The Soundtrack of *Charlotte Temple*: Teaching Sympathy in the Early American Novel through Popular Music

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Abstract: Students in the Early American Literature survey course struggle with connecting to the texts in the earlier part of the class. Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* is a novel based on the effectiveness of its sympathetic import, but the majority of my contemporary students find the eponymous heroine sniveling and are unmoved at her difficult plight. To try to have students think through this influential novel as more than one about a supposedly overly emotive young girl, I've created a group project in which students create a soundtrack for an imagined *Charlotte Temple* movie. After having taught *Charlotte Temple* this way numerous times, I've noticed that students begin to relate to her as a character, and they are also able to tease out more complex themes that they otherwise would have overlooked. We are also able to have more productive discussions about sympathy as an effective tool in Early America, particularly as so many of the songs they've chosen line up with the goals of a sympathetic novel.

Introduction

One of the final chapters in Susanna Rowson's 1794 *Charlotte Temple* is titled, "Which People Void of Feeling Need Not Read." That youthful, early American readers sympathized with and felt Charlotte's plight as an abandoned, unwed mother in the years following the American Revolution cannot be disputed. Often recognized as "the first bestseller in America," it was the most popular novel in the burgeoning Republic and outsold any other in the United States until the 1852 publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Cowell 5-6). As such, the novel has become a staple in my undergraduate American Literature survey course: not only is it important because of the sheer number of early American readers it reached and affected, but its content also addresses the political and social questions that spoke to the experiences of those readers. Unlike the "young" and "fair" readers whom Susanna Rowson hoped would feel "compassion" for "unhappy Charlotte" in the 1790s, more often than not, my students bristle at Rowson's didactic rhetoric (37). They question Charlotte's decisions and feel little empathy for a young woman whom they perceive as refraining from taking any agency in her life.

One student summed up this general consensus about Charlotte as a character in fall 2016 when she exclaimed during a group discussion referencing the eponymous heroine: "'C'mon Charlotte! C'mon girl, don't be so naïve! Stop listening to Destiny's Child and start
listening to 'Lemonade’ ("Group Three"). In other words, the student found Charlotte's actions, or lack thereof, frustrating and hard to understand; she identifies the novel's overall narrative with the melodrama of the 1990s girl group that launched the singer Beyoncé as an artist rather than the feminist message of empowerment that most listeners positively associate with the singer's lyricism and music today. Scholar Marla Kohlman echoes my student's sentiment about Beyoncé's appeal in a 2016 article when she comments that "Quite frankly, we have watched [Beyoncé] move from her teenage years with Destiny's Child to the 'Grown Woman' she is now," a woman who is able "to exercise intersectional identity politics" to a "wide, cross-over audience" (36). My student's relating of the current pop artist's transformation to the past popular heroine's perceived stagnancy indicates that today's story arcs and political lenses do not map easily to early American texts. There is no "wide, cross-over audience" for early American seduction novels in the contemporary classroom, though there would have been just this type of broad audience in the eighteenth century. Charlotte as a character eschews the oft-championed, contemporary feminist plot of a young woman emerging out of an overly sentimental, youthful relationship into an empowered, independent lifestyle with scant need of others.

However, Charlotte's story of tears, failure, and moral fortitude even when facing (and later succumbing to) death upon being abandoned in the New World was one that affected eighteenth-century readers en masse. What I have ultimately discovered in my classes is that modern sensibilities hinder the ability of new readers in the undergraduate classroom to recognize fully the seduction novel's importance to the field of American literature as a social and political commentary; likewise, it is difficult for these students to appreciate the aesthetic form—based in sympathetic rhetoric—of this once vastly popular and widely acclaimed novel.

Hence, when considering how to teach Charlotte Temple and the genre of sentimental fiction that it represents in my early American survey course, I have ruminated on how to elicit sympathy for Charlotte so that students can understand her character's resonance in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Indeed, students are generally shocked when I share with them that Charlotte's status as a character was equitable to a modern day celebrity (i.e. that Beyoncé reference is not quite so far off as it may have first seemed). After all, visitors even today frequent a headstone that bears Charlotte's name in New York City's Trinity Churchyard, though there's never been evidence linking the fictional heroine with anyone in
the tomb itself. As *New York Times* columnist, C.J. Hughes related in a 2008 story, Charlotte "Temple aficionados left offerings on the slab, like hair, bouquets and burned love letters, according to newspaper accounts. Lovers would meet at the stone, [too]." This level of sympathy and feeling of kinship for Charlotte's experiences feels almost impossible to replicate for contemporary audiences who find the protagonist flat and dreary. She is certainly not the type of role model one would visit on a pilgrimage in modern day America. Ultimately, when considering how to help my students feel compassionately for Charlotte in a similar vein to how early American readers would, I decided to craft a project centered on music, the most connective platform used to inflame feelings that I felt my students could universally relate to and appreciate.

