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Novels of the Nation: Literary Theory, Post-Revolutionary Republicanism, and the Rise of the Novel in America, 1789-1812

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Katherine Anne Webster

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in English

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"Novels of the Nation: Literary Theory, Post-Revolutionary Republicanism, and the Rise of the Novel in America, 1789-1812" examines previously understudied eighteenth-century texts on neoclassical rhetoric and the belles lettres and representations of literary sensibility in a selection of early American novels. In so doing, this study both highlights the integral connections republican-era literary discourse assumed between literariness, egalitarianism, and national stability and reveals how these relationships were reflected, reinforced, and renegotiated in America's first novels. Previous critical readings of the rise of the American novel resist discussions of the genre's literary qualities. Such readings either view the novel's sentimentalism as evidence of a failed aestheticism or claim that the early American novel's value is not aesthetic, but historical. This dissertation recovers the intellectual history that accorded historical, national, and political relevance to concepts like beauty, taste, and literary pleasure in the early national period and reveals the ways in which America's first novelists

interrogated the central notion that a love of literature could be the cornerstone of a democratic society.

Chapter 1 introduces two educational texts that taught literature in the neoclassical tradition and were widely read in America in the mid to late eighteenth century: Charles Rollin's *Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres* (1732) and Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783). Studying of these works establishes a more accurate picture of how the United States' first citizens thought about central concepts like literary taste, the social role of polite literature, and the relationship between aesthetic sensibility and national identity. Subsequent chapters proceed with a close analysis of the portrayal of literary sensibility in four novels authored in the years between the Revolution and the War of 1812, concentrating on scenes of reading, poetic composition, and conversation about polite literature. Chapter 2 centers on William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), Chapter 3 focuses on Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798), and Chapter 4 discusses Isaac Mitchell's *Alonzo and Melissa* (1811) and Chapter 4 addresses Rebecca Rush's *Kelroy* (1812). Reading these novels in concert with each other reveals changing reactions to the fundamental principles of literary discourse defined in Rollin and Blair's works. In the decades between 1789 and 1812, American authors moved from wholeheartedly accepting the tenets of neoclassical literary discourse and attempting to carve out a place for themselves as the modern descendants of the Greeks and Romans, to questioning the usefulness of this discourse's focus on beauty and taste in a world where more pragmatic concerns clearly reigned, to forging an uneasy peace between traditional literary theory's optimism and the more biting, unflinchingly critical modern paradigms of literature that hoped to replace it.

The novel flourished in the context of the new United States precisely because it could manage the tensions that arose as a result of the conflict between neoclassical literary ideology and life on the ground in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth- century America. The novel could at once

aim to communicate high ideals and inspire noble sentiments (key aims of classical literature) and regulate the aesthetic responses it hoped to evince (unversed and unadorned when compared to traditional epic genres like poetry, the novel avoided the appearance of being overwrought). Further, I suggest that acknowledging the literary transformations that took place in the earliest years of the United States' independence lends us a different lens through which to view the literary landscape of the nineteenth century. "Novels of the Nation" traces a historical line that connects eighteenth-century literary discourse's emphasis on beauty, taste, and national prosperity to both Emerson's interrogations of man's genius and to Stowe's mobilization of the sentimental novel in the fight against political and social injustice.

The dissertation of Katherine Anne Webster is approved.

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Introduction

Writing in response to her protégée Myra's playful accusations that she spends too much time in the country and away from Boston, Mrs. Holmes, the principal model of female virtue in William Hill Brown's novel, *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), goes to great lengths to justify her preference for her rural setting. She starts by describing its superior natural beauty, dwelling on the "rural elegance" she finds "common to most places in the country," and writes admiringly of the prospects she can view from her estate. In her letter to Myra, however, Mrs. Holmes does not rely solely on her own eloquence. Explaining that her love for her sequestered home is kindled by her willingness to be pleased there, she invokes the supporting wisdom of Laurence Sterne:

> A great proportion of our happiness depends on our own choice—it offers itself to our taste, but it is the heart that gives it relish—what at one time, for instance, we think to be humour, is at another disgustful or insipid—so, unless we carry our appetite with us to the treat, we shall vainly wish to make ourselves happy. "Was I in a desart," says *Sterne*, "I would find wherewith in it to call forth my affections—If I could do no better, I would fasten them on some sweet myrtyle, or seek some melancholy cypress to connect myself to—I would court their shade and great them kindly for their protection—If their leaves withered, I would teach myself to mourn, and when they rejoiced, I would rejoice along with them. (15-6)

The letter continues with enthusiastic descriptions of the newly-refurbished "Temple to Apollo" on her estate, a summer house fitted with a library and musical instruments, and of the avenue, adorned with statuary in "antique" style, leading up to it. Then, bringing her remarks to a close, Mrs. Holmes explains, "I fly from the tumult of the town . . . to those of quietness and peace, 'where,'" she continues, quoting an essay by another celebrated novelist, Oliver Goldsmith, "'every breeze breathes health, and every sound is the echo of tranquility'" (17).[1]

[1] Though not cited by Brown, the phrases that Mrs. Holmes quotes here appear in *The Miscellaneous Works of*

Dedicated to the "Young Ladies of United Columbia" and promising in its preface that "the dangerous consequences of seduction [will be] exposed, and the Advantages of Female Education set forth and recommended," *The Power of Sympathy* reflects many aspects of the republican ideology that by the last quarter of the eighteenth century had gained ascendency in American thought, committing itself, as it does, to the cause of promoting virtue in the breasts of new American citizens (6-7).[2] Mrs. Holmes is clearly meant to be taken as an ideal model of republican womanhood. In the course of the novel she consults with Myra, for instance, on a variety of topics, including "certain points of female conduct" and which books are best suited for "the situation of an *American* lady," and Mrs. Holmes is the first person from whom advice is sought when questions of propriety arise (13, 53).[3] When Mrs. Holmes is first introduced to us, however, her purity and wisdom are signaled not by a dry didacticism, but by a keenly attuned aesthetic sensibility and an openness to the pleasure that both natural and man-made beauties can afford. She indulges in a lush description of her surroundings and displays a refined taste and an acquaintance with belletristic texts. She lets quotes trip from the point of her pen, evincing an admiration for literary works that goes beyond their ability to convey information to the emotive sensibilities they express and the well-constructed style of their rich descriptions. Clearly, the "Female Education" the novel condones should not only aim to make the young American

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Oliver Goldsmith, Essay I.

[2] For foundational studies of republican thought in the United States, including republicanism's emphasis on civic and moral virtue, see Bailyn and Wood. Shalhope and Gould also offer useful and comprehensive reviews of scholarly trends in twentieth-century historiography on republicanism in the pre- and post-Revolutionary age.

[3] Though not a mother herself, Mrs. Holmes exhibits many of the traits of republican motherhood discussed in Kerber's *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* and Jan Lewis's "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic." To the motherless Myra, Mrs. Holmes is indispensable. Mrs. Holmes manages her growth as both a woman and a citizen, advising Myra on what is proper for a young lady, but also for a young American.

student literate; it should also, as Mrs. Holmes's example shows, strive to make them literary.

While we will return to a more specific consideration of Mrs. Holmes's literary sensibility as it appears in the context of *The Power of Sympathy* in Chapter 2, it is worth noting her example here because she is not, of course, a singular figure in the literature of the period. Critics have long been interested in the call for a native American literature that was issued in newspapers, magazines, essays, and lectures in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and in the wish of Americans to consider themselves discerning and avid readers of polite literature.[4] In an effort to define their national character and to establish the legitimacy of republican ideology that guided both the process of statecraft and the development of a national culture, Americans turned to literary discourse—a language marked by aesthetic terminology and concerned with matters of beauty, taste, and pleasure. Why, however, was this discourse so attractive to members of a modern republican state, one that emphasized the values of virtue and civic participation and believed so fervently in the existence of inalienable rights and the equal capacities of every reasoning subject? What did it mean, in this context, to be literary—to care about form and style as well as content and to take pleasure in the beauties of texts that were crafted with an eye to communicating eloquently?

To these questions, we can add still more about Mrs. Holmes's preference for the novel, or, rather, questions about the endorsement of the novel that this preference indicates on the part of William Hill Brown. Modern scholars have often considered the novel the provenance of

[4] While the subject of early America's search for its own literary identity is touched upon often, Robert E. Spiller's *The American Literary Revolution, 1783- 1837* (1967), Russel B. Nye's *American Literary History, 1607-1830* (1970), and Everett Emerson's *American Literature, 1764-1789: The Revolutionary Years* illustrate the contours of this search most thoroughly. Spiller's work is an invaluable collection of excerpts from American poets, authors, and critics, while Nye and Emerson provide useful historical background information on America's earliest popular genres and reading practices.

women, who, relegated to the fringes of America's new democratic state, attempted to assert the voices denied them in congressional chambers by reading, responding to, and authoring novels.[5] Novels published in the early years of the republic have also, by and large, been regarded as popular literature, and, thereby, as literature that either did not lay claim to any serious aesthetic, literary identity, or else did not deserve the literary identities they claimed. Novels, the story goes, were written to entertain and were produced to satisfy the demands of a market rather than artistic intent or inspiration.[6] William Hill Brown, however, was not a fringe figure. He lived in the middle of Boston and was well known to many of the city's most prominent families as a talented writer and wit. He was even personally acquainted with the Mortons, whose family

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[5] Cathy Davidson's *Revolution and the Word* and Jane Tompkins's *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* have provided the most influential accounts of the social and political agency women assumed as both authors and readers of novels in early America, while Nina Baym's *Women's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870* examines the range of social and political issues considered by the large number of Victorian-American women novelists in the nineteenth century. Julia A. Stern's *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* extends Davidson's and Tompkins's discussions, showing that novels, in addition to claiming a place for female and other marginalized voices by the simple fact that they were published into the public sphere, also proposed methods of including fringe voices into political discourse by taking sympathy for others (as well as the Other) as one of their primary themes. Other critics, however, provide a caveat to Davidson's and Tompkins's conclusions. The novel may very well have been a vehicle for the female voice in the early days of the American republic, but oftentimes this voice spoke not against the state from which it was excluded, but in favor of its principles. Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky's introduction to *The Columbia History of the American Novel* and Shirley Samuels's article, "The Family, the State, and the Novel in the Early Republic," argue that the true function assumed by the early American novel, even those written by women, was the support of the state and its patriarchal authorities.

[6] Davidson and Tompkins are again the source of a rereading of early American fiction in this respect: they were the first to regard the novel's popularity in the 1790s-1820s as all the more reason that the genre's audiences and political intentionality should be taken seriously. Even the most comprehensive studies of early American fiction undertaken before the 1980s, however, take the novel's popularity as cause to suspect any artistic merits that its authors claimed. Herbert Ross Brown's discussion of the rise of the popular novel in America details the increasing emphasis American authors placed on the didactic value of their texts in order to make them more acceptable to post-Puritan American audiences—an emphasis that also increased the novel's readership. Brown's work is also indispensable for its discussion of the increased numbers of novels that appeared in circulating libraries up and down the Eastern seaboard starting in the 1780s (1-27). Alexander Cowie's examination of the early novel's popularity is, however, perhaps the most overtly critical of its popularity: "[American novelists'] first productions were timorously but craftily offered with every indication that the author hoped to produce a work which would satisfy the reader's craving for excitement without incurring the censure of the trustees of the nation's morals. An author's least concern, apparently, was whether his novel possessed artistic value; enough if he could reach his readers at all. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that with few exceptions, early American novelists produced works whose principle importance is historical" (9).

scandal inspired the Martin family's incest plot in *The Power of Sympathy*.[7] This well-educated, in-the-know, and active denizen of Boston turned to the novel as a genre he believed best suited to tell America's story. And he was not alone. All of the authors in this study, in one way or another, write not from the margins of their communities, but from their centers. Charles Brockden Brown and Isaac Mitchell were both newspaper men who read extensively, kept abreast of the dominant political, social, and cultural debates of the day, and wrote for and edited successful newspapers. Rebecca Rush was a scion of one of the United States' most prominent Federalist families and, as such, was probably afforded access to the best educational resources available to women (her uncle, Benjamin Rush, was, in fact, a tireless advocate for female education). Furthermore, the representation of Mrs. Holmes that we see above, and the numerous representations of literate and literary figures I will examine in this dissertation, suggest that these authors were very much concerned both with their novels' claims to a specifically literary identity and with their readers' literary tastes and capacities for acknowledging and taking pleasure in beauty. The novel's popularity, in other words, was not seen to inhibit its aesthetic capabilities. Why, then, did these authors look to the novel as the genre that could best help forge their new nation's cultural identity? And what made this genre suited to the project of promoting literariness, the love of literature for its beauty and for the pleasure it afforded?

In short, then, this dissertation aims to explore two central topics: the intellectual history of the literary in the first few decades of American independence and the novel's role within this

[7] According to Ellis, Brown "[lived] on State Street almost directly opposite the Apthorp-Morton residence" in Boston (361). For more information on William Hill Brown's other literary endeavors (which are much less well-known than *The Power of Sympathy*) and on Brown's relationship with the Apthorp-Mortons, see Ellis and Walser.

history. Such questions about the early American novel's aesthetic identity, however, would not even be possible without a few recent developments in the field of American literary criticism. The haranguing strains of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century critics who railed against the novel even in the midst of its first heyday reverberated more strongly, it seems, into the twentieth century than even the most compelling arguments for the novel's value as a moral, perfectly appropriate genre for republican readers.[8] When, in 1907, Lillie Deming Loshe produced one of the earliest wide-ranging studies of early American fiction, in the midst of which she paused to remark that "from the point of view of literary merit," the "accomplishment" of novels authored on American soil between the years of 1789 and 1830 was "inconsiderable," she set the tone for commentary on the earliest novels' aesthetic interest that would prevail for nearly eighty years (28). Herbert Ross Brown begins his 1940 study *The Sentimental Novel in America* by reminding readers of the caveat that "many of the titles of these faded favorites, it is charitable to remark at the threshold of this book, deserve to appear on any list of the world's worst fiction," while Alexander Cowie's *Rise of the American Novel* (1951) addresses early American fiction as merely a precursor to the United States' true golden age of literature in the nineteenth century (vii). "As for the novel," Cowie writes, "it suffered from the general disabilities of all artistic enterprise in the early days as well as from special handicaps which will be referred to later. Our great achievements in fiction rose from humble beginnings" (1). Such attempts to excuse what were seen as the early American novel's aesthetic failures even lingered on into Henri Petter's 1971 *Early American Novel*, which offers a familiar caution against high expectations of the study's subject matter: "The three decades ending in 1820 are not considered a distinguished

[8] See Cowie 5-8 and Samuels *Culture of Sentiment* 4-5 for overviews of criticism of the novel in its own time.

epoch either in the history of American writing, or, more specifically, in the development of the American novel. Indeed, the student of the period is likely to be struck not with many individual achievements but with widespread mediocrity" (3). Even more damning of the novel's claims to literary status, however, is that it is a genre often left entirely out of the pages of literary histories of the United States. Max I. Baym's *History of Literary Discourse in America* does not acknowledge any novelists before Hawthorne, focusing only on Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and Philip Freneau in his study of post-Revolutionary literature, and Gilman M. Ostrander's *Republic of Letters*, written in 1986, omits any discussion of the rise of the novel in the republican period, even in the work's detailed chapter on the period's literary accomplishments, "The Republic of Belles Lettres."[9]

Critics, then, decided fairly early on that if America's first novels were to hold a place in literary history, a definition of "literary" would have to be found that did not depend on questions of artistic merit or intent, a definition that took into account what America's eighteenth-century readers wanted from their literature, instead of what scholars of the mid-twentieth century valued in theirs.[10] In many respects what were seen as these works' stylistic failings have been blessings in disguise. Prompted to think outside of normative categories of aesthetic value in order to assess the early American novel, literary critics have challenged the canon, come to listen to a broader cross-section of authorial voices, and reached a consensus that literature can be appreciated not only for its artistic resonance, but also for its historical value. The work of Jane Tompkins and Cathy Davidson has been particularly instrumental in effecting the shift from

[9] Republic of Letters was authored in 1986, but published posthumously in 1999.

[10] Winfried Fluck's "From Aesthetics to Political Criticism: Theories of the Early American Novel" provides the most comprehensive discussion of this shift to historicist criticism.

aesthetics to social and political history in studies of the early American novel. As twenty-first-century readers, we now take it as a given that the "revolution" in the field of literary studies that Cathy Davidson described in *Revolution and the Word* has indeed effected significant change. We no longer focus on a set curriculum of "master texts" that are granted authority because of their claims to universal appeal and relevance, and we have come to see that "literature is not simply words on a page but a complex social, political, and material process of cultural production" (Davidson viii). By and large, the movement towards political rather than strictly aesthetic readings of the early American novel has been successful in helping scholars to understand the historical circumstances of the novel's publication and readership, especially in the earliest years of the United States' independence.

But this movement towards historicist views of the American literary landscape has been guilty of over-correction. Michael Warner's *The Letters of the Republic*, one of the most thorough analyses of republican print culture—or, rather, the relationship between republicanism and print culture—certainly carries the focus on the historical circumstances of print production and dissemination too far, even to the point of erasing consideration of texts' literary characteristics by declaring that only the medium of print gave republican literature its meaning. "The benefits of American authorship," according to Warner, "were defined at the time so as to be regardless of the book's aesthetic character," and, even more striking, Warner claims that "the rhetoric of republican nationalism can be sharply distinguished from the kind of literary nationalism that would become powerful in the 1830s, because republican trade nationalism did not entail a liberal ideology of the literary" (120, 121-2).

