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The American Dream Revisited: Marginalized Perspectives in Early American Selected Texts

Abstract

This study examines the profound impact of the American Revolutionary War on the literary landscape of the era, revealing that themes of isolation, rebelliousness, democracy, loss, and death became defining characteristics of the literature. Through the analysis of a few selected literary texts and drawing on existing research, this study aims to explore the impacts of the war on the literature and contribute to the current understanding of the period's literary heritage, providing evidence of how the war's tumultuous events shaped the creative expression of writers and influenced the broader literary canon. This study uses a directed qualitative content analysis approach, following the framework proposed by Hsieh and Shannon, (2005). The study highlights the themes of the selected post-revolutionary war literature and proves that the literature is always affected by the scenario.

Keywords: American Revolutionary War, Literary Heritage, Post-Revolutionary War Literature

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Abstract

This study examines the profound impact of the American Revolutionary War on the literary landscape of the era, revealing that themes of isolation, rebelliousness, democracy, loss, and death became defining characteristics of the literature. Through the analysis of a few selected literary texts and drawing on existing research, this study aims to explore the impacts of the war on the literature and contribute to the current understanding of the period's literary heritage, providing evidence of how the war's tumultuous events shaped the creative expression of writers and influenced the broader literary canon. This study uses a directed qualitative content analysis approach, following the framework proposed by Hsieh and Shannon, (2005). The study highlights the themes of the selected post-revolutionary war literature and proves that the literature is always affected by the scenario.

Keywords:

American Revolutionary War, Literary Heritage, Post-Revolutionary War Literature

Introduction

The literature is a personification of the era. It is because the writer, being a product of the age, mirrors the experiences gained through time. Similarly, the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783) influenced the literature produced during that period. It also affected the literary works, composed after the war. Rodriguez-Lopez (2007) states that the American revolt was revolutionary because it was the first time a colony fought for and

won independence from its ruling country, inspiring other countries to do the same in the centuries that followed. Meanwhile, MCCLOSKEY (2025) analyzes that the war had a devastating impact, causing widespread destruction, joblessness, death, illness, and displacement, and severely disrupting lives and communities. The literature of this era is based upon the themes of isolation, desire for freedom, struggles for independence, and melancholy. According to an analysis, many writers after the war expressed the



deep feelings of loss and sadness that people were experiencing, capturing the emotional part of the war in their works (Williams, 2018). In the aftermath of the American Revolutionary War, the developing American nation struggled to forge its personal identity through its literary landscape, by presenting the objectives, complexities, sufferings, and ambitions of people struggling for individuality. Another analysis explores that in many early American stories, characters often get isolated, sick, and suffer terrible consequences. This common theme shows how worried early Americans were about being cut off from information and the dangers of not knowing what was going on (Tillman, 2024). The literature also worked as a means to convey the idea of why Americans wanted liberty and self-governance. It is evident in the analyses of the works of Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. Falvo (2024) says that the early American colonists made a bold move by creating a democratic government, breaking away from the English monarchy. This decision has had a lasting impact on American politics and continues to shape the country's governance today.

Problem Statement

The American Revolutionary War is of vital importance for the American nation's historical context. This war molded people's identity, their values, and the literature. However, there is a recognizable gap in comprehending how the literary pieces affected or shaped American literature, by having the themes of individuality, isolation, liberty, and democracy, despite knowing that the war had profound impacts on American Literature. Specifically, there is a requirement for the analysis of the literary texts of that era, as they will help to reveal how the authors played a vital role in forming identity, expressing the ideology, and going through the complexities of nation-building. The analysis will also assist us in knowing how these works contributed to the development of a distinctly American literary voice. Moreover, it is of particular note that the already existing research has not given sufficient attention to the deep connection between the intense impact of war and the literary works it produced. Furthermore, a gap exists in the comprehensive analysis of multiple literary works, with prior research typically focusing on isolated texts, thereby limiting the understanding of the American realm of literature.