Indeed, in my estimation, there is no other platform like music that is as ubiquitous and conjoining among audiences across political, social, and economic divides, while still retaining the primary intention of evoking an emotional response from its listeners. As one educator explains, "Music is a universal language; its most fundamental pulse lives within all of us, within our bodies, no matter where we reside. As such, music offers a shared experience in the midst of a world characterized by competing interests, personal isolation, and the sometimes dehumanizing effects of technology." She even goes on to suggest that "Taken together, literature and music help us to identify and to preserve our common humanity" (Fay 377). While both today and in the past, music serves to create an "imagined community" across geographic space and boundaries, the purpose of my project is to use music to forge a community across chronological space.¹ That is, in asking students to use contemporary music to define and identify with Charlotte Temple's experience, I hope to channel some of the sympathetic emotions that earlier audiences felt for her. In doing so,

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¹ Benedict Anderson’s ideas of “imagined communities,” the personal and/or cultural feeling of belonging to a national identity is especially fruitful in a discussion of early American novels because this type of relationship-building was one of the books' purposes. Through fiction, Americans began to understand their relationship to each other and explore their shared values. This concept is always alluded to in my classroom discussions of seduction novels as social and political texts. Through this project, I hope that students begin to consider how music constructs a shared social and political community and that they begin to transfer this newly formed understanding to their interpretations of early American novels. For more information about Anderson’s theoretical framework, reference *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, 1983.
students can glean the purpose and potency of Rowson’s novel in a way that is more impactful and provocative than a traditional essay or research assignment.

The Charlotte Temple Soundtrack

My assignment has evolved throughout the four times I have taught it, and the final version of it, the one that I used in fall 2016, is the one that I will speak to predominantly in this article—though I will address why I amended certain components of the assignment over time for added context about the intentionality of the project’s aims. The “soundtrack” project includes four parts, and the full assignment sheet is listed in the Appendix to this article for reference. In this essay, I will discuss each part of the project in detail. To provide an overview, though, the four parts of the project are as follows:

1. In groups, students choose songs for a soundtrack of a potential movie version of the book and justify their decisions in a few paragraphs for each song. The paragraphs are grounded in a close reading of the novel and the selected song lyrics.
2. The groups create an album cover for their soundtrack, paying attention to the visual cues and imagery they invoke in this representation.
3. The groups conduct a podcast in which they explain and defend the final list of songs they decide upon for their soundtrack.
4. The groups present their song list, the album cover, and the most profound takeaways from their podcast to the class. Following these presentations, the class holds one last general discussion in which the novel is discussed again, this time including what the differing student groups discovered from their soundtrack choices, their album cover, their podcasts, and their own presentations about their findings as well as those of their peers.

Prior to enumerating on each of the assignment parts, it is necessary to discuss the educational foundations underpinning the fruitfulness of such a project in the American literature classroom. This assignment is grounded in the pedagogical practice of active-learning. During a conventional lecture on a book, drama, or poem, students passively listen
as their instructor imparts what he/she perceives as the most pressing issues within the piece of literature. While lecturing about background information on a text is useful to aid in understanding its historical and theoretical context—and this approach is embedded in my assignment sequence—lecturing alone is "not suited for teaching higher-orders of thinking, such as application, analysis, synthesis, or evaluation" (Bonwell 32). Through the creation of a soundtrack and podcast, students synthesize the material discussed in class and take it a step further, adding and testing their own ideas about this novel's thematic aspirations because they choose individual songs they see as comparatively relevant. In addition, they ruminate on this relevance in the written portion of the assignment. Next, they evaluate with their small groups the validity of their connections during the podcast, and after presenting their small group findings to the larger class, they once again discuss and test their ideas with the larger group, all of whom who have now undergone a similar, in-depth examination of the novel.

During each of these activities, students tap into the highest levels of Bloom's taxonomy of learning. At the lower end of this taxonomy is knowledge (the ability to recite facts and information) and comprehension (the ability to summarize and explain what has just been learned). By employing the skill sets ingrained in active-learning processes, students are challenged to pursue and master the higher-level learning categories of Bloom's taxonomy, including analysis (the ability to compare, contrast, and draw conclusions), synthesis (the ability to examine broader context and integrate new ideas), and evaluation (the ability to think complexly about a concept without a definitive right/wrong answer, to generate a new product based on knowledge gleaned from lower-order categories, and to defend and judge one's own and others' thoughts). There is no one part of the assignment that matches explicitly with each of these taxonomic categories; rather, each part invites students to engage in a variety of higher-order skills. The writing portion in which they compare contemporary song lyrics to specific textual moments can be considered both

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2 Though first formulated in 1956, Bloom’s taxonomy of learning is still deemed foundational to education theorists. Since then, new iterations of Bloom’s original hypothesis have been conjectured and debated by scholars, though the crux of the taxonomic structure still remains a cornerstone of educational theory. For a historical and theoretical overview of Bloom’s taxonomy in education circles, reference Mary Forehead’s “Bloom’s Taxonomy.” Emerging Perspectives on Learning, Teaching, and Technology, vol. 41, 2010, pp. 41-47.
analysis and synthesis, while the podcast, album cover, and final, larger class debriefing can be perceived as traversing all of these categories but perhaps remaining most closely aligned with Bloom's highest level, evaluation. It is during these latter activities that students defend their choices for their soundtracks, generate new hybrid ideas and materials based on what they've learned in the past, consider and debate others' generative choices, all with the final goal of better understanding the impact and significance of Susanna Rowson's influential novel. In the end, this assignment aims to enlist students' attentiveness and critical acumen at every level. It tasks students to conceive of new avenues for understanding the novel for themselves and others like them, to appreciate Charlotte Temple's cultural significance, and to consider how the novel's themes, while historically grounded, remain pertinent today.