The limitations of what we might call a "complete" historicization of the study of literature have by now become apparent, prompting a trend toward the reintroduction of what

Cindy Weinstein and Chris Looby call “aesthetic dimensions” into scholarly conversations about American literature. David S. Shields's work was some of the earliest to reinvigorate concerns for fine feeling and politeness, topics specifically related to the literary pleasure, in the literature of British colonial America. Shields's study of the roles that polite literature played in fostering sociability amongst America's urban elite and maintaining, in essence, a sense of courtliness that drew people together in communal circles was followed by others that considered the role of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourse at large in the formation of early Republican politics and culture. In this vein, one of the most noteworthy studies is Eric Slauter's *The State as a Work of Art: The Cultural Origins of the Constitution*, which notes the “contemporaneous rise of modern political science and philosophical aesthetics,” and suggests that the simultaneous emergence of these two discourses contributed to the perception among the founding fathers that the government they were constructing was a type of benevolent artifice, meant to respect the natural rights of the populace, but also carefully formulated in the interest of preserving order (87). As impressively, Edward Cahill's *Liberty of the Imagination: Aesthetic Theory, Literary Form, and Politics in the Early United States* argues that aesthetic theory, in fact, was of great interest to America's earliest citizens because of its “dialectic” nature and ability to oscillate between one ideal and another. The uncertainty, and even undefinability, of aesthetics was, Cahill suggests, the source of this discourse's attraction: “This dialectic of liberty in aesthetic theory offered American writers a rich critical vocabulary for articulating the imperatives and challenges of political liberty and, thus, for confronting the social contradictions of Revolutionary and early national culture” (5).

Studies of the role of aesthetics in early American culture have, thus, incited renewed interest in a broad array of topics related to the authoring and reading of literature in the first

decades of American independence. Noting the expansiveness of the term "aesthetic," Weinstein and Looby, in the introduction to their edition of collected essays on "American literature's aesthetic dimensions" offer a "quick and dirty list" of how various authors in their edition define the key term "aesthetics." This list, they note, "would have to include the play of imagination, the exploration of fantasy, the recognition and description of literary form, the materiality of literary inscription and publication, the pleasure of the text, sensuous experience in general, the appreciation of beauty, the adjudication and expression of taste, the broad domain of feeling or affect, or some particular combination of several of these elements" (4). In this dissertation I aim to narrow the field of "American literature" down to the early American novel, for the most part, because as a genre it was exceedingly popular and so deserving of particular study for its cultural relevancy, but, as I have noted, its "aesthetic dimensions" have not as yet been adequately accounted for. In addition, I am returning to the precedent set by David S. Shields by taking the literary, rather than the entire field of aesthetics, as a subject of inquiry. I do so for a number of reasons. The first is that literary discourse, by which I mean the principles and assumptions that governed discussion about texts that were written and read with an eye for style and beauty as well as content, while sharing many of aesthetic discourse's central themes, also had distinct attributes that, as I will argue, contributed to the novel's particular popularity in post-Revolutionary America. The second is that the rise of literary nationalism in America has yet to be fully understood. Literary critics' assumptions about the call for a robust American Literature issued in the years after the United States declared its independence from Britain are generally guided by Romantic notions of organicism and originality.[11] A. Robert Lee's and W.M.

[11] Douglas Lane Patey's chapter in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, "The Institution of Criticism in the Eighteenth Century," gives an excellent overview of the rise of literary criticism in eighteenth-century England. His account suggests that twentieth-century literary critics have not yet fully accounted for the social

Verhoeven's description of the impetus behind the concern with developing America's literary talent is characteristic: "as much as Enlightenment America . . . proclaims the Birth of a Nation, a break with the *imperium* of England, so, albeit each to their own style, its writers, thinkers, artists, and, given a Jefferson or Hamilton, frequently enough its political class, found themselves called to evolve a matching literary-cultural 'tradition of the new'" (7). The United States, the story goes, would truly prove its right to independence by demonstrating its capacity for invention and innovation and by imagining literary forms, settings, and narratives that had no precedent. While these Romantic ideas of the literary were certainly developing during the 1790s, and while, starting as early as the first decade of the 1800s, they began to fuel criticisms that the United States had failed in its initial attempts to promote a literary sphere for the purpose of developing worthwhile literary works,[12] relying only on these terms to think through the connections that the United States' first citizens perceived between the national and the literary risks blinding us to the eighteenth-century notions of literature and its place in society that more probably governed the rise of literary nationalism as a cultural phenomenon. Literature in the eighteenth century, as I will show, was evaluated and understood according to neoclassical principles that valued continuity and stability. These qualities played a large part in making the literary such a useful and appealing discourse in the early republic, but, if we continue to view American literary nationalism through a Romantic and even post-Romantic lens as, more than

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functions that literary discourse performed in the eighteenth century, in part because critics are too willing to dismiss the measured, order-seeking eighteenth-century approach to literature as bland and uninteresting when seen through the lens of Romantic notions that literature should be radically new instead of imitative and should aim to deconstruct boundaries rather than impose them (8). This same sentiment easily explains American critics' historic reluctance to interrogate early American literature's aesthetic worth.

[12] Petter provides a far-ranging overview of criticisms, launched both from abroad and from sources at home that derided America's literary output or lamented the fledgling nation's inability to realize the potential it had to contribute to arts and learning.

anything, a signifier of rebellion, we fail to interrogate and examine crucial aspects of the "prehistory" of American literature: the theories and discourses surrounding literary texts in America before the Revolution.

My approach to these questions about the history of the literary in the United States and about the novel's place in that history begins, in Chapter 1, with an examination of the literary critical theories with which late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American authors and readers would have been most familiar. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the practice of argument and debate moved increasingly from the halls of government to the pages of books and newspapers, creating the need for widely known precepts that could evaluate not just the oratorical, but also the textual. As literary texts, or belles lettres, became more and more available to a broader cross section of readers through the medium of print, rhetoricians in Europe took up the project of teaching and otherwise codifying a set of principles against which literary texts could be appreciated and understood.[13] There were rules—commonly known rules—for evaluating literature and a robust set of theories regarding why people should care about it, and this discourse had clearly made its way to the Americas long before the Revolution.[14] These theories of literature drew explicit connections between the quality and practice of literary taste and the moral, political, and even economic health of the nation-state, nearly promising that if good taste was fostered, a litany of social goods would follow as a matter

[13] See Conley 204-5, Ferreira-Buckley "Writing Instruction" 172-5 and Kennedy's "The Contribution of Rhetoric to Literary Criticism" for further discussions of the rise of interest in literary criticism and the belles lettres in the eighteenth century. McIntosh's *The Evolution of English Prose, 1700-1800: Style, Politeness, and Print Culture* also offers an account of the movement from oral to printed language in England in the eighteenth century (34-8).

[14] As I discuss in Chapter 1 (see especially 32-33) Charles Rollin's *Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres* was widely read in America as early as the 1740s.

of course. Such theories were collected and recorded most thoroughly in the works of Charles Rollin, whose *Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres* (1734) was written in France and then widely translated all over Europe and America, and Hugh Blair, a leading figure of the Scottish Enlightenment whose *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) enjoyed even greater popularity in the Western world than Rollin's seminal work. Rollin's and Blair's works have been familiar to twentieth- and twenty-first century scholars of Rhetoric, but have been largely unknown to critics of American literature. One aim of this study, then, is introduce these works' most important structuring principles to a new scholarly audience and to demonstrate how their terms invite new ways of thinking about American literature and the history of American literary criticism.

The guiding principles set forth in both Rollin's and Blair's works comprise a body of literary critical theory that is derived from classical authors, but that is certainly influenced by the intellectual environment and the changing needs of eighteenth-century society. The neoclassical ideas about the literary that Rollin's and Blair's works enumerate serve as guiding principles for authors well into the nineteenth century. In Chapters 2-5, I turn to close analyses of the portrayal of literary sensibilities in a series of novels published between 1789 and 1812—William Hill Brown's *Power of Sympathy* (1789), Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798), Isaac Mitchell's *Alonzo and Melissa (*1811), and Rebecca Rush's *Kelroy* (1812)—in order to assess how and why novelists took up, applied, reinterpreted, experimented with, and, in some cases, rejected the definitions of literature and its relationship to the concept of a nation that were supplied by neoclassical literary theory. The novelists included have each produced works of incredible self-reflection: each novel in this study grapples with questions about literature's relationship to society and about the novel's identity as a truly literary genre. By looking at these

novels, then, we get a full sense not only of how external historical factors influenced a continual renegotiation of the novel's literary identity, but also of how novels themselves pushed forward through these negotiations. The early American novel is not a passive genre, or one that only reacts to changing social conditions, but is, rather, one that attempts to effect change, both in the context of the culture beyond its pages and in the context of its own form.

The novels chosen for this study were selected, first and foremost, because they make obvious entrees into questions about the cultural roles literary sensibility played and the novel's charge to support those roles. *The Power of Sympthy*, *Wieland*, *Alonzo and Melissa*, and *Kelroy* all portray authors, poets, readers, and lovers of literature as central figures. This is not to say that the same issues surrounding literary sensibility do not appear in the novels of other authors. Royall Tyler's well-known preface to *The Algerine Captive* (1797), for example, pokes fun at America's penchant for novel reading, observing how quickly the taste for "gay stories and splendid impieties of the traveler and novelist" supplanted "sober sermons and practical pieties" during the time of the narrator's captivity (v). Susanna Rowson's preface to *Charlotte Temple* (1791/4) addresses the question of whether sentimental reading materials were proper for young ladies (5-6).[15] It is also not inconsequential that in Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), a letter written to the Reverend Boyer (a virtuous suitor who courts the hand of Eliza Wharton, to whom the novel's title refers), describes Eliza as particularly good company because of her familiarity with literature: "Indeed, she discovers a fund of useful knowledge, and extensive reading, which render her particularly entertaining" (46). The four novels studied here, however, take literariness as a central theme, bringing it to the foreground as a paramount

[15] Two publication dates are given for *Charlotte Temple* so as to reflect the first year it was printed in England and the first year an American edition was published.

cultural, social, and even political concern. This particular selection criterion allows for an interpretation of the rise of the novel in America through a new and wider lens. Two works taken into consideration here, William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* and Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* are canonical standards for students and scholars of early American literature, while the works of Isaac Mitchell and Rebecca Rush have not enjoyed the critical attention they are certainly owed. *Alonzo and Melissa*, for one, was widely read in a number of different versions until the late nineteenth century though it is practically unknown to modern critics.[16] *Kelroy* is an anomaly that could merit its own book-length study: a year before Jane Austen published *Pride and Prejudice*, Rebecca Rush produced a novel of staggering penetration which demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the ways in which manners related to social order at large. Finally, the novels I have focused on were also chosen with their authors in mind. As discussed above, William Hill Brown, Charles Brockden Brown, Isaac Mitchell, and Rebecca Rush could each speak from the center of political power and activity and moved in influential political spheres. In examining works by these authors, we examine figures who could best speak to the interconnectedness of literariness and state power and who each had a finger on the pulse of an entire culture.

The promises extended by the prevailing terms of eighteenth-century literary discourse were many. For one, this discourse offered a paradigm through which the United States could distinguish itself from other nations, but also a way of understanding connections to other

[16] *Alonzo and Melissa* was first published in installments in Mitchell's *Political Barometer* in 1804. In 1811, he expanded the narrative into a two-volume novel. Unfortunately, Mitchell died in 1812, after which *Alonzo and Melissa* was pirated and published as the work of a "Daniel Jackson." The pirated edition of Mitchell's work was reprinted at least twenty-five times throughout the nineteenth century. Writing about Mitchell in 1907, Lillie Deming Loshe addresses *Alonzo* as a familiar work, suggesting, even, that the novel had not gone out of vogue by the early twentieth century. For more information on *Alonzo*'s popularity, see Davidson 322.

nations that did not presume political dependence. Europe's heyday as the center of cultural hegemony and producer of the world's finest literature had passed and America was the new home of the inspired heroism and reverence for true virtue necessary to the authorship of good literature. Americans could, thus, look for a shared history in the past literatures of England and Europe, and, further back still, to Greek and Roman literature, appreciating literary merit wherever they found it, without admitting allegiance to any foreign government or deference to any foreign culture. Furthermore, literary discourse allowed Americans to see connections between literary sensibility—which was, to a certain extent, regarded as a natural ability that all men brought with them into the world and all men could cultivate through sustained engagement with literary texts—civic virtue, and national prosperity. These ideas complemented the democratic and republican principles taken up as the mainstays of American society. It was not birth, wealth, or class that defined and organized American society, but a natural taste for the moral and virtuous.

The story of the early American novel told here, then, is one of concurrences with and departures from the normative terms of literary discourse set out by thinkers like Rollin and Blair. This discourse's central tenet, that literature's job was to work for the good of the nation, was never doubted, but many of its other principles were taken up with varying degrees of enthusiasm and for a variety of reasons. William Hill Brown, writing in 1789, subscribes to the principles of this neoclassical discourse completely, championing them as the backbone of a new, democratic social order and as a remedy for the sexual deviance and corrosive moral environment engendered by Europe's patriarchal, aristocratic social models. Charles Brockden Brown, however, views neoclassical literary discourse more ambivalently, and, in *Wieland*, he tests neoclassical discourse's usefulness in the post-Revolutionary age, suggesting a number of

changes to its principles to better serve the needs of a republican audience. Finally, Isaac Mitchell and Rebecca Rush, each writing on the eve of the War of 1812, as rising tensions both between the United States' nascent political parties and among the United States and its trading partners abroad sank the country into economic peril, put faith, once more, in the ability of literary pleasure to ensure both America's ultimate prosperity and its amicable participation in a homogenized global network of economic and cultural exchange. Whether these authors espouse its terms critically or wholeheartedly, however, neoclassical literary discourse, touted in the eighteenth century as the key to a virtuous society, provided the terms which authors were left to interpret and apply. Only by assessing how American authors constantly defined and redefined this literary discourse do we come to understand the many reasons why citizens of the new United States attempted to forge national identity through literary means.

To questions about the novel's role in promoting a literary culture in the nascent United States, *The Power of Sympathy*, *Wieland*, *Alonzo and Melissa*, and *Kelroy* offer remarkably similar responses. For all its virtues, literary taste was a complicated, perhaps too lofty, and perhaps even dangerous power, prone to misinterpretation and even capable of seducing the reader's reason. Tracing the intellectual history of the literary in post-Revolutionary America, then, we find perennial renegotiations of the relationships between the love of beauty and the call for moderation, the sentimental and the useful, the aesthetic imagination and the critical eye, and, most importantly, the relationship of literature to the state. The novel flourished in this context, I contend, precisely because it could manage the tensions that arose as a result of the conflict between neoclassical literary ideology and life on the ground, as it were, in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth- century America. The novel could at once aim to communicate high ideals and inspire noble sentiments (key aims of classical literature) and regulate the aesthetic responses it

hoped to evince (unversed and unadorned when compared to traditional epic genres like poetry, the novel's long form prose avoided the appearance of being overwrought). Written in prose, depicting scenes of everyday domestic life, and otherwise taking verisimilitude as its aim, the novel could translate literariness into everyday terms and show how it could be safely folded into the context of everyday life.[17] The nation needed literariness, and literariness needed the novel, as both of the Browns, Mitchell, and Rush all suggest, to become accessible.

Understanding the history of literariness and the novel's place in the intellectual history of the literary in the United States will also shed light, I hope, on the related topic of sentimentalism and its place in American literary history. By claiming that studies of the novel's historical significance as a mouthpiece for women's issues supplanted consideration of the genre's aesthetic identity and by calling for a return to a consideration of the historicity of the novel's assumed literary value, I do not mean to suggest that this new concern for aesthetics must necessarily obscure inquiry into the sentimental novel as a genre that spoke primarily to the situation of American women or to suggest that the excellent work produced by scholars like Cathy Davidson, Jane Tompkins, Shirley Samuels, Sharon M. Harris, and many others should be overturned. Rather, what this dissertation reveals are the convergences between theories of sentiment that examine how and why manifestations of intense emotion, sensibility, and tender feelings are deployed in the novel, and theories of the literary. Part of sentimentalism's history, I believe, is found in eighteenth-century literary theory. Much of what we take for sentimentalism is a subset, or particular form of literariness—the discourses of each depend on strong, feeling reactions to beauty. It is also true that understanding the discourse surrounding literariness and

[17] Here I draw on terms developed in Ian Watt's discussion of the novel's realism (Watt Chapter 1, "Realism and the Novel Form" 9-34)

how early American authors put this discourse's principles into practice sheds new light on the tactics authors used to argue for a more equitable society—one, in a manner of speaking, that "remembered the ladies." No chapters on *Charlotte Temple* or *The Coquette* appear here, but, implicitly, many of the concerns raised in these two novels are addressed in the works I have selected for their interest in representing literariness. William Hill Brown, Charles Brockden Brown, Issac Mitchell, and Rebecca Rush each take up questions about the role of women in America and support remaking social codes so that women are not exploited. A literary society, each suggests, is one that does not deny that women, too, have the capacity for taste, virtue, and judicious citizenship. Thus, the concerns of feminist scholarship are intimately related to the questions about the role of the literary that I am posing, and a rereading of the American novel through the lens of intellectual history of the literary shows that the divide scholars have assumed here to be between aesthetically motivated and historical criticism is more a construct of the twentieth century than a matter of eighteenth-century historical fact.

