

The role of chance changed in the nineteenth century, and American literature changed with it. New theories of chance sparked religious and philosophical controversies while revolutionizing the sciences as probabilistic methods spread from mathematics, economics, and sociology to physics and evolutionary biology. *Uncertain Chances* shows how the rise of chance shaped the way nineteenth-century American writers confronted questions of doubt and belief. Examining a broad range of writing, from the fiction of Poe and Melville to Douglass's fight against statistical racism, through Thoreau's appreciation of nature's randomness and order to Dickinson's poetic rendering of surprise, Lee reveals how nineteenth-century dramatizations of chance help to navigate extremes that remain with us today—fundamentalism and relativism, determinism and chaos, terrorism and risk-management, the rational confidence of the Enlightenment, and the debilitating doubts of modernity.