Assignment Part One: Short Comparative Essays and the Class Introduction to the Novel

On the day the assignment is passed out, I assign the groups consisting of four to five students and explain to the class that the overall objective of the assignment is to locate ten songs that will create a soundtrack, or full playlist, of an imagined, contemporary movie version of Charlotte Temple. The written portion of the assignment culminates in ten close reading sections in which the groups examine songs that speak to specific plot points in the book. For each song they choose, students compose one to three paragraphs considering how that song and how the novel explore a similar, connective theme. In these close reading paragraphs, they are required to use evidence to support their conclusions about the texts' themes; that is, they must identify specific lines from the books and specific lyrics from the songs to develop the "close reading" sections of their analyses.

3 In the first incarnation of this project, I assigned students to groups of two or three. I found that this small number of groups made our discussion day feel over-saturated with content and repetitive thematically. You'll notice on the assignment sheet in the Appendix that I include strict guidelines about the number of songs the students can discuss and the level of preparedness they must have on the day of class. With too many groups and not enough specifications about time length and format, the presentations ended up taking multiple course periods rather than the one for the project presentations and discussion that should optimally be used. The assignment was adjusted accordingly and worked seamlessly in fall 2016. Ultimately, I would aim to have no more than four presentations, five at most, so that the discussion feels fresh during the small group and larger group session. Originally, I assigned smaller groups because the main emphasis of the assignment was the written portion, but as you'll see from the development of this assignment, the podcast portion that is discussed in here has become the main focus—again a portion of the assignment that is best-served with more students per group.
In every class I have taught this assignment thus far, students tend to choose popular music as the foundation for their soundtrack. This natural inclination on their parts lends itself to a discussion about the canon. Popular music seems to work well for Rowson's novel because Rowson's writing, too, was targeted to and enjoyed by the masses: the novel's readable style and simplistic prose doesn't lend itself as easily to Handel as it does to One Direction. In Elias Nason’s 1870 biography of Rowson, he remarked at length on the appeal of *Charlotte Temple* to those of all classes and backgrounds, assessing that

[The book] has stolen its way alike into the study of the divine and into the workshop of the mechanic; into the parlor of the accomplished lady and the bedchamber of the waiting-made; in the log-hut on the extreme border of modern civilization and into the forecastle of the whale-ship on the long ocean. It has been read by the gray-bearded professor after his 'divine Plato' . . . [and] by the school girl stealthfully in her seat at school. (50)

Like popular music, the seduction novel in early America became a touchstone across gender, age, and class divides. Today, we can imagine travelling in an airport and hearing a conversation about the newest Bruno Mars song from a cashier at the local fast food chain during a layover, from the teenage passenger next to us on the plane, from the flight attendant as the plane is landing, from the business professional waiting on a plane to arrive, and/or from an academic like you or me perhaps musing on the lyricism and poetic attributes of the song to whomever he/she might be conversing with in this common space. And of course that this type of music would be playing in the background during any of these encounters is likely, affirming the connective nature of popular music even for those who do not consider themselves fans of the genre. *Charlotte Temple*, whether one respects its simplistic style, was likewise a novel of almost forced bonding in early America because it was one of the first novels that reached and touched such a broad cross-section of readers and seeped into a shared cultural consciousness.

Building from this knowledge, one question this project brings into focus is why early American readers responded so profoundly and expressively to Rowson's novel, while contemporary readers often find the prose exaggerated and lachrymose. Although students
seem intuitively to ascribe popular music to Charlotte Temple's themes, they do not always correlate this relationship with the experience early American readers shared with the novel.

Further, the emotional appeal of Charlotte's journey seems forced and not up to the standards of what is oft considered "literary" fiction. As a result, the background information I provide to students prior to their independent work on Charlotte Temple centers on the seduction genre's wide popularity and emotional import. We discuss why novel reading was thought of as scandalous in the first days of the Republic—i.e. why reading sermons was thought to be more useful than reading romances. This lecture emphasizes the notion that while we may be reading "old books" in this class that the canon has only recently adapted to including writers who were popular like Rowson. In other words, one "old book" is not necessarily like the other: Rowson's writing does not mirror Herman Melville's and should be appreciated and discussed differently. In this interpretation, I am obviously indebted to prior American literary scholars' work on sentimental fiction, most notably Jane Tompkins, who argues in her now classic Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860 that a writing style that "may seem saccharine or merely pathetic to us" could potentially "move hundreds of thousands of readers" (xvii). Susanna Rowson was an innovator and mistress of this brand of potent rhetoric, and though such an emphasis on inducing feeling may run counter to what undergraduates are accustomed to studying in an English course, this style was infused with cultural capital and transformative force when written and read in the early Republic.