In attending to these authors' concurrences with and departures from standards codified by Rollin and Blair and in evaluating the ways in which they viewed the novel as a quintessentially American genre, I also hope to illuminate new areas of the literary history that set the stage for the nineteenth century's literary trends. Nineteenth-century literature is often seen to have a bifurcated identity. One side is typified by Harriet Beecher Stowe's sentimentalism—invested, dynamic, and socially conscious, its aim to involve the reader's heart in a cause, and most commonly seen as women's literature. F.O. Mattheissen's novelists and prose writers typify the second strain of this literary historical identity.[18] Detached, analytical,

[18] In some cases, as in Gregg Crane's edition of *The Cambridge Introduction to The Nineteenth Century Novel*, this bifurcation is implicit. The first section of Crane's introduction defines the romance genre of the American novel (Poe, Melville and Hawthorne), while the second engages with sentimentalism (Stowe and Warner). Nina Baym

and directing their appeals to the minds rather than to the hearts of their readers, Emerson, Hawthorne, and Melville stand in contrast to Stowe's emotionality. Either as inheritors of neoclassical definitions of literature's cultural responsibilities or as descendants of a broad scale critique of neoclassical views of literature, I argue, both the sentimental and the observational literary modes that characterized nineteenth-century literature evolved out of the literary environment in which the novels in this study were produced.

Most importantly, however, what the reassessment of the early American literature's intellectual history I offer here asserts is that the United States' first novels were not the products of a failed aestheticism or merely vehicles for cheap sentimental ploys. Neither was their didactic focus on morality and virtue entirely dry or matronly. Literature, furthermore, was not merely an ancillary consideration, addressed in order that it might provide a foundation of cultural definition that would bolster the new nation's political legitimacy. In the eyes of America's first authors and their reading public, literariness was a pillar of the national edifice, not mere decoration. The ability to admire beauty was tantamount to the performance of good citizenship, and taste was a matter of national concern. Literary pleasure was and is, in fact, an integral part of America's history.

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addresses the demarcation between sentimental literature and the more "serious" literature of male-authored romances more straightforwardly, describing the division between the two literatures as one between the "sewing circle" and the "whaling ship" (xiv). Jane Tompkins's *Sensational Designs*, as mentioned previously, addresses this divide in order to celebrate the sentimental fiction that was seen as occupying the "wrong" side of it for decades, while Ann Douglas's *Feminzation of American Culture* brings up the differences between Victorian sentimental tales largely authored by women and the "major" American authors who wrote during the Victorian era (her list includes Cooper, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Melville, and Whitman) to solidify the latter group's claims to literary authority (5). See William E. Cain's *F.O. Mattheissen and the Politics of Criticism* for a discussion that attempts to reconcile the projects of pre- and post-Mattheissen versions of the canon by suggesting that Mattheissen's emphasis on the democratic nature of works produced during the "American Renaissance" was a necessary step in the development of the type of criticism that would allow critics to take into account a wider array of cultural voices.

Chapter 1

Taste and Nation: Literary Theory in the New Republic

> This work is an original *American* production. The facts are recent. The history is affecting. The sentiments are pure. The language is perspicuous and elegant. The lovers of virtue and polite literature are respectfully invited to lend their patronage to genius, and may rest assured that they will have no cause to repent of their encouragement.
>
> - From an advertisement for *The Hapless Orphan*, 1792, quoted in Michael Warner's *Letters of the Republic*.[1]

For the past two or three decades critics have found the answer to the question "What did literature mean in the new republic?" in Habermas's theory of the rise of the public sphere. If, as Terry Eagleton has asserted, "modern European criticism was born of a struggle against the absolutist state," and literary criticism emerged in the eighteenth century as a way of wresting cultural and political authority away from an aristocratic elite and vesting it in a "public," an expansive community of non-aristocrats who could not wield direct political power in the traditional framework of a monarchical state, this explanation for the rise of interest in national literatures transfers quite well to the context of early republican America (9).[2] The first generation of American authors and readers to consider themselves citizens of the United States, of course, had just witnessed a literal struggle with absolutism, and, as many scholars have demonstrated, these early citizens were primed for participation in a culture of print by prior decades, if not centuries, of religious history. Long promoted by the Puritan establishment as central to each individual's communion with the word of God, literacy and the skill of reading

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[1] See Warner 119.

[2] For further discussion of the relationship between the rise of the public sphere and the development of literary criticism see Hohendahl 47-54 and Patey.

critically were considered requisite to the reflection and self-analysis that were key pillars of Puritan devotional practice.[3] American readers, by the dawn of the republican era in the early 1780s, had at the ready the skills they needed to read and write about the topical concerns of forming a new government and forging a new national identity. Reading could be re-imagined as not only a demonstration of religious devotion, but also as a demonstration of commitment to republican idealism and to the progress of a participatory democracy.

This emphasis on Habermas's narrative of the public sphere, however, often leads critics to define literature's value in the staid utilitarian terms of information transference or to describe the worth of literary texts only in terms of their materiality.[4] The latter is the case with Michael Warner's *Letters of the Republic*, which for twenty-five years has remained the most influential study of print culture in early America. I begin with evidence quoted by Warner himself in order to define some of this materialist perspective's major shortcomings. Warner argues that the appeal of the literary in republican society stemmed from the manner in which literature was disseminated rather than from the content it carried. Medium, in other words, completely

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[3] For excellent studies of the uses of devotional texts in Puritan America, see David D. Hall's "The Uses of Literacy in New England" 58-68 and Matthew P. Brown's *The Pilgrim and the Bee* 68-106. Jay Fliegelman has also drawn explicit connections between the Puritan tradition of reading-induced self-reflection and the rise of criticism (*Declaring* 116).

[4] Richard D. Brown's *Strength of a People* sees the significance of the printed word in its ability to keep citizens "informed," and he advances the argument that printing allowed for a pre-colonial ideology of the importance of an informed citizenry that developed as far back as the Glorious Revolution to take hold in America with special force. Julie Hedgepeth Williams's *The Significance of the Printed Word in Early America* also posits that "early Americans were children of the mass media" who had always had access to print and who valued it for its ability to convey information that would otherwise not be accessible to them. At first, Williams explains, this imagined network of information transference allowed people living in the American colonies to conceptualize themselves as part of a mother country from which they were physically separated. Later, after the United States declared independence, print became a valuable source for information about local events and contributed to a sense of being bound to local, as opposed to transatlantic, communities. Brown's and Williams's studies provide incredibly useful perspectives on the history of print media in the United States, but, as is my contention with Warner, they do not offer much to say in the way of accounting for the aesthetic qualities of texts that were circulated in the periods they cover.

trumped message. Literature's most attractive attribute was that it was easily produced in print and easily distributed. Imagining theirs as a culture of print, Americans could view themselves as members of a society that was unified through a network of information transference in which anyone who could read the news or set pen to paper could participate. It was in this way, Warner argues, that literary discourse allowed for the persistence of a utopian vision of democratic social organization.

Warner resists the idea, however, that aesthetic merit, or, at the very least, the expectation of aesthetic merit, had anything to do with the United States' culture-wide reliance on literary discourse to describe American national identity. His interpretation of *The Happless Orhpan*'s advertisement typifies this resistance against aesthetic frameworks: "When advertisements and subscription proposals tell readers that an author is American," Warner writes, "they do not necessarily point to a link between traits of nationality and those of aesthetics; they merely solicit patrons' encouragement of domestic trade, much as they might for the making of shoes" (Warner 119). Yet *The Happless Orphan*'s advertisement illustrates the need to reconsider this conclusion that purchasing a book was merely about supporting an American commercial system. Warner claims that the operative term in this advertisement is "American" (qtd. in Warner 119). Buyers were supposed to be attracted by the work's nationality. In supporting its production, they saw themselves as contributing, patriotically, to the development of American industry, not of American artistry. This account however, leaves us no way of understanding why literary discourse, in particular, would have gained such traction in America. Why, we must ask, did America define itself as a country that loved well-constructed written discourse, for example, instead of as a country that loved, to use Warner's example, shoes, which could, one could argue, also be mass produced and easily disseminated? Warner's argument also ignores the obvious

appeals this subscription proposal made to its potential readers' literary sensibilities—"The history is affecting. The sentiments are pure. The language is perspicuous and elegant"—assuming that such appeals were unconnected with the readership's sense of civic pride.

Subsequent critics have attempted to refine and to complicate the notion of a monolithic public sphere held together by the circulation of commodified print sources by positing new ways of thinking about the "publics" that literature addressed and by insisting on the recognition of the language of aesthetic discourse that so frequently appeared in print.[5] Edward Cahill's work most directly addresses questions about literature's aesthetic identity in republican America. Cahill suggests that aesthetic discourse played a particularly important role in public life because it gave American citizens a framework through which to understand the complexities and contradictions inherent in the republican worldview. Republicanism itself was a political discourse that promoted liberty, but yearned for order, demanded absolute freedom, but recognized the need for restraint. In this way, republicanism was easily complemented by the intricacies of aesthetic theory. Aesthetics, too, was a language that could embrace concepts, like the importance of the unfettered imagination and the beauty of controlled expression, that seemingly stand at odds with each other. Seen through the lens Cahill provides, we might read in *The Hapless Orphan*'s advertisement a tension between a need for indulgence in "affect" and "sentiment," both key terms expressing investment in the unrestricted powers of the imagination,

[5] David S. Shields's *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* turns its focus away from the overarching narrative of print culture and concentrates instead on the circulation of unpublished manuscript literature in elite circles in colonial America, thus demonstrating that the United States had a literary tradition apart from print culture that was much more interested in fostering tightly-knit groups reminiscent of European courts than in furthering the notion of a large, interconnected public. Bryan Waterman, in *Republic of Intellect*, also illuminates just how important small, intimate societies (rather than sprawling notions of a homogenous "public") and the guiding notion of "intellectual prowess" (rather than just the "communicative *forms*" of "letters") were to the development of early American literature in his work (4).

and an emphasis on “polite” readership which paints the practice of reading as a demonstration of mannerly, genteel civility. The volatile balance between these two versions of aesthetic experience, according to Cahill's reading, very much mirrored the volatility of life in the new republic.

Both Warner's and Cahill's readings, however, are in need of refinement and refocusing, Warner's because questions of the literary are all but absent in his assessment, and Cahill's because literary discourse is situated under the umbrella term of “aesthetics” rather than considered for its own unique qualities. Interrogations of literature's print identity have brought much to light about the social and cultural meanings of literature in republican America, but one important blind spot yet looms large in the perspective of previous ciriticism. As an entrée into this necessary vein of critical inquiry, we might home in on one very specific term that appears in *The Hapless Orphan*'s advertisement. Why, specifically, would a publisher promote a sentimental novel by promising that its language would be “perspicuous,” or, in other words, clearly expressed and easily understood? In promoting this value, this advertisement emphasizes literary pleasure, but it also connects this pleasure, pointedly, to the work's ability to communicate in a very specific way that is both stylistically pleasing and clear and direct. Making use of the term “perspicuous,” *The Hapless Orhpan*'s advertisement promises a pleasurable reading experience derived from the novel's rhetorical prowess, the work's ability to speak feelingly, but also persuasively and accessibly.

The term “perspicuity” was, indeed, a byword of the study of rhetoric in the eighteenth century. Rhetorical texts of this period demonstrated a shift in preference away from the ornate, embellished style popular in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European courts and back to a simpler, more modest, “elegant” yet “perspicuous” mode of communication promoted by

classical Roman rhetoricians.[6] Hence, John Oldmixon's 1728 English paraphrase of Dominique Bouhours's *La manière de bien penser* (1687) translates Bouhours's insistence that language be "claires & intelligibles" into a call for "perspicuity" that reflects classical precepts: "Nothing can be truly pleasing that is not intelligible," Oldmixon's version reads, and students should mind Quintillian's maxim that "Perspicuity is the principle part of Eloquence" (Bouhours 362; Oldmixon 357). Joseph Preistley's *Rudiments of English Grammar* (1761) also uses the term conspicuously in his introductory observations on style, declaring that "the use of writing, as of speaking, is to express our thoughts with certainty and perspicuity," and George Campell, in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), asserts that "perspicuity" is "the first and most essential" quality of proper expression (45, 216).

That these terms also appear in *The Hapless Orphan*'s advertisement confirms its publisher's interest in demonstrating the novel's value by illuminating its engagement with a very specific field of Rhetoric that became popular in the eighteenth century: the rhetorical study of the belles lettres. Belletristic rhetoric applied rhetorical principles that historically dealt with oratory to the evaluation of polite literature, or literature meant for both edification and enjoyment. The medium of print allowed for the increased circulation of belletristic texts in many strata of Western societies in the eighteenth century, and therefore the rise od this medium contributed to a growing interest in developing a discourse that could be used to evaluate polite literature and to discover its relationships to other forms of written and spoken rhetoric.[7]

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[6] See Conley 200 for more on this shift in stylistic preference from ornate to "perspicuous" language in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries.

[7] See Conley 204-5, Ferreira-Buckley "Writing Instruction" 172-5 and Kennedy's "The Contribution of Rhetoric to Literary Criticism" for further discussions of the rise of interest in literary criticism and the belles lettres in the eighteenth century.

"Perspicuity" appears as a central stylistic concern in belletristic rhetoric, as well, but, rather than concern ourselves with limited stylistic questions about whether or not novels like *The Hapless Orphan* do, indeed, manage to draw readers in with beautiful, yet straightforward language, it will be more productive to investigate the larger implications of the relationship between belletristic rhetoric and the early American novel that this advertisement reveals. How did these rhetorics define literature? What were the social, cultural, and political implications of reading polite literature? And what connections did belletristic rhetorics draw between polite literature, literary pleasure, and nationalism, connections that *The Hapless Orphan*'s advertisement gestures to explicitly when it references the work's "*American* production" alongside of its emphasis on "sentiment," "elegance," and "perspicuity"?

Though a number of rhetorical texts made their way to American shores by the advent of the republican era, there are two works deserving of particular study for their relevance to the questions above. Charles Rollin's *Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres* (1732) and Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) helped define what it meant to be literary in the early national period, but each of these too long overlooked works is due for thorough investigation. Critics have, for example, taken some note of Blair's *Lectures*, writing of its popularity and frequent publication. Kenneth Silverman dubbed the *Lectures* the "bible for linguistic nationalists" who aimed to promote an incisive, clear style of American English in the early national period, and William Charvat and Edward Cahill have both noted the wide margin by which the *Lectures* outsold other influential works on aesthetic theory, particularly Kames's *Elements of Criticism* (Silverman 495; Charvat 29-31; Cahill 26-30). We have yet to interrogate, however, why a work that concentrated specifically on literary theory and correct practices for reading polite literature would have been sought out more often than works like Kames's, which

focused on the broad topic of the psychology of man's aesthetic sense rather than on targeted issues of reading and interpreting texts. Rollin's work, furthermore, is in even more dire need of critical recovery. Though his *Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres* was also, as I will show, popular for a number of decades in cities from New England to the South, and though the principles of literary study Rollin outlines went on to influence how Americans thought about and responded to literature in the first few decades of the United States' independence, Rollin's name is entirely absent from critical histories of American literature.

Rollin's *Method* and Blair's *Lectures* outline ideas and associations attendant on the acts of producing and reading texts notable not only for their content, but also for their form. They also imply not just a course of reading to aid individual readers in developing literary taste, but an entire method of social organization that requires every subject, regardless of class standing or social status, to participate in the project of nation building. A close examination of these two texts will add much both to readings, like Warner's, that view American literature as the cornerstone of a public sphere, and, like Cahill's, which attempt to explain why this cornerstone was so thoroughly etched with the language of aesthetic theory. Studying the most popular belletristic rhetorics available in the United States reveals that good taste and patriotism were affiliated in the American mind and that the belles lettres were seen to have a value far beyond what the marketplace could grant. When purchasing a literary text such as a poem, play, or novel, American citizens most likely considered themselves to be committing an act of nationalism not only by contributing to an American economy, but also by evincing a love of elegance, well-turned language, and transcendent subject matter. The study of the literary as a subset of aesthetics, in addition, productively complicates analyses of early republican culture that attempt to account for aesthetics at large. While, as Cahill has shown, aesthetic discourse

oscillated between a number of opposing ideas, literary discourse promised predictable order and security to any society that could truly appreciate beauty and promote virtue. Reading literature, I argue, according to the paradigm of literary discourse that Rollin and Blair helped establish, was not so much about comprehending instability as putting it to rest. Most importantly, however, turning critical attention to Rollin's *Method* and Blair's *Lectures* reveals that the assumption that the growth of a literary sphere was a sign of both cultural and political vitality was undergirded by a long intellectual history. This was a history that connected literariness to ideas of social harmony, enlightened progress, and even an egalitarian worldview that valued the capacity of every subject to contribute to the proper regulation of the nation's general taste. Literary discourse, then, was a fit paradigm to describe not the strength of just any state, but exactly the type of state that Americans hoped to build. The tenets of modern republicanism inhered in the language of literary theory, even if they were not named as such. In short, it was easy for the United States' first citizens to turn to literature for social and political affirmation because literariness was republican long before America ever was.