This research aims to address this gap by examining the intersection of historical context, literary themes, and cultural identity in post-Revolutionary War literature, thereby providing the analysis of more diverse literary works of this crucial period in American history.

Many studies have focused primarily on the works of well-known authors, neglecting the experiences and writings of some other writers. Thus, it presents the idea that highlighting the oversight texts can add to the clarity of the literary history of that era. It will help the researcher to dive into the literature's motifs to have an inclusive analysis.

By examining the intersection of historical context and the themes in post-Revolutionary War literature, this research aims to provide a better understanding of this critical period in American literary history.

Research Objective

To explore how the American Revolutionary War influenced the themes of the literature of that era.

Research Question

How did the American Revolutionary War influence the themes of literature of that era?

Significance

This research holds considerable significance as it contributes meaningfully to the existing body of knowledge by exploring the complex relationship between literary works and the historical context of war. By examining the perspectives of multiple authors, this study provides a better and multifaceted understanding of the complex dynamics that exist between literature and war. The focused approach adopted in this research enables an in-depth analysis of selected literary texts, thereby offering valuable insights that enhance our comprehension of the subject matter.

Theoretical Framework

The present study utilizes reader response theory which enables the readers to thoroughly read the text and interpret certain dynamics of the selected American text. This study is situated within the theoretical frameworks of reader-response theory, which provides a better understanding of the

complex dynamics at play in early American literature as a product of the post-war era. Reader-response theory, as developed by scholars such as Louise Rosenblatt (1938), Wolfgang Iser (1972, 1978), and Stanley Fish (1967, 1980), emphasizes the active role of the reader in shaping the meaning of a literary text.

Analysis and Discussion

Thomas Paine's Common Sense

Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" reflects key American literary elements, including patriotism, democratic ideals, rationalism, and individualism. Paine passionately advocates for American independence, echoing the era's nationalism and democratic values. He uses reason and logic to challenge monarchy and promote democracy, emphasizing individual rights and freedoms. This influential pamphlet not only shaped American politics but also contributed to the nation's literary identity, embodying the spirit of liberty and self-governance that defines American literature. According to Kyriacou (2023), monarchy is unfair because it gives power based on birth, not merit or fairness. Democracy values equality and deserves better than rule by one person or family. This is actually the gist of the essay by Thomas Paine. This analysis aligns with the researcher's perspective, which supports Thomas Paine's concept of democracy. The critique of monarchical systems highlights the limitations of a governance structure centered on a single, elite individual, potentially disconnected from the experiences and concerns of the general public. Contrarily, Callus and Vella (2021) comment that Thomas Paine's ideas about equality and freedom are inspiring, and we also need to recognize that people with disabilities deserve the same respect and value. Disability isn't always a bad thing; it can bring unique strengths and perspectives, but disabled people cannot perform a task similar to an experienced, able person. However, this analysis diverges from the researcher's notion of equating common individuals with those who are disabled. Instead, it highlights that leadership potential is not inherently tied to birthright or social status. A democratic system, which emphasizes merit and capability, allows for individuals from diverse backgrounds to assume leadership roles,

considering the notion of "disability" in leadership irrelevant to one's socio-economic origins.