Significantly, taking sentimental rhetoric seriously is not only a problem posed in early American literature. In a study of popular music, Mitchell Morris suggests that we dismiss popular music that touches us deeply because we are afraid of the judgment we may receive

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4 In two of the semesters that I implemented this project, I required students to read Blythe Forcey's excellent article about Charlotte Temple's formative impact on early American readers' social and political identity. Whether students read her article, her theoretical framework still provides another touchstone for my lecture about the seduction novel's influence as a genre in America. Forcey asserts that because "the nation was changing and growing at an unprecedented rate" that it "did not feel homogeneous or stable" (225). She contends that the matronly narrative voice and instructive rhetoric that Rowson provided readers helped them construct an American experience that was navigable. Through Charlotte's mistakes, citizens could learn how to protect themselves from a primarily immigrant existence that felt added by a recent war and sudden lack of national identity. This allegorical reading lends credence to an analysis of Charlotte Temple as grounded in time and place, one of the bases that led to the formation of this project. For Forcey's full article, see "Charlotte Temple and the End of Epistolarity," American Literature, vol. 63, no. 2, June 1991, pp. 225-42.
for being affected by it. He relates that when he expresses that he studies musicians such as Barry Manilow, he is often encountered with nervous laughter, along with a smile and an instant recognition of the artist’s music. "A good part of this protective frivolity," Mitchell suggests, "comes from our uncertainty about the ... songs’ historical and cultural embeddedness. We try to talk about them but our only languages are those of autobiography and personal response. And who among us wants to be seen so nakedly in public?" (3).

Mitchell’s work with popular music produces the same response that contemporary readers often have regarding sentimental fiction. Readers and listeners may respond to the emotion in these texts privately, but they fear taking them seriously aloud, perhaps because they do not want their own emotions and sympathy made public for fear of ridicule and/or perhaps because, in a scholarly setting, rationality is thought to be privileged and emotionality suppressed. Asking students to conduct a close linguistic analysis of Rowson’s novel alongside lyrics from popular music during the first part of the assignment is one way to validate theoretical inquiry of sentimentalism as a genre and to broach the idea that emotion has a legitimate space in the academic classroom.

Thus in the vein of scholars such as Jane Tompkins and Nina Baym (among others), I instruct students on that first day of lecture when the assignment is distributed that they are joining a larger project in American literary studies that lends credence to including sentimental fiction and writing by women in classes such as the early American Literature survey.⁵ Through this lesson, I hope first to encourage students to understand the potential and functionality of sentimental literature and second to invite them think of themselves as scholars and participants in the act of literary recovery. The written, close reading portion of the assignment in which they compare song lyrics and plot points thematically is certainly not a perspective students will be able to find anywhere else in scholarship about Charlotte

⁵ As referenced throughout this essay, my teaching practices and scholarly endeavors are indebted to Jane Tompkins’ and Nina Baym’s foundational work to bring women writers into the canon and to reclaim sentimentality as a scholarly field of study. The American Literature survey courses in undergraduate classrooms around America would be at an astonishing deficit without their scholarship. While Tompkins is cited explicitly in this essay, Nina Baym’s critical masterpiece, Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels By and About Women Writers in America, 1820-1870, Cornell University Press, 1978, is mentioned only in passing. As such, I include a reference to it in this footnote to acknowledge the weight of her work’s influence on this assignment, particularly as it pertains to helping students become impassioned about recovering lost voices in the early American canon.
Temple, which serves to aid them in feeling increased ownership over their work and to perceive themselves as providing a unique niche in the field of recovery and the resultant elevation of sentimental fiction in the canon. While many students may not be confident in literary analysis, especially when it comes to some of the first novels ever composed, they generally always feel confident in providing opinions and ideas about their chosen songs, which thereby aids their confidence in crafting and sharing their own literary criticism on the novel.