Belletristic Rhetoric in America: Principles and Popularity

A preliminary overview of the similarities and differences between Rollin's and Blair's works will aid a subsequent investigation of each text's concern with literature, taste, and national stability. The *Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres* and the *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* were both instructional texts, meant to provide students with a working knowledge of how to assess and even to produce thoughtfully constructed written and spoken discourse, a useful skill, as both the *Method* and *Lectures* maintain, both in public offices (the courts, the halls of government, and the pulpit) and in the private domains of individual

reading practice. Their many overarching similarities only illustrate the longstanding power that the ideas expressed by both enjoyed in the eighteenth century. Organized similarly, both works describe the principles of their native language, give the history and prevalent qualities of an array of genres, and provide key passages from both classical and modern works on which students could practice critical commentary. It is, furthermore, generally accepted that Blair was influenced by Rollin's work when he authored his own.[8]

For the most part, the study of Rollin's and Blair's works (though, as I have noted, Blair's have been more popular than Rollin's among twentieth- and twenty-first century scholars) has traditionally been the purview of scholars of Rhetoric and the history of compositional technique. These works, however, certainly deserve the label of "literary theory" that I apply to them, though the term is anachronistic. The term "belles lettres" carries different meanings in the *Method* and *Lectures*, each of which are significantly broader than our modern definition of "literature" as a body of imaginative or fictive works notable for their artistic achievement, but these two works are rightly considered as the progenitors of our current thinking about how the literary is defined.[9] Rollins's *Method*, for example, sets out to explain the origins, history, and characteristics of an array of genres, not all of which would be found in the syllabi of current English department curricula. The work's title page promises "An Introduction to Languages, Poetry, Rhetoric, History, Moral Philosophy, Physicks, &c.." Blair, taking a narrower view of this subject, reviews the structure of English grammar and includes, along with studies of poetic

[8] See Warnick 6-10 and Greer 187.

[9] Wilbur Samuel Howell notes that the English appropriation of the term "belles lettres" may have had a lot to do with the popularity of Rollin's text in England. It was in 1736, two years after the first publication of Rollin's *Method* in English, that the term "belles lettres" first appeared in Nathan Bailey's *Dictionarium Britannicum* as an English word (532-3).

works, significant commentary on "Eloquence." For each author, the "belles lettres" encompass "discourse" (communication in writing or in speech) that has somehow been embellished or restructured from its natural, conversational state. In other words, for both Rollin and Blair, the "belles lettres" refers to a body of work in which authorial choices have been made. All of the genres touched upon in Rollin's and Blair's texts were meant to be appreciated for their beauty and for their capacity to evoke emotive responses through the use of language chosen for its power in particular circumstances. What is more, neither the *Method* nor the *Lectures* sets out solely to enumerate unique characteristics of the genres it discusses or to offer criteria for how each genre should be judged, though these are central aims of each work. Rather, each author also examines broader questions about the roles that literary creation, assessment, and even enjoyment play in the context of society at large, relating literary study to the historical and political backgrounds of the nations in which specific literatures were produced. Rollin and Blair, then, have each authored studies of literature—written discourse notable not just for its content, but for its aesthetic merits—and how it relates to society. "Literary theory" may not have been a term familiar to either Rollin or Blair, but it clearly coincides with the types of analyses they each perform.

Though of French and Scottish origins, respectively, these two works are necessary subjects for a study of early American literature for two reasons: first, neither was intended primarily as a work of original individual thought, but, rather, each was meant to serve as a compendium of the best and most prominent work on literary criticism, theory, and educational practice in its author's milieu. Each work thus attempted to capture an entire discourse, to take a comprehensive, multi-faceted view of its field. Classical rhetoricians and historians such as Quintillian, Cicero, and Tacitus are featured frequently in each, as are the works of eighteenth-

century thinkers. Rollin's work shows the influence of Fénelon and Bouhours, for example, while Blair takes up, in turn, many of Rollin's ideas, as well of those of Lord Kames and David Hume. While Rollin's and Blair's own opinions influence their respective views on works by other scholars, and while each rhetoric, according to some critics, is innovative in its own way, the *Method* and *Lectures* provide wide-ranging exposure to the ideas of an impressive array of different thinkers.[10]

Secondly, each of these works prove to be enormously popular in America. Rollin's *Method* meets with acclaim and sells well in France when first published there under its complete original title, *Traité des études: De la manière d'enseigner et d'étudier les Belles-Lettres*, in 1732, but it achieves expansive popularity among English-speaking audiences in Britain and the American colonies. The *Method* appears in translation in its entirety on the shelves of English booksellers in 1734, and American audiences take notice of the work shortly thereafter. By the 1740s, the work is advertised in Philadelphia, appearing in the catalogue of the Library Company of Phildelphia in 1741,[11] and then in notices placed by Benjamin Franklin for his post office book shop in 1742,[12] and by the booksellers John Wallace & Company in 1743.[13]

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[10] Greer explains that Rollins's use of contemporary French texts to demonstrate rhetorical techniques and his encouragement of a simple, direct style that allowed more immediate engagement with readers and listeners were innovations of prior rhetorical modes: "[Rollin] broke with earlier rhetorical theory . . . by refusing to accept blindly classical precepts for good rhetoric. Instead, he emphasized audience response as the most important yardstick for measuring the value of a discourse" (187). Ferreira-Buckley notes that Hugh Blair, for his part, expanded the rhetorical study of belles lettres by linking it to the study of psychology, or "to the study of reason itself" (24).

[11] The Library Company of Philadelphia listed all four volumes of Rollin's *Method* in its 1757, 1765, 1770, and 1775 catalogues as well.

[12] Franklin advertises lists of books for sale at his Philadelphia post office in both the August 12 and August 19 issues of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*.

[13] John Wallace & Company's first advertisements that include Rollin's "Belles Lettres" appear in the December 20 and December 29 issue of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*.

Even a truncated list of advertisements and library catalogues that list Rollin's *Method* suggest the work's appeal was neither short-lived nor particularly local.[14] Though listed often in Philadelphia, the *Method* also appeared in New York by 1754,[15] Boston by 1760,[16] Savannah by 1763,[17] Williamsburg by 1764,[18] Newport by 1765,[19] Charleston by 1773,[20] New Haven by 1784,[21] and New Jersey and Annapolis by 1786.[22] Furthermore, evidence documents that Rollin was regarded as an authority on the teaching of literature even by some of the United States' most influential statesmen. Ben Franklin refers to the work in his *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania* (1747),[23] and John Adams owned a copy of the sixth edition, published in 1769.[24]

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[14] Because listings for Rollin's *Method* were numerous, I have limited my discussion here to the earliest mentions of the work in advertisements and library catalogues in each given city. Pre-1789 publication data establishes the *Method*'s popularity up to the time of the publication of *The Power of Sympathy*.

[15] The New York bookseller Garrat Noel offers Rollin's work for sale in 1754.

[16] Boston's *Evening-Post* first carries an advertisement listing books available at the house of one "J. Condy" on June 23, 1760. The same advertisement repeats in three subsequent editions published the same year.

[17] Rollin's *Method* appears in an advertisement in the *Georgia Gazette* on November 10, 1763.

[18] The *Method* is included in an advertisement placed by the Williamsburg Printing Office which appears in the back of *The Virginia almanack for the year of our Lord God 1765* by Theophilus Wreg.

[19] Rollin's work appears in the catalogue of the Redwood Library Company in Newport, Rhode Island in 1765.

[20] Robert Wells advertises Rollin's *Method* as part of a collection of books available at the Great Stationary and Book Store in Charleston. The advertisement appears before the title page of John Tobler's *Georgia and South-Carolina almanack, for the year of our Lord 1775*.

[21] Isaac Beers lists the *Method* for sale in the October 28, 1784, issue of the *New-Haven Gazette*.

[22] The November 13, 1786, issue of the *New-Jersey Gazette* advertises Rollin's "Belles Lettres" for sale at its printing office, and the Annapolis Circulating Library lists the work in its 1786 catalogue.

[23] Franklin's entry on Rollin in his list of "Authors quoted in this Paper" reads: "The much admired Mons. Rollin, whose whole Life was spent in a College; and wrote 4 Vols. On Education, under the Title of, *The Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres*; which are translated into *English, Italian,* and most other modern Languages."

[24] Records for all four volumes of Rollin's *Method* can be found in the catalogue of John Adams's personal library which the Boston Public Library acquired in 1894.

Rollin's work had by no means fallen out of favor by the time *The Power of Sympathy* was published in 1789, but by this time Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* came to exceed its popularity. In response to the frequent appearance of unauthorized versions of the lectures on literature he delivered at the University of Edinburgh, where he taught from 1759 to 1783, Blair publishes his two-volume *Lectures* in 1783. While Rollin's earlier *Method* was known to an American audience because it had been imported often from printers in London and Dublin, Blair's text is very quickly printed anew in the United States. Robert Aitken, a Philadelphia publisher, issues it in 1784, and Edmund Freeman in Boston follows suit, publishing a truncated version in 1789 under the title *Essays on Rhetoric*. The *Lectures* spread geographically even more quickly than Rollin's *Method* did when first introduced on American soil. By 1785 it is advertised not only in Philadelphia,[25] but also in New York,[26] Baltimore,[27] and Charleston.[28] As Stephen L. Carr has shown, the *Lectures*, once distributed and then published in America, enjoys unflagging popularity—indeed, it becomes more popular in the United States than in any other country in which it appears—for more than a century, appearing in fifty-six American editions between 1784 and 1895.[29] The incredible longevity of the *Lectures'*s publication history was due, at least in part, to its longstanding use as a textbook in early

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[25] Spotswood and Co. lists the *Lectures* among newly available works in the March 22, 1785, *Pennsylvania Evening Herald*.

[26] An abridged version of the *Lectures* is advertised in the *New-York Packet* of July 4, 1785.

[27] Spotswood also advertises the *Lectures* as part of his collection available in Baltimore in the January 18, 1785, *Maryland Journal*.

[28] Stevens, Ramsay, and Co. advertise "a few copies of Dr. Blair's celebrated *Lectures*" alongside their normal medical and spice catalogue in the March 14, 1785, *South-Caroina Gazette and General Advertiser*.

[29] See Carr 96-104 for a detailed review of the *Lectures*' publication history in the United States, England, Ireland, Scotland, and Continental Europe.

America's most prominent colleges. Yale adopts the *Lectures* for use in its Rhetoric classes in 1785 and Harvard does likewise in 1788. Then, between 1800 and 1835, as William Charvat notes, the work gets taken up by "Columbia, Pennsylvania, Brown, North Carolina, Middlebury, Williams, Amherst, Hamilton, Wesleyan, and Union" (31).[30] Taken together, Rollin's and Blair's works suggest that in the early republic literary discourse had a historical presence and an extremely wide reach. Looking more closely at each scholar's thoughts on the connections between literature, taste, and national stability sheds light on why Rollin's *Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres* and Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* continue in such high demand in the years following America's war for independence.

Charles Rollin's *Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres* (1732)

In his day Charles Rollin was known as both one of France's preeminent scholars and one of its most active educational reformers. The son of a cutler in Paris, where he was born in 1661, Rollin was ushered into academia with the support of a Benedictine monk who secured him a place at the Collège du Plessie-Sorbonne and a scholarship to support his studies (Gaudin 1). Rollin succeeded so well as a student that he was invited in 1683 to teach as a master of rhetoric in the Collège du Plessis, a position that proved to be the start of an illustrious career. Rollin rose through the ranks of French academia, serving between 1694 and 1696, in his most notable position, as the rector of the University of Paris, where he gained a reputation for revising and reforming the university's curriculum and promoting new teaching practices. Rollin's rise was curtailed only when he retired from teaching as a result of political pressure. A known Jansenist,

[30] See Silverman 495, Bordelon, Wright, and Holloran, 212, Ostrander 89-99, Broaddus 39-52 and Cahill 26-28 for discussions of Blair's influence in the early national period on belletristic curriculum at American colleges.

Rollin was disqualified from the rectorship at the University of Paris (a position to which he had again been nominated) in 1719 because his principles clashed with those of the university's hierarchy (Greer 186). Barred from teaching, Rollin picked up his pen and continued his pedagogical work in print. In the late 1730s and early 1740s he issued two compendious historical works, his *Ancient History* (1738), which became a well-regarded historical source in both France and England during the latter half of the eighteenth century, the lesser-known *Roman History* (1741), and, what was his most influential work, the *Method for Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres* (1732).

The *Method* has come to be known as a pivotal text that marked many transitions, both in the field of rhetoric itself and in the historical context of the eighteenth century.[31] For one, scholars have noted that, although Rollin relies on the rhetorical models of many classical writers—the theories of Cicero and Quintilian are especially evident in Rollin's work—he also made his own interventions into these studies, positioning, for example, audience engagement and comprehension as the most important indicator of a speaker's or writer's success (Greer 187). In doing so, Rollin created a more modern version of rhetorical study, one that, as Barbara Warnick demonstrates, later serves as an important influence on many of the most renowned British rhetoricians, including Adam Smith, George Campbell, and Hugh Blair. More importantly, however, the *Method* reflects widespread changes in France's traditional socio-economic structure and the shifts in monarchical policy effected in response to these changes. As Thomas M. Conley explains, Rollin's work appeared at a time when the emerging and increasingly powerful middle class sought the education a lack of excess income and leisure time

[31] See Greer 187-88 and Warnick, "Rollin's *Traité*" 46-8.

had previously inhibited, and when the monarchy had come to see universities and schools as an effective way of managing the threat to traditional aristocratic worldviews this rise of the middle class represented. In Conley's words, "While increased support for existing universities and the foundation of new ones might be seen as more window dressing for the continuation of the traditional powers of the monarchies, it was a way, first, to promote a sort of cultural homogeneity (and perhaps a measure of national pride) and, second, to provide an avenue by which nonaristocrats could be absorbed into the royal administrative apparatus" (Conley 204).

As far as we can judge the intent behind the *Method*'s conception and publication, it clearly aligns with the interests of the monarchy. In its first pages, Rollin adopts the "objects of instruction" laid out by France's rulers as his own:

> The University of Paris, rais'd by the Kings of France for the instruction of youth, has three principle objects in view in the discharge of so considerable an employment, to wit, knowledge, manners, and religion. Their first care is to improve the understanding, and furnish the minds of young persons with such supplies of knowledge, as their years will admit of. They then proceed to the government of the heart, by instilling such principles of honour and probity, as will suffice to make 'em useful members of the state. And to compleat the work they have thus mark'd out, and give it the last degree of perfection, their next endeavour is to make 'em Christians. (1)

Far from wishing to dismantle France's longstanding hierarchies, Rollin wanted to promote the stability of the state as it then stood: a government run under the just protection of benevolent "Kings."

Be what they may, however, Rollin's intentions do not preclude the possibility that his theories could be made to support a social worldview dramatically different, and much more democratic, than the monarchical rule he set out to support. Originally a member of the middle class himself who, in Conley's words, became "absorbed" into the superstructure of French governance, Rollin did have the French populace in mind when he published his text. As I have

noted, Rollin's *Method* is meant to serve broad educational purposes as a single source for pedogogy in an expansive array of literary fields, but it is also meant for broad circulation. In a striking departure from the tradition of producing educational texts in Latin, Rollin publishes the *Method* in the vernacular, incorporates lessons on modern French works in addition to those of classical Greek and Roman authors, and pitches it not only to university students, but also to the mothers and fathers of middle class families concerned with providing their children with a suitable education (Warnick, "Rollin's *Traité"* 48). Rollin's aim is accessibility. He believes that "eloquence" is a necessary skill for all citizens, even those who might not have the opportunity to pursue higher learning at the university level, and that it should be taught using texts produced in the audience's own cultural context as well as with works from the traditional canon of classical literature. The egalitarianism evinced by Rollin's work's publication history is also embedded in its content. The *Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres* maintains that every reader's natural capabilities grant the ability to participate in a system in which cultivating literary taste leads to social order, and in which the stability of the nation depends on the participation of all of its subjects, regardless of social position or birth. Though produced in and for a monarchical society, the *Method* claims much that would recommend it to an American audience.

Many of the central themes in Rollin's *Method* will already be familiar to scholars of early American literature and culture. The premise, inherited from the rhetorical theories of Cicero and Quintillian, that there is a direct connection between literary education—that is, instruction in many branches of "science" that depends on written or spoken discourse and a knowledge of the history, development, and best uses of a variety of genres like poetry, history, and oratory—and the social, cultural, and political health of the nation-state or *polis* lies at the

heart of Rollin's *Method*. Only through literature, Rollin argues, can students, as he outlines in the "Preliminary discourse," expand their understanding, become virtuous citizens, and even learn to be true Christians. Literary study, however, is not meant merely to provide specific knowledge to a select group of statesmen who will draw upon it as a resource in the course of governance. Rollin himself notes that much of the literature covered in his curriculum would have little practical use to readers in their daily lives: "It is true indeed, that frequently we have nothing to do with the Greek or Roman history, Philosophy or mathematics, in our conversation, business, or even the public discourses we have to make" (10). Rollin understood that the primary goal of studying literature is not necessarily the acquisition of useful knowledge, but, rather the refinement of taste.