This essay highlights how Britain treated the American colonies as tools for its own gain, restricting the freedom of America to benefit its own power and wealth. This shows why they needed independence (Saini, 1992). This analysis coincides with the researcher's assertion that the American separation from Britain was necessary. It suggests that suppression by an elite power structure that suffocates creativity and intellectual freedom is unsustainable. Individuals with innovative ideas and perspectives should resist such oppression and strive for autonomy and liberty, underscoring the importance of self-determination and intellectual freedom in societal progress. Another research explores that Paine's idea of independence is about living life on your own terms. It's about having the freedom to make choices and decisions that fit your values and needs, rather than being controlled by others (Turnbull & Turnbull III, 1985). According to Paine (1908), Britain's treatment of the colonies is shameful. Even animals protect their young, but Britain exploits us for its own gain. Britain's true motives are that they protected us only to serve their own interests, not out of love or concern for us. This shows why we need independence. This analysis aligns with the researcher's perspective, highlighting the absurdity of humans tolerating the suppression of their creative potential by external forces. While animals are allowed to utilize their natural abilities, humans should similarly be free to exercise their capacities without oppressive constraints. The imposition of such constraints, as seen in the historical context of British rule, necessitates liberation and self-determination to foster a more fulfilling existence. As stated by Paine (1776), the idea for a democratic system is brilliant, as it suggests creating a fair system of government where each colony has a chance to lead, with a president chosen randomly from a selected colony. This promotes unity and equality among the colonies. The researcher favors this perspective, as it supports the notion that leaders emerging from the general population may possess a deeper understanding of common experiences. However, it is also crucial to consider that fulfilled individuals, regardless of background, might bring unique insights. Notably, this research primarily focuses on select aspects, whereas a more comprehensive

analysis might benefit from exploring additional factors, such as economic and emotional contexts, to provide a better understanding. 'Common Sense' proves the power of words. It changed people's minds and shaped history, showing how important writing can be in fighting for freedom and independence (Nelson, [2006](#)). This analysis harmonizes with the notion that environmental factors directly influence literary works. Thomas Paine's writings played a significant role in inspiring opposition to monarchical rule and advocating for separation. However, a critical examination of Paine's essay reveals a potential limitation, as it may not have adequately addressed the immediate needs of individuals experiencing depression and isolation during that time. Rather than solely focusing on opposition to monarchy, Paine's work might have been more effective had it offered strategies for coping with the prevailing despondency and alienation, promoting resilience, happiness, and independence as more pressing concerns.

The Fall of the House of Usher

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" masterfully weaves the characteristics of American literature, such as isolation, psychological turmoil, and the darker aspects of human nature. The crumbling mansion serves as a symbol of decay, mirroring the characters' mental and physical deterioration. Maslow ([1971](#)) comments on this short story that it shows how the characters' inner worlds reflect their outer reality. Poe highlights the importance of understanding human emotions and experiences, which feels relevant to the humanistic approach of focusing on real human needs and feelings. The researcher supports this analysis as it says that internal experiences, whether positive or negative, can manifest in outward behavior. The characters of Roderick Usher and his sister, Madeline exemplify this notion, as their traumatic experiences, likely including the loss of family members, may have contributed to their withdrawn and isolated behavior. This emotional turmoil potentially exacerbated Madeline's mental instability, ultimately leading to dire consequences, as evidenced by her demise. Another study reveals that Poe masterfully sets the tone with a gloomy, dark atmosphere that mirrors the creepy House of Usher. Roderick's hypersensitivity makes him incredibly emotional, and the tragic mistake of

prematurely burying Madeline adds to the horror and suspense of the story (Timmerman, [2003](#)). This analysis is in accordance with the researcher's assessment that the narrative's setting is characterized by darkness and gloom as per the scenario. While the researcher attributes Roderick's distress and depression to the presumed premature burial of his sister, which was visibly an illusion, it is plausible that his emotional state was also influenced by deeper-seated issues. Specifically, Roderick's feelings of loneliness and isolation, likely exacerbated by the loss of his family due to war and death, may have contributed significantly to his anxiety, underscoring the complex interplay between his emotional state and circumstances. According to Shen ([2008](#)), Roderick Usher's hypersensitivity and fragile mental state are reflected in his words. His nervousness and over-acuteness of senses make him question reality, blurring the lines between sanity and madness, much like the narrator's inner turmoil in the story. As stated by Nadal ([2016](#)), Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' masterfully explores the lasting impact of trauma, showing how past experiences can haunt the present like a ghost. The story highlights the creepy connection between traumatic events and the uncanny, leaving readers with a sense of unease and disconnection. This study exemplifies how post-war literature often reflects the psychological turmoil and instability experienced by characters, providing insight into the human impact of conflict.