Part Two: The Album Cover

After being introduced to the novel, choosing songs for their soundtracks, and writing their close-reading paragraphs, the next major part of the assignment requires students to create an album cover. The cover art portion is open creatively, the only restrictions being that the groups must be able to explain the visual decisions they made when crafting their art work. Why did they include certain symbols, images, or phrases? What colors did they choose, and why? Students are required to list the songs on one side of the album art, and they must be mindful of their font or handwriting, thinking about each visual cue on the soundtrack as relating back to the tone and purpose of the novel. This part of the project has led to a myriad of different formats and styles. For instance, one group created a black poster with a single, dead rose protruding out of the middle of the dark background. The students shared with the class that the rose symbolized the hope of romantic love and a "happy ending" that dies slowly in the novel, and the solid black background was emblematic of the dark, foreboding mood of the book. On this poster, cursive script in silver marker was used for the font that listed the chosen songs, and the students suggested that the color silver was used to remind audiences that Charlotte's baby, Lucy—who survives when her mother does not at the novel's conclusion—acts as a "silver lining" in the midst of an otherwise dark picture of the early American Republic.
Another album cover (see fig. 1) was presented digitally to the class on a PowerPoint slide. This group mimicked their cover art from the MTV shows, *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom*. The fonts used are similar to the script the reality shows use, and Montraville, Charlotte's paramour, holds a book, an illustrative decision made according to the students to allude to the dangers that fiction posed to early American readers. Students in this group spoke of Montraville perhaps being guided by the raciness of novels in his seduction of Charlotte, and they depicted him as moving and gesticulating while his lover sits passively next to him. (In fact, they specifically referred to situating him in a "man-splaining" pose next to his young lover because he is the one who dominates the entirety of the couple's relationship.) Further, they referenced the "unreality" of "reality tv" shows today, remarking that Rowson's book, which is subtitled, "A Tale of Truth," employs the same marketing device of being "real" as contemporary shows like *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom* that depict the subject matter of unwed, teen motherhood. Both the reality shows and the novel purport a "slight veil of fiction," though the degree of what "slight" may mean is determined by the creators of the respective plots of these pieces (Rowson 37).

Moreover, students referenced the morality ascribed to in the television shows and the book, citing specifically Rowson's preface in which the author avows that she aims to "be of service to some who are so unfortunate as to have neither friends to advise, or understanding to direct them, through the various and unexpected evils that attend a young and unprotected woman in her first entrance to life" (37). The narrator's intrusions in *Charlotte Temple*, they argued, are similar to those of celebrity psychologist, Dr. Drew Pinsky, who guides the morality behind the MTV shows both on and off screen through his advocacy of the programs' ethical usefulness to young female viewers. Discussing this shared approach of using the idea of truth rather than the reality of it to market a text to reach young, impressionable audiences across class and geographical boundaries with a specific ethical message helped provide students with a frame for understanding the power of Rowson's writing. In addition, it generated understanding not only for Rowson's aims in this instance but also for her readers,
many of whom students could now identify with more easily because of the discussion this cover art provided. They, as young, unassuming readers, were exactly the demographic audience Rowson was attempting to reach in her composition.

Furthermore, the particular cover shown and referenced in the above paragraph was drawn by a student in the fall 2016 class who expressed excitement about using his artistic talents in a literature course. One benefit that bears mentioning of a multi-faceted project like this one is that it reaches students who may have different learning styles, especially those who are more auditory or visually inclined. After all, it allows room for engagement with the material in a variety of ways. While American Literature survey courses usually consist of English majors, minors and students who are taking the class to fill a certain other college requirement or for the sheer enjoyment of it, may be particularly drawn to the different avenues of analysis that this project offers.

Parts Three (the Podcast) and Four (the Presentations and Full-Class Discussion)

For three years, I taught this project with just the above two out-of-class requirements, with the third and final part of the project consisting of a presentation to the class about the students' song choices and album covers. What I began to discover, though, was that students were only finding universality as the takeaway about the themes they encountered. Notice in the analysis discussed above that the MTV reality show alluded to in the album cover is more or less equated thematically with *Charlotte Temple* in a seamless fashion. While this work is useful in forming that relatability with Charlotte’s narrative that I first aspire to elicit, it loses some of the nuance that a more thoughtful study of seduction narratives should render. A similar thematic relativity would occur when students would study song lyrics with plot points in their close reading paragraphs. For instance, if one listens to Taylor Swift lyrics, it becomes almost impossible not to find the theme of unrequited love embedded in her music. The 2008 song, "You Belong with Me," has appeared on numerous student "soundtracks" for this project over the years. Swift croons in it: "Can't you see I'm the one who understands you? Been here all along, so why can't you see? You belong with me." This lovelorn sensibility is echoed during multiple plot points in Rowson's novel. Like Swift's speaker in her song, Charlotte waits patiently (or "all along") on Montraville to acknowledge her love. In one example, Rowson writes about Charlotte waiting for Montraville to pay her a visit, "But often,
very often, did he promise to renew his visits, and forgetful of his promise, leave her to mourn her disappointment. What painful hours of expectation would she pass! . . . she would lean her head on her hands, and give free vent to her sorrows, then catching at some new hope, she would again renew her watchful position . . . with a heart bursting with disappointed love and wounded sensibility” (84). The overwrought style of Rowson’s seduction novel provides the emotional pull for readers that hearkens easily to Swift’s beseeching music and the lyrics in her song. Whereas contemporary readers may resist the overwrought, emotional language Rowson uses (i.e. “a heart bursting with disappointed love”), thinking about the words in the context of a song they identify with in which the music does the emotional work helps bring about a closer understanding of the emotions Rowson sought to convey in her writing and that early audiences responded to.