Rollin makes slight digressions into the language of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century epistemological philosophy in his discussion of taste, when he describes "taste," for example, as "a kind of natural reason wrought up to perfection by study" (43). For the most part, however, he remains uninterested in pursuing questions that would become popular with eighteenth-century philosophers not only in France, but in Europe at large, about whether taste is a faculty of reason, sentiment, or both.[32] For Rollin, what taste judges is more important than how it judges: locating those aspects of the human constitution from which taste proceeds is much less an important part of Rollin's project than promoting taste's value as a touchstone of moral judgment. Rollin begins his remarks on what later proves to be a complex, multifaceted theory of taste's relationship to society, for example, with a deceptively simple

[32] For more detailed discussions of eighteenth-century debates over the nature of taste and its relationship to reason, see Bate and Dickie.

definition: “Taste, as it now falls under our consideration, that is, with reference to the reading of authors and composition, is a clear, lively, and distinct discerning of all beauty, truth, and justness of the thoughts and expressions which compose a discourse” (41). Because beauty has a moral component (it is connected to “truth” and “justice”), taste, as an internal sense of aesthetic merit, is also an internal sense of morality and judiciousness. To be aesthetically pleasing, a discourse presented either in speech or in writing must not only adhere to rules of composition that dictate the proper use of certain effects and techniques for elegant communication, it also must capture a truth or reveal the efficacy of virtue in a compelling way.[33]

Literature, as more than just an amalgam of useful information, is thought to cultivate the taste and refine readers' innate moral responses by showing, in “maxims, examples, and remarkable stories,” a “love of virtue, and detestation of vice” (13). From what we can tell by piecing together Rollin's network of references and allusions, the list of works that best exemplify these teachings is populated largely by classical writers. The Bible is, of course, one preferred source for such “remarkable stories,” but Terrence, Phaedrus, Livy, Tacitus, Horace, Virgil, and Homer also receive a fair share of attention. These writers possess, according to Rollin, a “tincture of common spirit,” a common talent for distilling the best of human experience to which men in all ages could relate. It is their ability to communicate what is most natural and most moral that ensures their popularity over the course of many centuries (43). Written discourse such as poems, essays, treatises, and speeches, then, offer an archive of human

[33] The alignment of beauty and morality in post-Lockean aesthetics goes back to Shaftsbury, who saw beauty and goodness as “one and the same” (*The Moralists* III.ii, 320). Shaftsbury concept of the moral sense heavily influenced Hutcheson, Butler, Hume, and Adam Smith. Rollin is probably more familiar, however, with the alliance of beauty and virtue presumed by the classical rhetorical tradition. Quintilian, especially, made clear that the good orator (one who could employ language beautifully and who could recognize beauty) necessarily had to be a good man. Rollin is a particular scholar of Quintilian, and plays a part in the rise of Quintilian's popularity in the mid-eighteenth century.

virtue and divine good, a trove of exemplars and ideas that encourage the ability to recognize "beauty, truth, and justness" by providing material on which the taste could practice. Once trained through literary study, taste's moral and aesthetic discernment becomes serviceable in innumerable situations and proves useful not only to distinguish value in other forms of art, but also to make decisions relating to the general conduct of life: "In a word," Rollin declares, "the most necessary qualification, not only in the art of speaking and the sciences, but in the whole conduct of our life, is, that taste, prudence, and discretion, which, upon all subjects, and on every occasion, teaches us what we should do, and how we should do it" (53).

Taste, then, operates as more than an isolated sense that allowes one to notice the aesthetic merits or shortcomings of particular art objects (paintings, sculptures, texts) produced for their cultural appeal. It is an expansive faculty that acts like a conscience, teaching the subject how to think and act with "prudence and discretion" as much as how to discern elegance in form and style. In this attention to the moral rectitude of his students, Rollin is most certainly indebted to his classical predecessors. Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, in particular, emphasizes the importance of morality to the project of oratory. Only a good man, in Quintillian's view, could be trusted with the power to construct clear, eloquent, and persuasive discourse, and only a good man could comprehend the most naturally beautiful subjects (357; bk. 12, 3-4). But, on the question of who is best able to reap the full benefits of an education in literature and to whom writing and discourse should be taught, Rollin departs from the examples set by traditional rhetorical teaching.

Both Cicero's *De Oratore* and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, seminal texts in the field of rhetoric that saw writing and discourse as mandatory studies for public speakers, make it clear that such studies are fit for only a select group of men. Cicero's *De Oratore*, written during the

final years of the Roman republic (55 BC), begins by outlining a staggering set of credentials an orator requires to complete his duties well:

> To begin with, one must acquire knowledge of a very great number of things, for without this a ready flow of words is empty and ridiculous; the language itself has to be shaped, not only by the choice of words but by their arrangement as well; also required is a thorough acquaintance with all the emotions with which nature has endowed the human race, because in soothing or exciting the feelings of the audience the full force of oratory and all its available means must be brought into play. In addition, it is essential to possess a certain esprit and humor, the culture that befits a gentleman, and an ability to be quick and concise in rebuttal as well as attack, combined with refinement, grace, and urbanity. Moreover, one must know the whole past with its storehouse of examples and precedents, nor should one fail to master statute and the civil law. Surely I don't need to add anything about delivery? This must be regulated by the movement of the body, by gesture, by facial expression, and by inflecting and varying the voice . . . What shall I say about the universal treasure-house, the memory? It is clear that unless this faculty is applied as a guard over the ideas and words that we have devised and thought out for our speech, all the qualities of the orator, however brilliant, will go to waste. (61; bk.1, prologue 2.16-18)

As Cicero himself notes, "any one of [these skills] alone would be a tremendous task to perfect," and so it is no wonder that there are "so few eloquent speakers" who have mastered any or all of them (61; bk.1, prologue 2.19). Apart from the sheer enormity of the scope of the material that an orator would have to study to become adequately prepared, *De Oratore* also contends that true orators cannot be made through education alone, no matter how thorough or comprehensive their education proved to be. The ideal orator is, rather, endowed with an uncommon talent and natural skill that set him apart from other men. Responding to a previous discussion on the necessity of art and artfulness to the practice of rhetoric, Crassus, whose voice holds most sway in *De Oratore*'s Book I, asserts claims about the role of natural talent in successful oratory:

> in my opinion it is, in the first place, natural ability and talent that make a very important contribution to oratory . . . For a certain quickness of the mind and intellect is required, which displays itself in the keenness of its thoughts, in the richness with which it unfolds and elaborates them, and in the strength and retentiveness of its memory. And if there is anyone who thinks that these powers can be conferred by art (which is false: we ought to be well satisfied if art can

> kindle and stimulate them, but they surely cannot be implanted or bestowed by art, for they are all gifts of nature), then what about the qualities that no one doubts are innate: I mean flexibility of the tongue, the sound of the voice, powerful lungs, physical vigor, and a certain build and shape of the face and body as a whole. By this I do not mean to say that some people cannot be refined by art—for I am well aware that what is good can be made better by teaching, and that what is not very good can still somehow be honed and corrected. But there are certain people whose tongues are so faltering, whose voices are so harsh, or whose facial expression and bodily movements are so uncouth and rude that they can never enter the ranks of the orators, even if they are intellectually gifted and have a firm command of the art. On the other hand, some are so well suited in these same respects and so richly endowed with the gifts of nature that they seem not to have been born of human stock, but to have been fashioned by some divinity. (83; bk. 1.113b-115)

Not all men had either the mental or performative qualities necessary to succeed at inventing discourse. Only those few born with special talent could later be formed into orators, and to these few the governance of the republic was entrusted, since they were best capable of communicating in public forums.

Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, written about a century after *De Oratore*, pictures similarly selective criteria for the ideal orator. Commenting on the importance of morality to oration, Quintilian asserts:

> My aim, then, is the education of the perfect orator. The first essential for such an one is that he should be a good man, and consequently we demand of him not merely the possession of exceptional gifts of speech, but of all the excellences of character as well. For I will not admit that the principles of upright and honourable living should, as some have held, be regarded as the peculiar concern of philosophy. The man who can really play his part as a citizen and is capable of meeting the demands both of public and private business, the man who can guide a state by his counsels, give it a firm basis by his legislation and purge its vices by his decisions as a judge, is assuredly no other than the orator of our quest. (9-11; bk.1.9-10)

Knowledge of letters and rhetoric is most useful to the single man, or small group of men, who demonstrate that he or they can best establish laws for entire “communities” by showing a special ability to manage the state while keeping in view principles of “moral and honorable

conduct." The study of discourse, then, under the rubrics established by both Cicero and Quintilian, has a stratifying effect: education works for the good of society in that it creates leaders who are morally and intellectually fit to rule, but it assumes inherent barriers between those born with natural talent and those who are not.

Rollin, however, views literary study to be the right, and, even more so, the duty of the entire populace, and he asserts that everyone possesses the ability to cultivate the powers of mind and taste that will allow them to act as good citizens. Morality and honor are not just the responsibility of an educated few who make laws for the entire nation. Rollin's *Method* focuses on the idea of taste as a faculty of moral and aesthetic judgment available to everyone, a natural, immutable quality that all men share. Differences in taste accrue as the result of education, but, essentially, all men enter the world with the same original version of taste at their disposal. Rollin makes this point explicitly and often, commenting variously that "all men bring the first principles of taste with them into the world," and that the "seeds" of taste "lye concealed in the mind of every man" (43, 4). Understanding taste as a natural, even, we might say, "inalienable," faculty enables Rollin to depict taste as the key to social cohesion, a leveling agent that connects different strata of society, regardless of normative social distinctions such as class.

Take, for instance, one of the extended proofs Rollin offers in support of the claim that taste is available to all men. Referencing Cicero (and, we might add, using his predecessor's words in service of an argument that he himself would not, perhaps, have conceded), Rollin remarks:

> I have already said, that this distinguishing faculty [taste] was a kind of natural reason wrought up to perfection by study. In reality all men bring the first principles of taste with them into the world, as well as those of rhetorick and logick. As proof of this we may urge, that every good orator is almost always infallibly approved of by the people, and that there is no difference of taste and

> sentiment upon this point, as Tully[34] observes, between the ignorant and the learned. (43)

Rollin's fundamentally egalitarian view of taste differentiates his work from that of Cicero and Quintilian—works that, as we have seen, believe in the positive benefit to be had by entire communities as a result of studies in writing and discourse, but that reserve the governmental agency conferred by such studies for use by only a few orators. For Rollin, taste is what binds members of a society together and proves similarity among all ranks, regardless of the differences that education might produce between the "ignorant" (read: those who did not have the leisure time or the necessary income to pursue education) and the "learned" (traditionally, aristocrats who could afford to attend a university).

While Rollin only hints at taste's ability to guarantee social cohesion in the above passage, he puts a much finer point on this claim elsewhere in the chapter when he describes the benefits that ripple out to the culture at large as a result of literary education, even if many members of a given culture do not have access to a classroom and must reap the benefits of living in a scholarly society second-hand: "Even those, who live in the politer ages" but do not have access to "learning or study" have the advantage of imperceptibly learning taste if it has successfully permeated common culture because, Rollin argues, uneducated citizens will "gain some tincture of the prevailing good taste, which intermixes without their perceiving it themselves in their conversation, letters, and behavior" (44). Literary taste constitutes more than just a matter of good breeding and a mark of high culture; the cultivation of taste, rather, ensured that members of a society would pursue virtue and probity in solidarity, that differences between the "ignorant" and the "learned," for instance, would not threaten social harmony.

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[34] An anglicization of "Marcus Tullius Cicero."

The good effects caused by the universality of taste, in Rollin's theory, however, do not end here. While Rollin's theory of taste as a unifying agent undoubtedly responded to reigning concerns over the rise of the French middle class and the necessity of imagining this class's interests to be united with that of the monarchy's, asserting taste's role as a seat of moral discretion also allows Rollin to claim taste to be a compass which, in the long run, could guarantee that society would move together in the right direction. Rollin himself addresses questions that could be raised to cast doubt on such a rosy picture of a society, unified by shared taste: was not taste, for example, changeable, even courruptible? Could it not be led astray, and seek to follow fashion, instead of truth? Rollin, in fact, saw himself as writing to a nation on the brink of decline, one that had begun to value fashionable ornament over true elegance, and indeed to favor luxury over good sense. French society, in his estimation, teetered precariously on the point of what could prove to be its cultural apex if French students could not be set once again on the road toward virtue: “there is cause to fear, lest the bad taste of bright thoughts, and turns of expression . . . should prevail in our own age. And I question whether this be not a mark and presage of the ruin of eloquence we are threatened with, as the immoderate luxury that now reigns more than ever, and the almost general decay of good manners, are perhaps also harbingers of it” (49).

Taste was, as Rollin acknowledges, not completely impervious to changes caused by human frailties such as the fascination with novelty, and it was not uncommon for societies to ignore the dictates of true good taste and so enter a period of decline:

> By a strange tho' frequent revolution, which is one great proof of the weakness, or rather the corruption of human understanding, this very delicacy and elegance, which the good taste of literature and eloquence usually introduces into common life, for buildings for instance and entertainments, coming by little and little to degenerate into excess and luxury, introduces in its turn the bad taste in literature and eloquence. (46)

The direct causes for these "strange . . . revolution[s]" were many. Rollin explains that, at times, such broad-sweeping changes in general taste could be brought about by "one single person of reputation" who, "[preferring] the reputation of wit to that of solidity, pursues what is bright rather than what is sound, . . . sets the marvellous before the natural and true," and draws audiences after him. Elsewhere in the *Method*, Rollin attributes the decline in taste (and therefore political and cultural legitimacy) to flawed moral systems and (often pagan) religious beliefs that lead societies to their downfall because their values could not be reconciled with the teachings of true taste (50). Taste seems to offer solidarity, but its ability to permeate society's ranks and to affect a wide audience also made it able to lead a nation in the wrong direction, toward decadence and immoderate luxury rather than toward the noble causes of virtue.

Proper attention to literary study, however, could correct even taste's common susceptibility to aberration. According to Rollin, lapses were inevitable, given human imperfection (an idea that was very present to Rollin, who, as a Jansenist, subscribed to a view of humanity as depraved and in need of salvation from a higher power), but men could recover their original sense of true taste by reading the right materials. For Rollin, the "right" texts were those written by classical authors, whose merits had been continuously acknowledged over time and had most accurately distilled universal truths:

> [The ancients'] actions are gone and cannot return; great events have had their course, without any reason for us to expect the like; and the revolutions of states and empires have perhaps very little relation to our present situation and wants, and therefore become of less concern to us. But good taste, which is grounded upon immutable principles, is always the same in every age; and it is the principle advantage, that young persons should be taught to obtain from reading of antient authors, who have ever been looked upon with reason as the masters, trustees, and guardians of sound eloquence and good taste. (51)

Because good taste is "immutable," it acts as an unassailable moral compass, guiding men back

to morality in the event they ever lose sight of it. A treasured store of historical literature, furthermore, ensures that men could always be taught, once again, to read this compass clearly.

Rollin's work is one codification of a discourse that extended many attractive promises to Americans in the latter half of the eighteenth century. It offered much to a newly-formed nation intent on establishing its political legitimacy and protecting a view of itself as governed by the united voices of reasonable citizens who all spoke with the good of the social body in mind. Literary study could not only ensure social harmony but could also the hope that any "weakness . . . of human understanding" could be checked so that petty ambitions or lapses in values and judgments would not have long-term effects for the entire nation. Hugh Blair's work, influenced by Rollin's, only made these relatively abstract promises more enticing to America's post-Revolutionary audience, uniting, as it did, much of Rollin's classical and seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century educational theory with the terminology of Enlightment-era political philosophy.

Before proceeding to a discussion of Blair's work, however, it should be noted that a few of Rollin's sentiments were attractive to Americans on a more than abstract level. Rollin himself, as we have mentioned, is concerned primarily that the theories his work expressed of the direct causal relationship between literary study and cultural legitimacy would be put into practice in French schools and homes, because, as noted, Rollin thought himself to live in a society threatened by decay, overtaken by immoderate luxury and corrupted values. Americans, unsurprisingly, were more than happy to agree with this assessment of France and to apply it to Europe in general. Bolstered by Rollin's theories, Americans came to define Europe as a degenerated cultural space and substantiated their own claims to political legitimacy by describing themselves as inheritors of Europe's previous glory, hence the new proprietors of taste

and the protectors of virtue. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, citizens of the new United States see the language of cultural decline and ascendency that we uncover in Rollin's *Method* to work in their favor: American independence, under the rubrics offered by literary criticism, looked all the more inevitable and justifiable. Europe's soil could no longer support the "secret seeds" of good taste. It was time, as Americans saw it, for their flowers to bloom elsewhere.

Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783)

Widely known among twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars of Rhetoric, Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* has already inspired much discussion for the attention it pays to the sociological implications of linguistic and rhetorical study. Most critics who look to Blair for his comments on the relationship between society and literature have taken Blair's claim that, "studies [of the kind outlined in his work] . . . will appear to derive a part of their importance from the use to which they may be applied in furnishing materials for . . . fashionable topics of discourse, and thereby enabling us to support a proper rank in social life" as central to his project (9). Thomas Conley, S. Michael Halloran, and H. Lewis Ulman, for example, read the *Lectures* as a work deeply invested in upholding traditional attitudes toward class, painting, as it does, in Linda Ferreira-Buckley's terms, "the cultured late eighteenth-century gentleman and the requirements of his station" (*Eighteenth-Century* 25).[35] Dottie

[35] These critics all note how seriously Blair took up the responsibility of teaching Scotland's youth to succeed in an aristocratic world—a world largely controlled by the English. Conley includes his discussion of Lectures in a section entitled "Rhetorics from the Hinterlands," suggesting even the modern view of Scotland as removed from English centers of cultural power that young Scots would have to enter if they wanted to pursue careers "in Parliament, the pulpit, or bar" (223). S. Michael Halloran's assessment of Blair's Lectures also evinces a certain underdogism: "Blair was in the business of helping young provincials rid themselves of the linguistic habits that would mark them as such and bar them from the upper reaches of British society" (190). H. Lewis Ulman's account is notable in its emphasis on the University of Edinburgh's status as a school for great minds in the late eighteenth century: "In A Short History of the University of Edinburgh, 1556-1889, D.B. Horn cites studies demonstrating that Edinburgh University graduated 353 out of the 2,500 university-educated men born between 1685 and 1785 who are listed in the Dictionary of National Biography—more than all other Scottish universities

Broadus extends this argument to American shores, claiming that Blair's *Lectures* were popular in colleges across the United States in the country's earliest years because they complemented elitist Federalist ideologies that urged the necessity of a small governing class instead of a sprawling democracy. Proper taste, in this light, appears to be the just province only of the cultural elite, and, if literary study has a social function, according to these readings, it is to steady the ladder for social climbers in their campaigns for upward mobility.