Walt Whitman's Preface to the Leaves of Grass

Walt Whitman's 'Leaves of Grass' showcases essential American literary elements, such as the celebration of individuality, despair, and the human experience. Whitman's poetry explores themes of self-discovery, connection with nature, and the interconnectedness of all people, reflecting American ideals of freedom, inclusivity, and the pursuit of happiness. According to an analysis, Whitman's 'Leaves of Grass' is all about celebrating the beauty of everyday life, equality, and nature. He believes that the true spirit of America lies in its common people, not just its leaders and that everyone deserves respect regardless of their background. He also sees the magic in nature and finds deep connections between humans and the

natural world (Edlund, [2017](#)). This research illustrates the potential for ordinary individuals to drive revolutionary change through their innate capabilities and creativity. However, when such potential is stifled or suppressed, it can lead to detrimental consequences. The narrative employs a metaphorical comparison between a young girl and a tree, highlighting the parallels between the girl's role as a vital source of sustenance for her family and the tree's productivity. When the girl's capabilities are compromised, much like the tree's branches being broken, she experiences emotional distress, social withdrawal, and increased dependence. This shows that America could become more successful if it got independence. Coviello ([2001](#)) states that Whitman's folktale aims to spark love, friendship, and a sense of universality, blurring boundaries between author and reader and celebrating individuality in a truly innovative way. This research underscores Whitman's emphasis on love and friendship as a means to transcend isolation and foster meaningful relationships. His work encourages individuals to cultivate their productive capacities and resist external forces that might stifle their personal growth and development.

Thomas Jefferson's Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence

Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence showcases crucial American themes, including liberty, democracy, and the pursuit of happiness. The document's persuasive expression of individual rights, rebellion against tyranny, and vision for a new nation embodies the American spirit, influencing the country's literary and philosophical identity. Its emphasis on freedom and self-governance resonates with core American values. Jefferson's Declaration of Independence says that everyone is created equal and deserves freedom, life, and the chance to be happy. If a government takes away these rights and becomes too controlling, people have the right, and even the duty, to stand up against them and create a new system that protects their freedom and security (Jefferson, [1776](#)). This perspective aligns with the researcher's idea that resistance against a government that impedes progress is justified. It suggests that challenging established norms and advocating for liberty can be a more viable

alternative to enduring hardship, isolation, and depression, thereby promoting a culture of empowerment and self-governance. According to research, Jefferson's Declaration says that when people declare independence, they're asserting their power and expecting the government to protect their basic rights. A good government should have clear limits on its power to ensure people's safety and happiness, and it should prioritize their well-being (Tsesis, [2015](#)). This literary work, set against the backdrop of the Revolutionary War, examines the popular uprising against a government perceived as failing to safeguard citizens' rights and ensure their comfort and happiness. Jefferson's Declaration of Independence highlights the importance of individual rights, like life, liberty, and pursuing happiness. This idea of personal freedom is balanced with responsibility to the great American identity, inspired by the ideal of the self-sufficient common farmer who prioritizes the common good (Jayne, [2014](#)). This analysis aligns with the researcher's perspective of the historical decision of the American people to fight for independence and supports the researcher's analysis's notion, exemplified by the farmer's appreciation for modest happiness in peace. This perspective suggests that the newly formed nation, while potentially lacking the luxuries enjoyed by their former British oppressors, would prioritize peace and liberty, addressing their rational quests. After exploring the essay, Smith ([2018](#)) reveals that the iconic phrase 'all men are created equal', by Thomas Jefferson, has evolved over time. Originally meant in a more limited way, it was later reinterpreted and expanded by social movements to push for greater equality and justice. This research critically examines the essay and portrays the idea that the post-war American experience exemplified the principle of equality among individuals, as societal dynamics appeared to transcend traditional hierarchies and notions of superiority or inferiority.

