In Their Own Words: Essay #2

Rough draft due for peer review 2/18, final draft due 2/25.

The task: Write a four to five page essay that explores how Welter’s theory of the cult of True Womanhood plays out or is reflected in one of the following three texts: “The Storm,” “The Yellow Wallpaper,” or Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.

Goals:
- to practice applying concepts to texts, in this case applying Welter’s analysis and theory to either one of two short stories or to an autobiography
- to begin to uncover the ways literary texts reflect, convey, and maybe challenge attitudes and customs of their day
- to continue practicing the work of focusing an essay on a specific task
- to continue working on developing theses and supporting arguments/discussions
- to practice selection and integration of quotations using MLA citation format
- to practice clear use of two sources, a primary source and a secondary source, in an essay
- to practice transitions and signposting skills—the signals that help readers follow the argument and grasp the connections the essay makes

Re-reading the sources: to write this essay effectively, you’ll need to reread Welter’s article several times. Review and track key ingredients of the cult, her analysis of the ways these standards were taught and enforced, her implications about the double binds these standards created, the beliefs about women’s and men’s nature the cult reveals, etc. (Remember Welter is not advocating these standards as comprising her own beliefs about the “true woman”; she is analyzing popular culture texts to uncover how the culture of that era seemed to define a “true woman.”)

You will also need to reread the primary source you choose several times—or in the case of Incidents, reread the chapters you feel most relevant to your argument.

As a class, let’s brainstorm some of the possible ways we might find the cult playing out or reflected in the three literary texts listed above or in any other text.
Focusing your essay: of course, your essay can’t pursue all the possible avenues of exploration—remember “essaie” means one effort, one thread, one possible thought journey through the assigned territory. Some ways to tighten your focus include:

- decide which question you most want to ask and answer in your essay
- pick one character and discover how the ideals of the cult impact this character’s behavior, experiences, etc.
- decide on the richest, most resonant quotations and ask why these seem so significant in terms of the cult
- after you’ve clustered, free-written, or listed some starting ideas, review these to see which relate easily to one another and what they add up to
- talk about your thoughts so far and see what comes out when you put it into words for a listener
- write a bunch of possible theses until you get that “aha!” feeling—that feeling that here’s something close to what you want to explore for yourself and your readers

Your audience: Write this paper to committed academic readers who might not have read the texts you’re using. This means you’ll need to include streamlined, economical overviews of both Welter’s article and the literary text you choose. You’ll also need to pay particular attention to setting up quotations for these readers. So what all goes into an overview?

Clarity and precision: In your essay, be clear and specific about which element or aspect of Welter’s theory you’re using in which piece of analysis of the literary text. Quote or paraphrase from Welter’s text to help you be specific. If paraphrasing, still cite the page number for even more precision. Of course, your essay’s analysis will focus primarily on the literary text; your examples for your argument will come from that text. What all can quotations add to your essay?
Moving between sources: Be sure your readers can always tell which source you’re quoting from. Use signal phrases in the sentence itself when you shift between sources; don’t just stick the author’s name in the parenthetical reference at the end of the sentence.

Remember P.I.E. as the basic format for body paragraphs in an analytical essay. Start paragraphs with your next distinct point or claim. Close paragraphs by explaining how evidence relates to and demonstrates the claim. Be sure by paragraph’s end, your reader knows exactly how that paragraph serves your thesis.

Review of basic essay format and requirements:
- must be word processed and double spaced
- must have brief heading in upper-left hand corner including your name, the date, and the assignment #
- must have a title
- no separate cover page nor plastic cover needed
- pages should be numbered

Grading criteria:
- grasp of the texts
- grasp of and focus on assigned task
- clarity and complexity of thesis
- depth and clarity of the discussion that supports the thesis
- clarity (which usually means linearity in Western academia) of essay’s organization
- attention to signposting your progress through the task and your discussion
- accuracy, fluidity, and relevance of quotations—this includes set-up and unpacking
- sentence level precision
- grammar, punctuation, and spelling
- stylistics like varied sentence lengths and constructions; use of vivid active verbs, use of imagery, individual voice where appropriate, etc.