This view of the *Lectures*, however, does not offer an entirely accurate view of its premises. Blair, born into a Presbyterian family in 1718 and educated for the ministry, rose to prominence in both ecclesiastical and academic circles, much as Rollin did before his life of public notoriety was curtailed because of his subscription to Jansenist principles. By 1758 Blair had assumed the highest clerical position in Scotland at the High Church at St. Giles, where he became well known as a preacher and developed much of the material for his most renowned work, his collected *Sermons*, which were published between 1777 and 1801. During much of his career, Blair served as a professor as well as a clergyman, and, furthermore, he was one of the most active figures in the Scottish Enlightenment (Blair met often with Adam Smith, David Hume, and Lord Kames). The *Lectures* are the product of his work in scholarly circles, and begin to germinate in 1759, when Blair first taught a course in rhetoric and composition at the University of Edinburgh. The class grew so much in popularity over the years that Blair was appointed to a permanent position at the University. In some respects, the popularity of this class got away from Blair: he decided to publish his *Lectures* himself as a fully-developed print version of the lectures he had been delivering at the university because inferior, pirated versions,

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combined (63-64) . . . How did Blair articulate the role that he envisioned for rhetoric and belles lettres in the education of such men?" (122).

taken from students' notes, had become incredibly popular on the market.[36]

The *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, are, then, in their original state, conceived for an audience of upper-class or upwardly-mobile university students, but this is not to say that they are the product of an aristocratic paradigm interested only in reaffirming its own power by asserting its exclusive right to pass literary judgments. The very fact that Blair thought literary taste was teachable and that it should be taught to those students whose economic, if not familial, advantages qualified them for participation in polite society attests to the *Lectures*' egalitarianism. If the *Lectures* do support traditional notions of the dominance of polite culture, they also argue that anyone can learn to participate in this culture because differences in taste and literary judgment are the product of differences in education, not in innate ability. The *Lectures*, as I will show, are more accurately read as a disquisition on literature's necessity to the progress of Enlightened society, a product of Blair's engagement with both neoclassical rhetorical theory (like that of Rollin) and the philosophical scholarship of the Scottish Common Sense thinkers whom he counted among his friends. Blair believed in the ability of all men to learn to judge matters of taste rightly. In fact, as we will see, the *Lectures* present a theory of taste that places even more authority in the hands of communities than Rollin's work granted them fifty years earlier.

Blair does communicate his theory of taste and its relevance to society at large with a lighter touch than his predecessor Rollin, and it is thus easy to see how the *Lectures* could be taken as a conduct book for ambitious gentlemen who wanted to increase their social capital rather than as a serious disquisition on the importance of literary study. Looking, for instance, at

[36] See Feirrera-Buckley for biographical information on Blair.

Blair's central definition of taste, one would think that he is focused only on the reader's enjoyment rather than on his edification: “Taste may be defined,” Blair begins, succinctly, “[as] 'The power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and of art'” (11). The moral dimensions of Rollin's description of taste as “a clear, lively, and distinct discerning of all the beauty, truth, and justness of the thoughts and expressions which enter into discourse” seem to have been lost, and the penchant for instruction replaced with idea that the desired end of literary study should go no further than entertainment (41). It is also true that Blair acknowledges, as mentioned briefly, that literary study has the practical effect of allowing the student to navigate more easily the otherwise perilous waters of the eighteenth-century British drawing room, noting, as he does, that “In an age when works of genius and literature are so frequently the subjects of discourse, when every one erects himself into a judge,” subjects “can hardly mingle in polite society without bearing some share in such discussions” (7). One might even say that the “pleasures” derived from reading had very little to do with texts themselves, and instead arose from the opportunities for sociability that reading affords, or, rather, by the number of *faux pas* that careful study helps one to avoid.

Literary study, however, works toward important ends in Blair's theory of literature. Many of the ends of belletrism described in Blair's work should be familiar because they are very much like the aims Rollin identifies in his *Method*. Blair remarks, for example, that “reading the most admired productions of genius” is a means of “disposing the heart to virtue,” and that “poetry, eloquence, and history” shows readers “elevated sentiments and high examples” which “nourish in [their] minds public spirit, the love of glory, contempt of external fortune, and the admiration of what is truly illustrious and great” (10, 9). Blair shares Rollin's conviction that evaluating literature fosters a moral sense and keeps both private and popular virtue intact. The

Lectures also share the *Method*'s emphasis on the social cohesion that results from the study of literature. Without these studies, Blair contends, even the power of reason would be muted:

> One of the most distinguished privileges which Providence has conferred upon mankind, is the power of communicating their thoughts to one another. Destitute of this power, Reason would be a solitary, and, in some measure, an unavailing principle . . . Small are the advantages which a single unassisted individual can make toward perfecting any of his powers. What we call human reason, is not the effort or ability of one, so much as it is the result of the reason of many, arising from lights mutually communicated, in consequences of discourse and writing. (1)[37]

For the most part, then, differences between Rollin's *Method* and Blair's *Lectures* amount to a matter of addition. In stating that reason, as well as morality, depends on writing and discourse, Blair's work reveals that the understanding of what it means to read literature has expanded over time, but that many of its traditional significations remain intact.

One point on which the two scholars differ, however, deserves particular notice. Like Rollin, Blair emphasizes the naturalness of taste as an innate quality argues that it is a universal capability. Blair's eurocentricism is perhaps more pronounced than Rollin's—Blair made clear, for example, that "among rude and uncivilized nations," any opinions posited on the subject of taste must "carry no authority" (23). Furthermore, he did concede that some men were gifted with more "natural genius" than others, but, by and large, he believed that taste was "common in some degree to all men," that "the principles of Taste [were] deeply founded in the human

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[37] Blair, when compared to fellow Scottish rhetoricians of the late eighteenth century, most notably Joseph Campbell, is not regarded as particularly interested in philosophical questions about the nature of reason (Warnick 90). Conley, in fact, describes the relationship between Philosophy and Rhetoric in the eighteenth century as a tense one, particularly because "Locke's psychology . . . presented rhetoricians with some serious problems" because it dissolved the idea of rote connection between "objects of mental perception," or "what we know" and words. Conley explains further: "Thus when I utter the word *dog*, I refer to my idea of "dog," not to any particular dog" (191). Under such conditions, communication could be boiled down to just the reportage of an individual's inner state—a hard principle to accept for rhetoricians who believed in the power of language to create shared emotions and opinions. Blair's nod to philosophical discourse here in his mention of reason, we should note, is what Conley calls "casual," and, ultimately, suggests the superior merit of practical rhetorical study that must take place if reason is to be effective in the first place (190).

mind," and that all subjects were drawn to beauty, regardless of their age, class, or stage of cultural development (13). The *Lectures* also address concerns over the very real threat of the degradation of good taste and attributes this degradation to many of the same causes that Rollin identifies. Just as Rollin notes that, "strange, tho' frequent revolution[s]" in taste occur because of human frailties, Blair explains that it is possible for poor taste to become ascendent in the public mind over the true taste that should point men toward morality: "I admit, that accidental causes may occasionally warp the proper operations of Taste; sometimes the state of religion, sometimes the form of government, may for a while pervert it; a licentious court may introduce a Taste for false ornaments, and dissolute writings. The usage of one admired genius may procure approbation for his faults, and even render them fashionable" (23). Rollin, as previously discussed, suggests that this decline could be remedied by studying "antient authors, who have ever been looked upon with reason as the masters, trustees, and guardians of sound eloquence and good taste," to reawaken the original sense of good taste with which readers enter the world (60). Studying texts of long-recognized merit provides the answer, and it is teachers of rhetoric themselves who were largely trusted with the work of repairing culture-wide lapses in judgment that threaten social order.

For Blair, however, the remedy to the problem of cultural decay looks quite different. When Blair first addresses discrepancies in taste and takes up the question of where the standard of taste might be found, he answers that it is set, in short, by consensus: "Most certainly there is nothing but the Taste, as far as it can be gathered, of human nature. That which men concur the most in admiring, must be held to be beautiful. His taste must be just and true, which coincides with the general sentiments of men" (22). Blair's involvement in the school of Scottish Common

Sense Realism is evident here.[38] Originating in Scotland in the late eighteenth century, this movement is largely a reaction to the work of British philosophers such as John Locke, whose work was principally responsible for deconstructing the doctrine of innate ideas and arguing, instead, that each person entered the world as a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate to be filled with information provided by sensory experience. Philosophers in the school of Common Sense Realism, assert, in opposition to Locke's fundamental theory of human psychology, that there are certain ideas and moral laws that do not need to be taught or explained and that all men knew through a shared "common sense." James Beattie, a member of this school, best distills this central belief in his popular *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth* in 1770, in which he describes common sense as

> that power of the mind which perceives truth, or commands belief, not by progressive argumentation, but by an instantaneous, instinctive, and irresistible impulse; derived neither from education nor from habit, but from nature; acting independently on our will, whenever its object is presented, according to an established law, and therefore properly called Sense; and acting in a similar manner upon all, or at least upon a great majority of mankind, and therefore properly called *Common Sense*. (qtd in Broadie sec 8)

Blair too describes taste as a type of "common sense" when he defines it as deeply rooted in "human nature," painting it as an innate faculty that brings truth and natural law into view and as a faculty that all men share. "General sentiment" is such an authority for Blair, then, because it best gauges whether a sense of beauty is, in fact, common, and therefore true, or not.

Because the "concurring sentiments of men" would infallibly discover natural truth, the solution to the problem of cultural decline, as Blair imagines it, is almost an easy one. Blair describes the process of saving society from decay at length. At first, he paints it as a gentle ebb

[38] See Horner 27-31 for more on the background of Scottish Common Sense Philosophy as it relates to Scottish rhetorics.

and flow of general preferences: “In the course of time,” Blair writes, “the genuine Taste of human nature never fails to disclose itself, and to gain the ascendant over any fantastic and corrupted modes of Taste which may chance to have been introduced. These may have currency for a while, and mislead superficial judges; but being subjected to examination, by degrees they pass away; while that alone remains which is founded on sound reason, and the native feelings of men” (24). At the conclusion of the lecture on taste, however, Blair gives this ebb and flow a more assertive aspect (24). “Authority or prejudice may, in one age or country,” Blair pronounces in the chapter's final lines, “give a temporary reputation to an indifferent poet or a bad artist; but when foreigners, or when posterity examine his works, his faults are discerned, and the genuine Taste of human nature appears. 'Opinionum commenta delet dies; naturae judicia confirmat.' Time overthrows the illusions of opinions, but establishes the decisions of nature” (25).

Blair, of course, did not share Rollin's Jansenist principles, and so it might be expected that his view of human nature might be considerably more optimistic than his predecessor's. While the certain knowledge of man's depravity harrowed Rollin, causing him to express ardently the need for literature to check man's natural tendencies toward immoral and irreligious behavior, Blair, residing in what he believed to be one of the most “polished” nations of Europe, thought man's innate taste for goodness far stronger than any corrupting influence, even if this influence originated in the minds of men themselves. What Blair pictures in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* is a regular cycle of cultural rise and fall, one that predicted the inevitable victory of communities guided by moral, natural law, even if their principles had eroded under the influence of corrupt governments, religious practices, or ambitious leaders. Though Blair was a loyal subject of the Crown (a crown that treated him well and granted him

many rewards), his rhetoric, largely because of its resonance with Scottish Common Sense Realism, describes a system in which sovereignty is not bound up in the hands of one, or even a few, naturally-endowed experts, but dispersed among a much larger group of authorities. In fact, literary critical authority radiated out into a field of power in which every reasoning subject could, theoretically, wield a fair share of influence. The shift from Rollin's belief that education in "antient authors" would return a nation to its originary glory to Blair's idea that the "concurring sentiments of men" would right the course along which society progresses is telling. Literary theory, in the nearly fifty years between the publication of Rollin's *Method* in 1732 and the appearance of Blair's *Lectures* in 1783, had come to place more power in the hands of ordinary men. The engine that drove the cycle of decline and renewal is powered, effectively, in Blair's work, by the people themselves, and, what is more, as Blair understood the matter, the majority stance of their combined voices would always be right. Far from picturing just the eighteenth-century gentleman, filling the "requirements of his station" within the ranks of British aristocratic culture, the *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* hope to teach men their roles in the context of an enlightened society, one, as we have seen, where reasonable discourse drives progress toward both virtue and knowledge, and one in which the "decisions of nature" are discovered through what is, essentially, a democratic process. It is no wonder that Americans consume Blair's work so readily. The underlying logic of the *Lectures* would have been enticing—and not only for the expectation of appearing to advantage in polite company.

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In closing, we might take a moment to review why the literary pleasure promised in such advertisements as the one we have seen for *The Hapless Orphan*, which proposes, we remember,

an “original *American* production” in which “The history is affecting. The sentiments are pure,” and “The language is perspicuous and elegant”—pleasure that goes beyond an understanding of literature as a conduit for information—proves to be such a crucial contributor to the rise of literary nationalism in the United States. The emphasis on enjoyment and the appeals to readerly taste apparent in such representations that invite interest on the basis of beautifully formed language and stylistic merit indicate not only a culture-wide effort to assert the civility and refinement of the American character, but also participation in a system of criticism that reflects the democratic social organization Americans claim to adopt once their independence has been established. Accounting for the aesthetic dimensions of reading and producing literary texts is, thus, crucial to the project of assessing the rise of literary discourse in the republican period. As a reading of Rollin's *Method* and Blair's *Lectures* suggests, Americans would have understood taste as the mainstay of a healthy republic, one in which all citizens play a part in the perpetual progress stable states are supposed to make toward virtue and higher knowledge.

This is not to say, however, that taste did not act, in some sense, as what Bourdieu has famously called a tool for “distinction” in the early national period. Instead of naturalizing the idea of class distinction in American culture, however, it demarcated the differences between American culture and its outsiders—specifically, European nations that had lost sight of true good taste and had adopted corrupt social and political practices. The logic behind Rollin's descriptions of “strange revolutions” in taste and Blair's discussions of the “accidental” perversions that could result from degradations in “the state of religion” or “the form of government” surface again and again in American periodicals, and, as I will discuss, in literary productions like William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy*, where it was made to serve arguments for American exceptionalism in aesthetic terms. Citizens of the United States could

understand themselves not only as members of a political entity that valued liberty and virtue above all, but also as participants in the only modern Western culture that understood beauty in an unadulterated way because its taste was pure and lively. It is also this understanding that America is the last-standing natural home of good taste that allows Americans to lay claim to a transnational, even transhistorical literary past, and thus to consider authors such as Homer and Virgil, but also, as I will show, British novelists such as Richardson and Sterne, as part of their cultural history. It was in America that these works could be truly appreciated, and in the context of a republican society that taste could be best preserved.

Chapter 2

Theory in Practice: The Literary in William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789)

In 1726, two years before he was to make a prolonged visit to the Americas for the purpose of establishing a college in Bermuda, George Berkeley penned a poem to which he first gave the title, "America or The Muse's Refuge: A Prophesy."[1] From its first to its last lines, the poem condemns Europe for having a hand in its own decay and celebrates America as the next, perhaps final, resting place of natural heroism, virtue, and culture:

> The muse, disgusted at an age and clime
> Barren of every glorious theme,
> In distant lands now waits a better time,
> Producing subjects worthy fame:
> In happy climes, where from the genial sun
> And virgin earth such scenes ensue,
> The force of art by nature seems out done,
> And fancied beauties by the true:
> In happy climes, the seat of innocence,
> Where nature guides, and virtue rules:
> Where men shall not impose, for truth and sense,
> The pedantry of courts and schools:
> There shall be seen another golden age.
> The rise of empire and of arts,
> The good and great inspiring epic rage,
> The wisest heads and noblest hearts,
> Not such as Europe breeds in her decay;
> Such as she bred when fresh and young,
> When heavenly flame did animate her clay,
> By future ages shall be sung.
> Westward the course of empire takes its way:
> The four [ital] first acts already past,
> A fifth [ital] shall close the drama with the day:
> Time's noblest offspring is the last.

At the heart of Berkeley's verses lies a missionary scheme. Berkeley envisioned his college as a

[1] See Breuninger and Tennenhouse 13.

place where natives of the islands of Bermuda and European colonists from North and South America could converge in order to receive proper moral and religious instruction. The poem itself, the only extant poem of Berkeley's ever published, was, in part, circulated so that it might help drum up financial support for the venture among British philanthropists (Guyatt 77).