Self-Reliance by Ralph Waldo Emerson

The essay "Self-Reliance" by Ralph Waldo Emerson focuses on the relationship between humans and self-dependability and is a reflection of human freedom, individualism, and trust in one's own intuition (O'Dwyer, [2012](#); Butler, [2001](#)). Being true to yourself means being a nonconformist, not following the crowd. Trusting yourself is key, as it

resonates deep within every person (Nyerere, 1967). According to an analysis, this essay suggests that true solitude isn't just about physical isolation, but also mental clarity. Nature has a way of grounding us, bringing us back to reason, faith, and a sense of something greater than ourselves, helping us shed our egos and petty concerns (Emerson, [2001](#); Waterman, [1981](#)).

Bartleby, the Scrivener

Bartleby's passive resistance becomes a powerful commentary on the human condition. Daniel (2015) portrays the idea that the scholars analyze 'Bartleby, the Scrivener' in the context of early America, exploring how factors like poverty, spirituality, health, and social isolation might have shaped Bartleby's character and story. While critics attribute Bartleby's behavior to poverty or social isolation, an alternative interpretation suggests that these factors are insufficient explanations, given his potential access to financial resources through employment and opportunities for social interaction with colleagues (Radu, [2016](#); Melville, [1969](#); Melville, 1853). Instead, it is rational that the traumatic experiences of war, including exposure to violence and the deaths of some loved ones, have had a profound psychological impact on Bartleby, contributing to his withdrawal and detachment.

My Kinsman, Major Molineux

In "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" by Nathaniel Hawthorne, elements of American literature shine through. The story explores themes of identity, community, and the American Dream, as young Robin seeks fortune and connection with his esteemed relative. Hawthorne masterfully weaves in symbolism, ambiguity, and critiques of societal norms, reflecting the complexities of 19th-century America. The tale's blend of psychological insight, social commentary, and strange atmosphere solidifies its place in the American literary canon, showcasing Hawthorne's unique voice and perspective. Pedal (2008) sees Robin's journey as a path to moral growth, where he learns from his experiences in the city and leaves behind his innocent country ways. The contrast between the peaceful woods and the unfamiliar city highlights his transformation and search for values. Gaboune ([1982](#)) says that many critics see Robin's story as a classic example of an adolescent's journey to

adulthood. Robin's quest to make a name for himself in the city is also about breaking free from his parents' influence and finding his own place in society, a common challenge faced by many young people. While existing research interprets Robin's journey as a transition from adolescence to adulthood, an alternative perspective posits that his transformation represents a shift towards rationality and liberty, and a critique of corrupt societal structures, advocating for a merit-based system. This narrative highlights the American people's ability to challenge and reject the oppressive systems of Britain, ultimately establishing a more just and equitable society. According to an analysis, when Robin politely asks for directions to his relative's house, it highlights his innocence and good nature, which starkly contrasts with the city's chaotic and corrupt atmosphere (Hawthorne, [1832](#)). A different interpretation of Robin's inquiry about direction suggests that it represents a quest for guidance and clarity, rather than innocence. In the context of war, it can be contextualized within the broader human experience of navigating uncertainty, particularly in situations of conflict, where individuals may cope with complex decisions about their path forward and struggle to distinguish the most feasible or morally justifiable course of action. Alkana ([2007](#)) comments that anxiety plays a significant role in 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux'. The characters' worries and fears drive the plot and reveal the tensions beneath the surface. The riots in the story reflect the growing tensions between social classes in newly formed America, especially as the Northeast underwent industrialization and economic changes. This study can be examined through the perspective that the acquisition of power can lead to the manifestation of cruel behavior. In the context of the American experience, the historical narrative reveals a paradox, that Americans suffered under British oppression and subsequently established an independent nation. But later, certain individuals replicated the same oppressive behaviors towards the elites of the former tyrants, that they had previously experienced, suggesting a complex dynamic between power, oppression, and social identity.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the selected American texts, it can be concluded that the American War of Independence grew a sense of individualism among the masses of that era. The writers grew further

sensitivity towards self-growth and self-dependability leading to progress and enhancement in every prospect of life.

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