The first two experiences I had with his project, then—when I only assigned the thematic paragraphs, the album covers, and a presentation—I would only consider semi-successful overall. Students began to understand why seduction novels were important in early America, and they were much more empathetic in class discussions toward Charlotte and open-minded about the idea that sentimental novels could evoke dramatic emotions in their readers. The resulting platitudes, however, that all literature is universal and confronts the same themes does not reach the depth of query that I think Rowson’s novel deserves or that foregrounds a college-level English course, especially one that introduces theoretical inquiry about sentimentality as a genre. Consequently, in fall 2016, I included a reflective group podcast that necessitates more thoughtful contemplation about the students’ findings.

Through the addition of this podcast, I desired to bring the students to more nuanced discussions in which they could tease out how Rowson—who was certainly touching on universal ideas of love, gender, marriage, and seduction—was still a product of her own time and place, just as the music they were choosing is reflective of its own time and place. To help make these distinctions even clearer, I included in the assignment sheet an addendum that students could only choose songs that were produced in the past fifteen years, with the objective to make political discussions about the songs more productive. Whereas students were choosing primarily recent popular music in previous years, they were not required to do so—or to think about how their instinctive choices could be interpreted from a socio-historical perspective. Shifting the project’s goals inspired me to force this already helpful outcome of
students choosing popular music within a specific timeframe to its obvious extreme. To aid them further in critically comparing the songs with the novel, I decided to provide students with specific, probing questions to consider when meditating together on their song choices and the novel. Copied below is the language from the assignment sheet about the purpose of the podcast and the questions that the students should address within it:

Seduction narratives were popular fiction, and scholars often interpret them as politically and socially charged. The songs your group came up with pertain to our particular historical moment, but they still reference the same broad themes as early American seduction novels. With your group, analyze how those themes play out in more complex ways than you were able to discuss in your paragraphs. Questions you may consider include: What is similar in how courtship, women's roles, and politics appear in your songs and Charlotte Temple? More importantly, what is different and unique to each time period, and why? Are the way these themes play out and compare to Charlotte Temple different based on genre? Would Charlotte Temple be a story contemporary readers could relate to, if you were to create an actual movie with your soundtrack? How could your soundtrack help create a movie contemporary viewers would watch? What would hinder Charlotte's popularity with today's audiences, even if you did include contemporary songs? What would be different or the same about her story today, given our political climate? (D'Amico Assignment Sheet, Appendix)

After the students gave their presentations about their soundtracks to the class, I instructed them that we would have one last full-class discussion about Charlotte Temple, using the conclusions they had arrived at in their podcasts as a starting point. I referred colloquially to this exercise as a "class discussion on steroids," explaining that the purpose was that they would come to similar heightened levels of thought about the novel that they would had they drafted an independent research paper. If we're thinking of scholarship as a conversation between experts on a subject, I posited, then each group should have hypothetically ruminated enough independently and conducted enough outside conversation about the themes undergirding the text that they could now all be considered experts. Therefore, our final class discussion on the novel should mimic a conversation between
scholars about a genre and text whose specifics and themes they would be well acquainted with. The addition of this podcast and final class-wide debriefing have proven integral to this assignment's success, and the substantive conclusions the students arrived at produced some of the most well-thought analyses I have experienced in an undergraduate classroom about the seduction genre to date.

As such, in this part of the essay, I thought I would share some of the conclusions my fall 2016 students came to in their reflective podcasts because, again, it was through this medium that the bulk of the theoretical leaps students arrived at concerning the novel were achieved. Every group in fall 2016 ended up with more songs than they could include in their ten-count soundtrack. As a student in Group One remarked, "Just that we were able to pick songs was telling," suggesting that she thought it would prove a more arduous task to find applicable songs than it actually was (Group One). Another student explained that she would listen to music randomly, and think, "Oh, wait! This applies!" (Group One). Nearly all of the students commented across the groups that they at first felt restricted by the fifteen-year stipulation that I added. However, the plethora of songs that worked for the project soon began to feel almost overwhelming. This "problem" speaks directly back to that result of thematic universality that comes out of this assignment without the podcast and ensuing discussion. These types of comments were all made near the beginning of the student podcasts, and I believe the students felt as if they would end up discussing that not much had changed from Rowson's time until now either politically or socially, especially because the written portion of the assignment does not force them to consider differences in depth; rather it focuses on thematic similarities.

