

2019/2021 Fellowship Recipient

Dr. Cynthia Smith

Sentimental Sailors: Rescue and Conversion in Antebellum U.S. Literature

Sentimental Sailors: Rescue and Conversion in Antebellum U.S. Literature, recovers a largely neglected genealogy of sentimental culture that promote non-national forms of personal and collective identity. The “sentimental sailor” is an antebellum ocean figure who rescues those in physical peril, an act which always leads to conversion. Conversion, however, took on multiple meanings throughout the nineteenth century and while sentimental sailors in religious tracts converted the rescued to Christianity, writers who advocated for humanitarian movements used the sentimental sailor in a broad range of genres to influence readers toward abolition, women’s rights, and mariners’ rights. By recovering the sentimental sailor, my project reveals that the maritime world also had a sentimental literary tradition, one that contradicted the nationalist goals of the land-based sentimental heroine by encouraging Americans to convert to humanist values that could see beyond nationalism and the cultural prejudices of their communities.

Dr. Cynthia Smith received her Ph.D. in literature from Miami University.