Berkeley's poem employs a variety of tropes and themes that would have been familiar to the eighteenth-century Anglo reader, referencing the westward movement of progress and a natural cycle of ascendancy and decay that dictated the development and disintegration of entire cultures.[2] It locates the value of the American environment in its ability to inspire aesthetic production ("epic rage") and sees aestheticism as a nexus of artistic sensibility and virtuous governance, counterpoised against more worn, ineffectual modes of social regulation: "In happy climes, the seat of innocence, / Where nature guides, and virtue rules: / Where men shall not impose, for truth and sense, / The pedantry of courts and schools." A legitimate "Empire" and a body of "arts" must, the poem illustrates, "rise" together: indeed, the progress of aesthetic ideas seems to cause the creation of new nations, rather than, *vice versa*, national prosperity contributing to the development of new creative endeavors.

The logic of Charles Rollin's and Hugh Blair's works on belletristic rhetoric—works that, as I discussed in Chapter 1, predicted the continual rise and fall of literary taste in the history of any civilized society—is also present in Berkeley's poem, and it was as a prediction of national prowess in the authoring of belles lettres that Americans read Berkeley's words. Berkeley's verses, when first written, had nothing to do with the United States. Yet this poem went on to have an afterlife in the last quarter of the eighteenth century in the pages of American

[2] See Guyatt 77-78 and Breuninger 426-7 for more on Berkeley's use of poetic tropes, especially *translatio imperii*.

newspapers, where it was hailed as an early and incisive predictor of the nascent republic's national genius and as evidence of its "natural" literary capability. The reprintings of Berkeley's verses, by then retitled "Of the Prospect of Arts and Sciences in America,"[3] reveal much about how citizens of the newly-independent United States mapped literary theoretical discourse onto their rapidly evolving political environment. For one, when Berkeley's poem appeared in the poetry or literary sections of newspapers in the 1780s, it was often accompanied by victorious commentary on America's success as a literary environment, the new home of the "heavenly flame" of poetic inspiration. The poem realized the fullest extent of its fame, for instance, in 1786 when it spread through the nation's periodicals after its inclusion in an article entitled "American Literature," which appeared in the *Massachusetts Centinel* for April 19 of that year. The article is unabashedly celebratory. It begins by congratulating Americans on the recent production of a few "original performances" in American letters, citing a list that includes Timothy Dwight's *Conquest of Canaan* and John Trumbull's *M'Finigal*, and ends with the remark that these achievements have proven "the prophetic observation of the Bishop of Cloane"— another of Berkeley's titles— "to be otherwise than utopian." In just over a month this article appeared, in full or in excerpt, in *The Pennsylvania Packet* (May 4, 1786),[4] the *New Haven Gazette* (May 11, 1786),[5] and the *State Gazette of South-Carolina* (May 29, 1786).[6]

And yet, news of the United States' literary successes did not come without a fair share of

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[3] Berkeley composed this poem in 1726, but did not publish it until 1752, when he included it in his *Miscellany*. It was then that he titled the work "Of the Prospect of Arts and Sciences in America."

[4] See "Boston, April 19" in the May 4, 1786, edition of *The Pennsylvania Packet*.

[5] See "Extract from the Resolution of Congress of the Eighteenth of April, 1783" in the May 11, 1786, edition of *The New Haven Gazette*.

[6] See "Boston, April 24" in the May 29, 1786, edition of the *State Gazette of South-Carolina*.

nostalgia for fallen predecessors that had until lately carried the banner of cultural hegemony in the western world. Berkeley's poem, even as it aims to celebrate America's potential to be an unadulterated space for the cultivation of arts, also laments the passage of Europe's, and particularly England's, moment of cultural ascendency. The verses remember a time when Europe's culture, too, was divinely inspired: "Such as she bred when fresh and young / When heavenly flame did animate her clay." An article accompanying a reprint of Berkeley's poem in Boston's *Independent Ledger* on September 6, 1784 echoes this sentiment, reminding readers that America's aesthetic glories came in the wake of Britain's failure to perform virtuously in the political realm: "Perhaps the reader is a Briton," the contributing author exhorts, "if so, all this might once have been your own. But alas! our ministers have destroyed the only general empire, whose every subject wished its continuance and confirmation; for its foundations were laid in liberty and peace."[7]

The assertion of American political and cultural legitimacy in specifically literary terms, then, works as a strategy for defining the American character for two related reasons. On the one hand, literary discourse provides a rationale for distinction. Citizens of the United States could imagine themselves the standard bearers of pure, natural taste and could envision their nation as the place where the "seeds" of taste that were thought, as Rollin's work attests, to "lye concealed in the mind of every man," would be planted and nurtured to the greatest advantage. This assumption of superior literary capability differentiated the United States from Europe, which was understood to be corrupt and their kingdoms fit only to "[breed] . . . decay." On the other hand, as is apparent in the *Independent Ledger*'s backward glances to an earlier moment when

[7] See "Verses by Dr. Berkeley."

Britain was still governed by "liberty and peace," literary discourse also allows Americans to see themselves as integrated into a longstanding history of literary creation and appreciation. The language of literary discourse cast the United States not as an unmoored outpost of Western culture or as a far-flung site of uncertain socio-cultural experimentation, but as a haven in which a centuries-old process of cultural stewardship could be continued. By adopting the rhetoric of literary discourse as a defining feature of their national identity, then, Americans could claim the comfort of historical connection without professing political dependence.

Such a backdrop suggests a sense of both optimism and order that critics have assumed to be absent in William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy*, published in 1789 and famously billed as "The FIRST American Novel." It is not, in many respects, difficult to see why Brown's novel seems only to describe chaos and internal disarray. *The Power of Sympathy* centers around two lovers, Harrington and Harriot, who find out that they are brother and sister and die as a result of the revelation—Harrington takes his own life, and Harriot succumbs to the weight of her grief. Theirs are not the novel's only tragedies, however. Harriot, in the course of the novel, also makes acquaintance with the Martin family, lately thrown into upheaval by Mr. Martin's seduction of his wife's sister, a transgression that leads to the young sister's madness. Harriot's mother also dies an early death as the result of her seduction by Harrington's father, a man who himself dies of shame and remorse once the sins of his younger days prove to wreak such havoc on the lives of two of his children. The novel's primary events, then, are seduction, near-incest, incest, and suicide. Leslie Fiedler, Kenneth Silverman, Elizabeth Barnes, Anne Dalke, and Leonard Tennenhouse are among the many critics who read the novel's sensational narratives of sexual transgression as clear evidence that Brown lamented the inability of republican ideology

to solidify in the course of everyday life into coherent, orderly social structure.[8] As these readings assert, *The Power of Sympathy* makes attempts to condemn European modes of hierarchical organization that relied on lineage to define status and required the use of women as currency in a system of exchange, but, ultimately, the novel cannot manage to propose a solution to the problem of lingering patriarchal structures. Indeed, in Dalke's view, Brown's characters *want* the "benevolent protectionism" of a society that "[maintains] the hierarchy of established distinctions between classes," and they distrust the "flexible, mobile, classless" character of republican society because it so easily allows for sexual and moral confusion (Dalke 200).

Moreover, most of the novel's critics maintain that any coherent critique the novel may

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[8] This reading of *The Power of Sympathy* as a condemnation of republican culture has a long and a varied history. In the past five decades, scholars have added more nuances and perspectives to the central idea that William Hill Brown set out to condemn the republican paradigm in the nascent United States. Fiedler was the first critic to read Brown's novel in this light. After establishing a coterie of virtuous republicans (Mrs. Holmes and Worthy best exemplify respective female and male versions of this virtue) and settling them at Belleview in the midst of "a neo-classical, a sentimental Nature," Brown introduces the threat of seduction—a very real threat, Fiedler asserts, that the idealized republican world cannot internalize or mitigate (96-105). Silverman, more specifically, reads *The Power of Sympathy* as a critique of cultural attitudes that connected sentimentalism and republicanism (589-91). While sentiment, or "sympathy," was promoted in order to induce citizens of the United States to the fellow feeling necessary to keep American society together, Brown argues that sympathy could also be taken too far. Silverman notes Brown's knowledge of the Apthorp-Morton scandal to illustrate that Brown had seen many examples of sympathetic attachment going too far and argues that this idea of the dangerous, too-close connection is recast in *The Power of Sympathy* as the nearly-incestuous relationship between Harrington and Harriot. Barnes's discussion also calls attention to Brown's critique of the republican focus on sympathy: "What Brown's novel ultimately points to are not only the ways in which sympathy is used to construct a newly emerging American identity but also sympathy's power to destroy the identity it is meant to define" (139). Dalke's article is useful for the ways in which it contextualizes the incest narratives in *The Power of Sympathy* within a general trend of incest narratives that arose in the United States from 1789 to 1830 and shows how most of these narratives reveal a double standard that grants men freedom and mobility in the midst of the republican social world, but not women. When men are seemingly free to choose a wife from any class, women are more open to attack from all sides—they can be addressed by many men whose intentions might not be favorable, and, when female characters do hope to marry wealthy, well-connected men, they are often portrayed as hoping to take advantage of the male's class privilege. While Dalke's account exposes the double-edged sword that governs female relationships and marriages in the novel of seducation, Tennenhouse offers the complimentary perspective that men, too, are caught in a double-bind in the context of many seduction tales which causes them to choose libertinage: "In contrast with British domestic fiction," Tennenhouse writes, "American seduction stories condemn neither the seducer nor the woman seduced so much as the underlying cause of seduction, which it attributes to the disparity between desire and economic necessity. The American libertine finds himself trapped by the prevailing system of exchange, which neither provides a solid economic foundation for a family nor gratifies his sexual desire" (51).

offer about life in the nascent United States is obscured by a number of stylistic inconsistencies. While claiming attention specifically as an “American” text, *The Power of Sympathy*, as critics have discussed, owes both its story's content and form to prior English models of sentimental fiction—models that it does not, as these readings contend, use thoughtfully or innovatively. Fiedler's charge that Brown's “strategies” and “motives” are, from the first, “a little confusing,” is one of the lightest leveled at Brown's work. The novel, as Fiedler suggests, claims to have primarily instructive ends—its preface promises to “expose” the “dangerous Consequences of seduction” and to show the “Advantages of Female Education”—but it allows itself (knowingly or unknowingly) to be carried away by the sensationalism and intrigue it seeks to condemn (8). Cathy Davidson also addresses generic inconsistencies as one of the work's central problems. *The Power of Sympathy*, she writes, despite its claims to didacticism, is “a novel divided against itself.” In its early letters, Davidson describes, "the novel is all that it moralistically claims to be, a didactic story denouncing vice and particularly the 'vicious' sin of seduction" (98). This didactic mode persists well into the novel, "embodied in the long letters of Worthy, Mrs. Holmes, and the reported speeches of the Reverend Mr. Holmes" (all friends of the Harringtons) that "read as if they were delivered from a pulpit to a suspect moral audience requiring moral edification" (99). This moralism, however, is strangely coupled to a series of "quite different letters which, taken together, give us a salacious, sexually charged novel." As Davidson claims, “Harrington feels real lust, then real love, then real anguish as he progresses from prospective seducer to fiance to brother and, finally, to suicide, while Harriot's distress at not being able to sublimate her love for Harrington into a safe sibling affection is great enough to cause her death, too” (99). Unlike *The Power of Sympathy*'s subdued didactic epistles, the “novelistic” letters describing Harrington and Harriot's romantic relationship indulge in emotion and revel in affect.

All in all, Davidson concludes, "the division in the novel runs so deep that at times it almost seems as if we have two distinct and even contradictory discourses, a didactic essay and a novel, shuffled together and bound as one book" (99).

I do not mean to claim here that *The Power of Sympathy* is a perfect book, or that it is an entirely happy one, but I do mean to suggest that when read against the backdrop of literary nationalism typified in the representations of Berkeley's poem shown above, and, by extension, against the norms of literary discourse established in the works of America's most popular literary theorists, Charles Rollin and Hugh Blair, the method behind the madness of William Hill Brown's novel becomes much more apparent. *The Power of Sympathy* does, as Davidson has argued, exhibit a dual identity, but the line between these identities are understood best not as a demarcation between diacticism and sensationalism, or dry moralism and salacious indulgence, but between the literature of a virtuous, inspired community and the degraded fictions of nations that have fallen away from their prior commitment to beauty.

Brown's first priority, as I will show, is to place the American novel within the context of a broader universal literary history. To assert his novel's identity as the product of "another golden age," he connects his own sentimental tale with the work of some previous authors (Homer, Shakespeare, and Sterne, for instance), but disassociates it from the works of others (first and foremost, Goethe). Once claiming his novel's place in literary history as the "noblest offspring" of a centuries-old literary tradition, Brown's second priority is to define the character of American society in contradistinction to the fallen societies of Europe. Brown's model American citizens value the literary and have a taste for beauty, while his Americans who have not, in fact, espoused republican ideals and who still subscribe to European social mores value the decadent and luxurious. The deaths of the Harringtons are tragic, but they die as devotees of

an aristocratic worldview that encourages sexual transgression, the exploitation of female bodies, and unchecked indulgence in ornate, effusive literature (Brown begs us to realize, furthermore, that this third sin is intimately related to the first two). Mr. and Mrs. Holmes, however, together with Myra and Worthy, all survive the catastrophes that plague most members of the Harrington family (Myra is, in fact, Harrington's sister, but does not demonstrate the same reverence for aristocratic norms as her brother and father do). These remaining characters are all notably virtuous, and, indeed, all notably literary. Myra and Worthy are two young lovers whose narrative often gets lost, in *The Power of Synpathy*'s critical literature, in the glare resulting from the explosions surrounding the Harringtons' romances, yet through their romance Brown shows exactly how literariness will protect the United States from the intrigues and oppression (gender-specific female oppression, in particular) that are inherent in modern European life. Myra and Worthy model a social bond strengthened by a shared taste for the beautiful. Their refined literary sensibilities, not lineage, class, or wealth, legitimate their relationship, and they are pictured as equal partners with a complementary capacities for correct literary judgment.

Brown upholds literary pleasure, thus, not only as a defining feature of American identity, but also as the egalitarian, republican antidote to the sexual pleasure that forms illicit relationships in the aristocratic, hierarchical European world. Far from being an excoriation of republican values, *The Power of Sympathy* is, in fact, the first great champion of those values in novel form. Even as it laments the disintegration of lives and cultures as the result of decadence and decay, Brown's novel celebrates the United States as a "happy [clime], the seat of innocence," where a true democracy of taste can be realized and where virtuous literature can be authored once more.

Literary History in the "First AMERICAN Novel"

The Power of Sympathy is a work defined by its self-reflexivity and awareness of literary historical precedent. Clearly cognizant of the expectations he faced as one of the United States' first authors and as the author of the "First American Novel," in particular, Brown deploys a rich network of literary allusions that signals engagements with and critiques of a staggering array of literary sources. Brown borrowed conventions established by novelists like Richardson, Sterne, and Goethe, but, before the novel comes to a close, La Rouchefoucault, Shakespeare, Pope, Swift, Addison, Timothy Dwight and Noah Webster, to name a few, are also mentioned in letters sent from character to character (Kable xxxv). The novel also takes up many of the most common questions that animated the American literary scene in the 1780s.[9] *The Power of Sympathy*'s prefatory remarks cast a critical eye on "Novels which *expose* no particular Vice, and which *recommend* no particular Virtue," and therefore provide "amusement" without imparting "any particular idea" to edify the reader's intellect, remarks that meditate, even before the novel's action begins, on the usefulness of the fiction as an instructional tool. In Mrs. Holmes's frequently-given advice on literature deemed fit for "the situation of an *American* lady," she recommends, at different points, Louis-Antoine de Caraccioli's *Advice from a Lady of Quality to her Children*, a widely-known conduct book first published in English in 1778, and Noah Webster's *Grammatical Institute*, calling it "the best work in our language to facilitate the knowledge of Grammar" (271). *The Power of Sympathy* also questions, front and center, the aims that American literature should hope to achieve and the role fictional works like the novel

[9] Carla Mulford's introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Power of Sympathy* offers what is probably the most thorough discussion of Brown's novel's engagement with questions of literature's moral purposes, women's reading, the relationship between genres, and critiques of the novel in the 1780s. Cathy Davidson addresses these questions as well, both specifically in regard to *The Power of Sympathy* and in regard to the American novel as a genre, in *Revolution and the Word*'s chapter, "Ideology and Genre."

could be expected to play (53, 57). The longest letters in Brown's work describe a protracted conversation between Mr. Holmes, who is Mrs. Holmes's father-in-law, and Worthy, the capable and virtuous young man from Boston who is best friend to the novel's ill-fated protagonist, Harrington, in response to the question, posed by their visiting friend, Mrs. Bourn: "What books would you recommend to put into the hands of my daughter?" (20) In the course of this conversation, the characters address a variety of genres (poetry, history, maxims, essays, and the novel) and discuss the necessity of "[refining] the taste and [improving] the judgment," but they also warn against the seductive style that characterizes many "books written in an easy, flowing style," as Mr. Holmes explains, "which [so] excel in description and the luxuriance of fancy, the imagination is apt to get heated" (26, 22).

The Power of Sympathy is interested in defining both what American literature should look like, in content and in style, and how American readers should read it. The very density of the novel's system of allusions and the multiplicity of the perspectives it offers on the subject of literature and its readers, however, makes defining *The Power of Sympathy*'s aesthetic difficult. Connecting his novel, as he does, to numerous literary works that came before it, Brown clearly means to put forth his novel as a proper candidate for initiation into a longstanding canon of great works, but, we should ask, which literary traditions, tropes, and formulas does he accept as apt for an American work and which does he reject? What characteristics does the ideal American reader display? Did instruction always preclude the possibility of entertainment, or did pleasure have a place in the exercise of proper reading? How did Brown attempt to present the novel, a genre that was a familiar target of criticism, as a serious literary form, and how exactly was he trying to produce an "American" novel? Most importantly, how did Brown understand the relationship between American literature and national literatures that preceded it,

or, to put it another way, how could Brown expect *The Power of Sympathy* to be taken as an American text, even as it relied so heavily on European texts, English texts in particular, for generic conventions?