In previous years when I would try to insert a more historically-grounded interpretation about Charlotte Temple prior to including this podcast assignment, I almost felt as if I were undercutting the hard work the students had accomplished by finding thematic unity in the novel and their song choices. The podcast portion of this assignments encourages students to take the critical work they have done via their close readings a step further, though, especially in that it requires that they contend with the political and social function of Rowson's text. In The Seduction Novel of the Early Nation, Donna Bontatibus affirms that seduction novels bespeak their time and place purposefully. "The pathos elicited by the seduction of Charlotte Temple . . . allows readers the imaginative space to reevaluate the stigmas attached
to the fallen woman, the single mother, and the child born outside of marriage," she writes, further assessing that "This imaginative space allows the audience to consider decriminalizing premarital pregnancy by holding seducers accountable for their actions even when the legal systems did not" (7). When students considered how Charlotte's story would play out today, they began to realize distinctions in Charlotte's story that make it specifically geared toward an early American audience. They acknowledged that young people often struggle with the same obstacles that those in the eighteenth century faced: universal issues of gender and class that the novel address are still problematic and patriarchal power structures still exist that encourage women to remain passive. However, that these same struggles exist does not denote that they have remained exactly the same or that they were reacted to in the same ways in post-Revolutionary America, delineations which the students began to discover during their podcast small-group discussions.

For example, in a comparative discussion between Charlotte Temple and the John Mayer song, "Daughters," students began to tease out how distorted family relationships are highlighted in Rowson's novel. One student shared that Charlotte's "parents weren't there to guide her . . . Had she just been around her parents to see their relationship . . . maybe she wouldn't have been so easily swayed" (Group Two). Students blamed Charlotte's mother and father equally, though they wondered most why Charlotte's mother did not direct her daughter about love and courtship in particular. Why, if her mother was "mutually in love with her dad didn't she go and just be like, 'that's not the way your dad treated me'"?, they queried (Group Two). This discussion led them to consider critically the ways that young people today interact with their parents, and the students discussed that perhaps because Charlotte's mother came from a working-class background and/or felt deferential toward Mr. Temple, that she therefore did not take the initiative they would expect "good" parents to take. Mothers today, they assessed, especially those who were married to someone of Mr. Temple's class and appeared so externally sensitive, would take a more hands-on approach to raising their children.

While the students in this particular group moved on to a different avenue of analysis when speaking about the novel, this conversation laid the groundwork for an even more insightful class-wide discussion in which students were able to extend these thoughts about parenting further, finally considering how family roles have altered from early American to
now. They referenced in our wider discussion that when Charlotte is on her deathbed, it is her father, not her mother, who visits her, and she never seems to wonder where her mother is. "My adored father!" Charlotte cries when she sees him, and Rowson proceeds to write that "Every eye gave testimony to what the heart felt—but all were silent" (122). This latter sentence reveals the difficulties that lie beneath the surface of Charlotte's relationship with her parents. As my class concluded together, Charlotte's family relies on implied manners rather than constructive dialogue when it comes to their relationship. This politeness leads to a disconnect that cannot be repaired in Charlotte's lifetime, and Charlotte's mother is only peripherally allowed to take part in her daughter's life, again belying the family's ability to truly connect.

What it is significant to note as an instructor is that rather than simply making general connections between the songs students found (like Mayer's "Daughters") and the themes in the book (like family relationships), students began to think deeply about the differences in the two pieces that reflect their time periods—doing so while still regarding Charlotte's character and story sympathetically because of their personal connections with the music they selected. Moreover, students had read and responded to the novel so deeply that they were easily able to cite specific moments and find textual evidence to support their claims during our class-wide discussion, a benefit that elevated the overall level of argument and discourse.

The distinct, socio-historical framework of the novel was perhaps best accentuated during the concluding moments of one of the small group's podcasts when students addressed what would have happened to Charlotte today had she been roaming around a city street, pregnant and alone. "Maybe it's possible that if the story was happening today Charlotte wouldn't have died," one student remarked: "That's not to say that she wouldn't have had the possibility of bleeding out and dying, but it might've changed the ending of the story for her." "Yeah," another student responded, "she would have had more help because there's more available, like the twenty-four hour clinics, and there's [sic] people who genuinely care and have the resources to help her." The first student, chuckling a little, replied, "Now food isn't just for rich people" (Group One). After this moment in the podcast, this group falls silent, as if lost in thought, and then another student speaks up, and the podcast ends with his final thought:
But to what extent then is that a result of books like *Charlotte Temple*? Society has developed a more progressive view that we need to help people who need help. Society has made great strides to take care of people who couldn't help themselves to prevent things like this. I can only imagine that it is the result of books like *Charlotte Temple* that highlight this and bring it to the masses. I guess *Charlotte Temple* personalized stories like this. This kind of stuff happened before but nobody read about it and nobody made it personal and made us realize that this kind of stuff is going on and there's probably something we can do about it. (Group One)

What I hope for my students to glean from the novel is exactly what they came to on their own through this project and is highlighted in the above assessment: this novel changed people's hearts about young women's struggles because it made such stories "personal." In doing so, it sparked political and social conversations about issues that resonate still today. As such, we owe some of the sympathetic approaches that we have in the United States toward "the hapless fair" and "the anxious parent" (38) to Rowson's bestselling novel, and we should aspire to continue to elicit sympathy and subsequently action through the practice of reading and writing about shared experiences.
Works Cited


Bonwell, Charles C. "Enhancing the Lecture: Revitalizing a Traditional Format. *New Directions in Teaching and Learning*, vol. 67, Fall 1996, pp. 31-44.


