



The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel

Julia A. Stern

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American novels written in the wake of the Revolution overflow with self-conscious theatricality and impassioned excess. In *The Plight of Feeling*, Julia A. Stern shows that these sentimental, melodramatic, and gothic works can be read as an emotional history of the early republic, reflecting the hate, anger, fear, and grief that tormented the Federalist era.

Stern argues that these novels gave voice to a collective mourning over the violence of the Revolution and the foreclosure of liberty for the nation's noncitizens—women, the poor, Native and African Americans. Properly placed in the context of late eighteenth-century thought, the republican novel emerges as essentially political, offering its audience gothic and feminized counternarratives to read against the dominant male-authored accounts of national legitimation.

Drawing upon insights from cultural history and gender studies as well as psychoanalytic, narrative, and genre theory, Stern convincingly exposes the foundation of the republic as an unquiet crypt housing those invisible Americans who contributed to its construction.

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