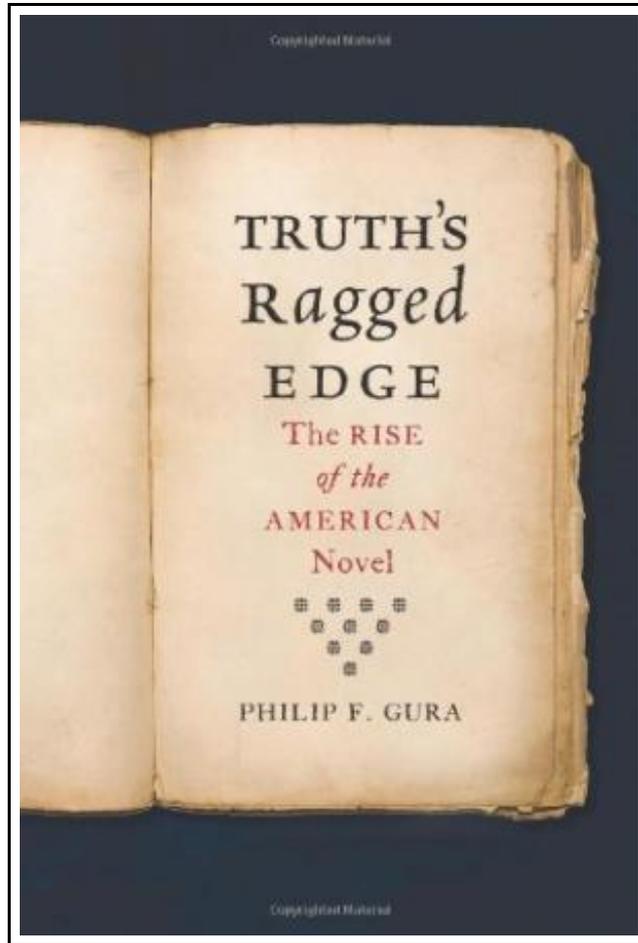


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Reviews

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(Roma Little)

TRUTH'S RAGGED EDGE: THE RISE OF THE AMERICAN NOVEL



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FSG. 1 Cloth(s), 2013. hard. Book Condition: New. The author of the 2007 National Book Critics Circle Award finalist *American Transcendentalism: A History*, cultural historian Philip Gura here presents an original and illuminating survey of the American novel's first century. Beginning with William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy*, from 1789, and best-selling morality tales of seduction and betrayal like Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, Gura goes on to recover such long-neglected but influential writers as escaped slave Harriet Jacobs and the irrepressible John Neal. By the mid-19th century, writers like Hawthorne and Melville had introduced interiority and doubt, reflecting a broader shift from general social concern to individualism. Rich in subplots and detail, Gura's narrative also discusses the technologies that modernized publishing and allowed for the printing of novels on a mass scale, and of lively and influential cultural journals and literary salons in New York and Boston. "Those who agree with Hemingway's claim that Huckleberry Finn created all modern American fiction will find this study of our pre-Twain literary tradition illuminating. Gura tempers this book's thrill of discovery over forgotten voices and stories with a still-relevant warning that the fearless individualism of American fiction can come dangerously close to solipsism." *Publishers Weekly* "This book creatively revives the age of ecstatic religion, the steam locomotive, and the daguerreotype. It charts the steady rise of female authorship and of a book-hungry American middle class. It captures the movement, as one later chapter heading reads, 'from a theology of the feelings to an ethic of love.' And it contrasts with the thoughtless dependence of generations reared on soap operas and video games, recovering the unfamiliar contours of a stricter society that somehow gave birth to a thoughtful individualism." *Advocate* (Baton Rouge) 330.



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