

American Literature I Paper #1

Length: 4-5 pages

Research Requirement: use at least 2 secondary sources. If writing about the captivity narratives, use at least 2 narratives as your primary sources. When writing about *Charlotte Temple*, the novel is your only primary source.

Format: MLA--including internal parenthetical citations and a works cited page (that does not count toward the 4 pages)

Topics:

Women's Captivity Narratives.

Much can be analyzed about the many narratives depicting women's captivity in the American Colonial Period. In *Regeneration Through Violence*, Richard Slotkin looks at the mythic implication of the captivity narrative and argues that they represent "an Archetype of the American Experience." If this is the case, what then are the characteristics embedded within the women's captivity narratives that represent this archetypal experience and in turn how is this archetype problematized by the fact that women are the central figures in this important American narrative?

In Christopher Castiglia's *Bound and Determined* he suggests that women's captivity narratives worked to "maintain the established interlocking hierarchies of race and gender in the New World." In what ways then do the narratives you have read help to reaffirm the Anglo view of the Native Americans and in what ways do the narratives, despite the women's extraordinary displays on strength and courage, actually work to reaffirm feminine subjugation? Or, do you think the narratives actually undermine both of these stereotyped assumptions about race and gender?

Other topics: In what ways do the narratives help to create community and identity for the English settlers? Does the fear established in these texts work as a useful cathartic for the colonists? Do the "unnatural changes" that take place in the captive women establish certain iconic characteristics? For American behavior, and if so, whose behavior do these narratives establish? Men or women's? Is this ironic?

Charlotte Temple

In *Revolution and the Word*, Cathy Davidson suggests that we need to look carefully at the character of Montraville. Is he the true villain, or a victim like Charlotte? Does the text suggest a “standard double standard of sexual conduct [that] allows even a relatively decent young man to become, indirectly and second, a murderer?” Is *With Montraville* Rowson uncovering the actions of a libertine who uses women at will, or is she uncovering a systematic problem with the rising romantic ideology, with gender roles, with marital expectations, and with economic and social mobility through marriage?

Is, as Cathy Davidson also asserts, *Charlotte Temple* a narrative allegory for the uneasy period in the beginning of the United States of America? In a period of shifting alliances and attempts to establish an American identity, Charlotte forsakes her parents under the guidance of the corrupt Mademoiselle La Rue. She travels to the New World and finds her life to be less than idyllic. How could this plot trajectory speak to the audience reading it? Also, in the novel, most of the characters, including Charlotte’s father, forgo their conventional or expected social path and rebel against authority. How could this be speaking to the new American spirit? If this is an allegory, as well as a sentimental warning against following one’s heart, what would Charlotte’s eventual outcome tell us about the American experiment? Is the seduction narrative of Montraville over Charlotte suggesting that America itself is nothing but a libertine whose romantic promises of a better life lure the good-hearted into a life of destruction and death?

Eve Sedgwick argues in *Between Men* “that in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial desire and the structures of maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power” How does or doesn’t Rowson’s novel participate in the transmittal of patriarchal power? Does Rowson use the relationship between Belcour and Montraville to subvert or support patriarchal power?

In *The Plight of Feeling*, Julia Stern writes that “literary genres speak to specific historical moments with their attendant cultural and psychological needs. In the American eighteenth century, the novel of virtue in distress—maidenhood imperiled, ruined, and ultimately forsaken—exercises enormous appeal . . . the task of this literature is to address and work through the unprecedented sense of loss Americans experience in the wake of the Revolution that inscribes with fraternal blood the immutability of rupture from the mother country.” If this is true, where and how can we see this rupture continually performed in the novel?

Sources

In your text: *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* pg. 440-468.

Hand out: “Magnalia Christi Americana” Cotton Mather’s account of Hannah Dustan’s captivity

On Reserve in Library:

1. *Revolution and the Word*, by Cathy Davidson
especially pages 137-138, but the entire 6th chapter discusses Sentimental Fiction.
Chapter 2 “The Book in the New Republic” gives a nice overview of the rise of print fiction
2. *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel*, by Julia Stern
chapter 1 “The Plight of Feeling”
chapter 2 “Working Through the Frame: the Dream of Transparency in *Charlotte Temple*”
3. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, by Eve Sedgwick
especially page 25 and chapter 1 “Gender Asymmetry”-- the book is about British literature, so only take large ideas from it about patriarchy and how men function to retain power
4. *Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives*
especially Mary Jemison, Jemima Howe, and Sarah Wakefield
5. *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture Crossing, and White Womanhood*, by Castiglia
chapter 1 “Captivity is Consciousness”
chapter 3 “Her Tortures Were Turned Into Frolick”
3. *Regeneration Through Violence: the Mythology of the American Frontier*, by Richard Slotkin
chapter 4 “Israel in Babylon: The Archetype of the Captivity Narratives”
4. *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers*, by Annette Kolodney
chapter 1 “Captives in Paradise”
chapter 4 “Mary Jemison and Rebecca Bryan Boone: At Home in the Woods”

Journal Sources can be found on the library website under databases. Check the MLA site and the JSTOR site.