Nason, Elias. *A Memoir of Mrs. Susanna Rowson, with Elegant and Illustrative Extracts from Her Writings in Prose and Poetry*. NY: 1870.


This group project has FOUR parts.

Part One: Close Reading and Analysis of Song Lyrics and the Novel's Text

Over the next week, we’re going to be discussing the themes prevalent in Early American novels, particularly seduction narratives. You and your partners are going to tease out a few of these themes by creating a "soundtrack" for Charlotte Temple. Your playlist should contain at least ten songs, and you must make comparisons between the songs' lyrics and a particular theme that you see evident in this early American novel. You should have at least one paragraph per song (though you can certainly do more). The only caveat for the music is that it must come from the past fifteen years: it can be any genre or type as long as it was released within the period from 2001-forward.

How you divvy up the work amongst your team is up to you. You may decide to separate out a particular chapter or chapters that you feel are significant and choose songs based on the events that occur in them and divide these amongst your team. Or, you might meet and come up with songs together thematically and then decide who is going to write what. You must use direct quotes from the novels and specific song lyrics to support your choice of song and how it resonates with a deeper issue within the text.

On October 26th, you will turn in a paper with your group members' names on it that lists, chronologically in terms of plot, the songs you've chosen, along with a paragraph beneath explaining each choice. We will discuss and listen to parts of your song choices in class, so be prepared to stand up and justify your choices if asked.

The paper will be in MLA style, including a references page for the text. Use Times New Roman, 12 Point Font. The paragraphs beneath your song choice may be single-spaced,
though you should have a double-space between your paragraphs. Your references page will be double-spaced.

Along with your paper, I'd also like for you to turn in a short paragraph, explaining how each of your group members participated in creating the finished product that you've included. This paragraph will be separate from your main project and will be turned in at the start of the class.

**Part Two: The Album Cover**

In addition to turning in a group paper, you will also create an album cover for your soundtrack. Along with your song choices, this album cover will be presented to the class on the day you turn in your paper. The album cover should be the best visual representation of the novel's tone and theme that you can imagine. When you present your cover to the class, you will discuss why you chose what images you did, why the colors are as they are, and what fonts or handwriting style you chose and why. If there are any lyrics or quotes on the cover, you will explain their significance as well. Creative license about what you include on the cover is completely open: you simply need to be able to explain why you made the choices you did.

On the front or back of the cover, you should have a list of the ten songs you chose.

**Part Three: The Podcast**

While perhaps the "easiest" part theoretically, this piece of your analysis will probably prove the most difficult logistically. AFTER you have completed your soundtrack list and album cover, your entire group must get together and discuss what you've written about and created. Seduction narratives were popular fiction, and scholars of ten interpret them as socially and politically charged, too. The songs your group came up with pertain to our particular historical moment, but they still reference the same broad themes as early American seduction novels. With your group, analyze how those themes play out in more complex ways than you were able to discuss in your paragraphs. Questions you may consider include: What is similar in how courtship, women's roles, and politics appear in your songs and *Charlotte Temple*? More importantly, what is different and unique to each time period, and why? Are the way these themes play out and compare to *Charlotte Temple* different based on genre? Would *Charlotte
Temple be a story contemporary readers could relate to, if you were to create an actual movie with your soundtrack? How could your soundtrack help create a movie contemporary viewers would watch? What would hinder Charlotte's popularity with today's audiences, even if you did include contemporary songs? What would be different or the same about her story today, given our political climate?

Your group will discuss these issues—and whatever else you discover after having thought holistically about your soundtrack—for at least 25 minutes. During your conversation, one of your group members must record the conversation and creates a podcast. The podcast should be sent to me on the day your project is presented to the class. Everyone should contribute equally (or at least as equally as possible) to the Podcast to receive credit. Through this part of the assignment, you will delve into the deeper critical analysis skills about the nuances of Charlotte Temple that an upper-division English course requires.

Part Four: Presenting and Bringing It All Together
On October 26, you will share your project with the class. That is, you will tell your classmates about what songs you chose for your soundtrack and discuss how your album cover looks, and why. Rather than discussing each song in detail, you will choose two or three songs you think best convey a theme in Charlotte Temple, and you should be prepared to play clips from the songs in class. After each group has spent 10-12 minutes presenting their projects, we will discuss your Podcasts as a group. No group should exceed 12 minutes during their presentation: come prepared with your songs and who will be discussing what during your presentation. Your entire group will be deducted 5 points off for each minute you go over time. Note that each group member must participate in the presentation.

After sharing your projects, each group should then be prepared to share what they learned from the Podcast, and everyone in class will contribute to a broader discussion about themes in Charlotte Temple. Because you will have already discussed the book at a heightened level for 25 minutes, created a soundtrack, and co-written a paper about theme, each class member will be expected to be engaged throughout the discussion, offering questions and acting as an expert on the novel and the music.
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