The principle fact that we must keep in mind in order to understand Brown's definition of American literature is that the American novel did not begin as a forward-looking genre and did not, in fact, seek to declare its independence from earlier literatures through its originality, style, or unique narrative form. Progression was less important than descent, in Brown's case, and the essential projects Brown takes up in authoring his 'First American Novel" are claiming the novel's literary history, forging its connections to the past, and defining American literature as universal and timeless in contradistinction to the modern, fashionable literature of late eighteenth-century Europe. *The Power of Sympathy* offers, in fact, a perfect picture of what the literary theories described by Charles Rollin and Hugh Blair looked like in practice.[10] As Brown's novel unfolds, we see how the ideas of cultural progression and decline explained in Rollin's and Blair's works affected American thought about national literature and how prior scholars' ideas about great literature manifested themselves in American fiction.

Recall, for instance, that both Blair and Rollin recommended rigorous courses of reading in classical texts because these works demonstrated what Rollin referred to as "a tincture of common spirit": they revealed human nature most truthfully and highlighted the beauty of virtue simply and powerfully (43). Each theorist then supplemented his recommended traditional course of study with texts from his own cultural context—each supposing, moreover, that his nation was the natural modern descendant of the classical culture of the Greeks and Romans.

[10] See Chapter 1 for a thorough discussion of Rollin and Blair.

Rollin, for instance, recommended reading Racine and Boileau, and Blair proposed passages from Swift, Pope, and Addison as instructional examples for his readers. William Hill Brown, essentially followed suit, positioning his sentimental narrative as the most recent offshoot of a time-honored literary lineage that aimed to move the passions and incite sympathy. In some cases, Brown draws his novel's literary history quite far back. Using models set forth in Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, Brown emulates the common trope of the descent into the underworld in the dream sequence describing Harrington, Sr.'s, utter dejection and repentance. In this sequence, Harrington, Sr., the mournful seducer of Maria, Harriot's mother, is led into "the habitation of the sons of mortality" by a spirit, a Christianized version of Odysseus's guide, who first appears to him as a far-off light (83). The elder Harrington and his spirit enter "a place encircled with high walls" where, upon entering, "[his] ears [are] instantaneously filled with the faint cries of those here doomed to receive the rewards of their demerits" (83). The spirit guides the elder Harrington through the punishments of "the Gambler," "the Prodigal," "the Duelist," "the Ingrate," "the Suicide" (where he sees his son's face, a prediction of the younger Harrington's death before it actually occurs), and, finally through the punishments of the most "miserable" group of all, "the Seducers" (84-5).[11] Brown concludes the chapter by connecting his patriarch's regret to another literary source, ending with a quote from Shakespeare's Richard III describing the murderous king's remorse: "'Twas but a dream, but then / So terrible, it shakes

[11] Brown's version of the punishments of the underworld are reminiscent of Homer's depictions of wrongdoers like Tantalus and Sisyphus in Hades (XI. 582-600), but they echo even more strongly Virgil's highly organized version of Tartarus, the section of Hades reserved for the guilty who must be made to suffer: "Here are imprisoned and await punishment those who hated their brothers while they were alive or struck a parent and devised guile against a dependent or who hovered over their acquired wealthy all alone and did not share it with their relatives (those misers were the greatest throng), and those who were killed for adultery or took up arms in an impious cause and were not afraid to betray the pledges made to their masters" (VI.608-751, qtd. in Morford and Lenardon 267).

my very soul" (85).[12]

Brown was not alone in claiming that both classical and seventeenth-century English literature could, in fact, be American. The United States, as John P. McWilliams, Jr., describes it, was home to a "civilization steeped in Homer, Virgil, and Milton," one in which "newspapers urged young men to fight the British by printing verses with such first-line titles as 'Let's look to Greece and Athens,' 'When Satan First From Heaven's Bright Region Fell,' 'Two Parties Slay Whole Hecatombs to Jove,' and 'Aid Me Ye Nine, My Muse Assist'" (20).[13] It was also certainly not unusual for American authors to claim Shakespeare as a predecessor, though in doing so they were claiming English roots. In fact, republicans in the last quarter of the eighteenth century regarded their new nation as the most appropriate home for the world's most highly-revered works of literature. A 1794 advertisement in Philadelphia's *Gazette of the United States*, for instance, justifies the need for an "Elegant American Edition" of the Bard's works that it proposes to publish by reminding its readers "that Shakespeare has followed nature with such truth and correctness, as to render his Works the delight of all nations," and that "England has exhibited her favourite Authors with splendor, and it is hoped that America, that seat of true

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[12] The most recent edition of *The Power of Sympathy* (Penguin, 1996) notes "the source of this quotation has not been located." William Hill Brown certainly meant to quote Shakespeare's *Richard III* here. While neither the First Quarto nor the First Folio versions of *Richard III* contain this exact quote (in each, the lines read: "Soft, I did but dream. / O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!"), Colley Cibber's popular "altered" edition of *Richard III* which was first printed in 1700 contains the exact lines, "Ha! soft! 'Twas but a dream! / But then so terrible, it shakes my soul!" (5.3.178-9). See Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans and Van Lennep, Avery, Scouten, Stone, and Hogan 636-72 for more on Cibber and his alterations of *Richard III*.

[13] McWilliams does illustrate that many Americans objected to the content of the epics with which they were so familiar. Benjamin Rush, he relates, "vehemently attacked the teaching of Latin and Greek classics in American schools because such works were full of 'indelicate amours' and 'the vices of both gods and men,'" and John Quincy Adams took issue with the *The Aeneid*'s graphic, immoral nature: "no reader, Adams wrote, should be forced 'to see the hero of Virgil, the pious Aeneas, steeling his bosom against mercy, and lunging his pitiless sword into the bosom of a fallen and imploring enemy, to avenge the slaughter of a friend'" (23). This discomfort with the subject matter of classical epic, however, as McWilliams shows, was not more powerful than the reverence for the form of epic, which was widely emulated by American poets and novelists in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

liberty, will not be backward in encouraging this first great attempt to do merited Justice to the author of this Dramatic Work."[14]

Claiming a connection to Homer and then to Shakespeare, who was seen, even then, as the best example of literary expression in the English language, was a safe undertaking. The subject of whether Homer and Shakespeare were appropriate reading for a republican audience did not constitute the subject of wide debate. *The Power of Sympathy*'s relationship with its nearer relative, the eighteenth-century novel, however, is harder to comprehend from the standpoint of twentieth- and twenty-first century critics who have concentrated on the widespread suspicion of the novel in the post-Revolutionary period. Sentimental novels, it is true, were warned against in the eighteenth century for their propensity to promote, as Mr. Holmes terms it, an "overheated imagination," and they were also said to contribute to anti-social, anti-republican behavior. Women, seen to be especially at risk, could become all-too easily lost in novels, distracted by the unrealistic romances and foreign manners they described, and taken away from their rightful duties as domestic helpmates, wives, and mothers by over-zealous reading.[15] It is in defining *The Power of Sympathy*'s connections to its nearest predecessors, however, that Brown illustrates the type of aesthetic he aspires to in his own novel and the type of readerly reactions that could safely be called American and republican. Brown's definitions of proper literary engagement, furthermore, are not confined to dry edification, but regard real pleasure and enjoyment as requisite to the practice of beneficial and useful reading. Texts should, in Brown's view, be appreciated for their aesthetic qualities as well as for the moral

[14] See "To the Public."

[15] See Davidson 109-115 for a discussion of objections to the novel that centered around their propensity to encourage anti-social, anti-republican behavior.

sentiments they impart.

Brown establishes two conflicting paradigms of the literary as he attempts to illuminate the differences between the degraded, decadent literature he condemns and its truer, purer, American form. *The Power of Sympathy*'s first letter introduces Harrington, Brown's problematic protagonist. Critics are right to view both Harrington's aesthetic consumption and production with a suspicious eye. His over-identification with Goethe's Werther, for instance, is often cited as either the cause of his downfall, or, at the very least, an indicator that he is exactly the type of reader those concerned with the nation's social health were most anxious about.[16] Emotive, drawn in by romance, and separated from the world around him by his literary indulgences, Harrington eventually dies at his own hand with a copy of Goethe's novel on his bedside table, thereby mirroring the fictional Werther's own death.

Even before Harrington's love for Goethe becomes clear, however, Brown means for us to regard his protagonist critically, in large part because he indulges in affect and places a higher premium on stylization than on moral circumspection. Harrington appears first as a rake, telling Worthy of his newest "charmer," Harriot, and how he "declared the sincerity of his passion" and "poured tender vows into the heart of [his] beloved" (9). Any reader of sentimental fiction—anyone who had read *Clarissa*, for instance, as many American readers did[17]—would have recognized this exchange as the precursor to a seduction plot. Indeed, in a later letter, Harrington admits his desire to make Harriot his mistress by setting her up in rooms of her own and keeping

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[16] See Schweitzer 22-4, Barnes 150-151, Davidson 178 for specific readings of *Werther*'s influence on William Hill Brown's Harrington, and Bell for an account of how the depiction of suicide in *Werther* affected subsequent accounts of suicide in early American fiction.

[17] See Tennenhouse's "The Americanization of *Clarissa*" for a description of American editions of Richardson's work and for a discussion of *Clarissa*'s popularity (184).

her for his sole benefit. However, Harrington is somewhat different from a traditional Lovelace. Apart from an intended seducer, he is also marked as something of an aesthete. When writing to Worthy about Harriot, Harrington begins with straight reportage of his love object's "mein," "disposition," "temper," and "manners," but he also revels in his ability to describe his transports and easily gives himself over to excessive effusion. Take, for instance, the penultimate paragraph to his first letter. Harrington concludes by offering an apostrophe, rendered in prose, but certainly evidence of a poetic impulse: "Hail gentle God of Love! While thou rivetest the chains of thy slaves, how dost thou make them leap for joy, as with delicious triumph. Happy enthusiasm! That while it carries us away into captivity, can make the heart to dance as in the bosom of content. Hail gentle God of Love! Encircled as thou art with darts, torments, and ensigns of cruelty, still do we hail thee" (10). This hymn to the "God of Love" continues, but even this excerpt is enough to make Brown's point clear: Harrington takes just as much, if not more, pleasure in producing richly stylized prose about his love object than he does in regarding the love object herself.

But Harrington is not the novel's only aesthete—not, in other words, the only character who revels in the experience of beauty and speaks in stylized expressions. Mrs. Holmes is also defined, first and foremost, by her aesthetic sensibility. Myra first addresses Mrs. Holmes as a mentor: "when shall I take upon myself the honour to wait upon you here? I want to advise with you on certain points of female conduct, and about my new dress" (13). Mrs. Holmes's response to Myra's epistle, however, reveals a woman who is a far cry from the stuffy moralizing school marm that a limited focus on her didactic role might make her out to be (13). She writes to Myra from her removed Belleview estate about her happiness in residing there, even while deprived of her late husband's company and of the social pleasures of town life, describing the "beauty" and

"rural elegance" of the natural scenes around her and deftly quoting a passage from Sterne's *Sentimental Journey:*

> "Was I in a desart," says Sterne, "I would find wherewith in it to call forth my affections—If I could do no better, I would fasten them on some sweet myrtle, or seek some melancholy cypress to connect myself to—I would court their shade and greet them kindly for their protection—If their leaves withered, I would teach myself to mourn, and when they rejoiced, I would rejoice along with them." (15-16)

Worthy, who is as much Harrington's mentor as Mrs. Holmes is Myra's, is likewise given to literary indulgences and enjoyments. Sterne, furthermore, shows up once again as Worthy's novelist of choice. At the close of the long, drawn-out conversation about reading material broached by Mrs. Bourn, a friend of Mrs. Holmes's, when she inquires about proper reading material for the young Miss Bourn, Worthy emerges as an enthusiastic champion of Sterne's work:

> A considerable silence ensued, which Worthy first broke, by asking Mrs. Bourn what book she had in her hand. Every one's attention was alarmed at this important enquiry. Mrs. Bourn, with little difficulty, found the title page, and began to read, "A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy, by Mr. Yorick."
> "I do not like the title," said Miss Bourn.
> "Why, my dear! Apostrophized the mother, "you are mistaken—it is a very famous book."
> "Why, my dear!" retorted the daughter, "It is sentimental—I abominate every thing that is sentimental—it is so unfashionable too."
> "I never knew before," said Mr. Holmes, "that wit was subject to the caprice of fashion."
> "Why 'Squire Billy," returned Miss, "who is just arrived from the centre of politeness and fashion, says the bettermost genii never read any sentimental books—so you see sentiment is out of date." (27)

Worthy responds with vehement protestations, not in his normally measured discourse, but, as Mrs. Holmes describes, in "*Shandean* tone" (28):

> "Sentiment out of date!" cries *Worthy* . . . "Sentiment out of date—alas! poor *Yorick*—may thy pages never be soiled by the fingers of prejudice . . . These antisentimentalists would banish thee from the society of all books! Unto what a pitiful size are the race of *readers* dwindled! Surely these *antis* have no more to

> do with thee, than the gods of the *Canaanites*—In character and understanding they are alike—eyes have *they*, but they see not—ears have *they*, but they hear not, neither is there any knowledge to be found in them." (28)

Just as Harrington had Goethe, Mrs. Holmes and Worthy view the world through the lens of a favored author: Sterne. And, just as Harrington reveled in overwrought, descriptive effusions, Mrs. Holmes and Worthy both take great pleasure in the intricacies and attitude of Sterne's embellished language.

But what is the difference between Harrington's taste for affective literature and Mrs. Holmes's and Worthy's love for literary pleasures? Robert D. Arner has suggested that the confluence of different modes of sentimentalism and sensibility in *The Power of Sympathy* is merely the result of Brown's engagement with many different literary influences—influences the young novelist did not balance with dexterity or intentionality. *The Power of Sympathy* is informed by a number of different definitions of sentimentality prevalent in the late eighteenth century, but because these definitions often conflicted with one another, it was difficult for Brown to deploy them in the service of a cohesive agenda. "Sensibility," for example, appears in Brown's novel as a term that describes "strong moral feeling," a definition that Samuel Richardson adhered to, but the Brown's novel also promotes "sentimentality," or the encouragement of emotions for their own sake, a concept that informs Sterne's works, which are often peopled by impulsive and effusive, though well-meaning characters (121). Goethe's vision of sentimentality, one that prioritizes indulgence and affect far above benevolence and compassion, is the only one that Arner views as entirely corrosive (124-5). *The Power of Sympathy*'s instability, according to Arner, results from its inability to reconcile or systematize these definitions. Instead of wholeheartedly recommending or condemning one definition of affective response, Brown's text remains ambivalent, half-believing that sentimentalism may

allow for the expression of true emotion and for the facilitation of sympathetic identification, but concerned that this emotionalism could go too far.

Arner's reading gets us closer to understanding Brown's discussion of the literary in *The Power of Sympathy*, but Brown's differing visions of Goethe's and Sterne's sentimentality, in particular, were by no means as ambivalent as Arner supposes. The differences Brown attempts to highlight between the two versions of literary pleasure signified by sensibility and sentimentality are more accurately understood in light of the cycle of cultural rise and decline that Rollin and Blair trace, as does Berkeley in his prophesizing poem on the rise of the "Prospect of Arts" in America. To American readers, Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* represented more than just indulgent affectation and dangerous emotionalism; it was also seen as the product of modern European decadence, the literature of a declining state and of an outdated, corrupt set of aristocratic values. Sterne, oppositely, as Mr. Holmes's and Worthy's protestations that the author's "sentiment" could never be "out of date" attest, was regarded as an author of timeless validity.

The American publication history of the works of Goethe and Sterne shows that Brown was not alone in reading their works against the literary-critical backdrop described in Rollin's *Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres* and Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and the Belles Lettres*. Werther, for example, attracted criticism from republican readers for his rampant emotionalism, but, what is more, his effusive, self-indulgent type of sentimentality was viewed as a symptom, rather than the cause, of socio-cultural decay. The first American edition of Goethe's text, published in 1784 as *The Sorrows and Sympathetic Attachments of Young Werter*, begins with a preface that defines its purpose as a didactic one: "The design of this Work is, to exhibit a picture of that State of Mind which appears not only in Germany, but is very frequently

to be seen in most Countries, where civilization and extravagant refinement of Manners, has attempted to abrogate the attachments of simple Nature." Werther's paroxysms and the highly-stylized language through which they are conveyed are markers of a society that has become too cultured, and Werther's artistry testifies not to the strength of the German people, but to their decadence.

Unlike Goethe's novel, which became widely read only after its first American publication in 1784, Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* had enjoyed popularity in America since it first arrived in the colonies, shortly after its first British publication in 1768. The nearly twenty years separating the first appearance of *Sentimental Journey* and *The Power of Sympathy* allowed enough time for Sterne to become a venerated writer and for his work to become, in a manner of speaking, a classic. Sterne himself was regarded as a religious as well as a literary authority in the colonies. An American edition of Sterne's collected works was published in 1774. Advertising both *Sentimental Journey* and a large number of Stern's sermons, this edition emphasized Sterne's ecclesiastical authority. Its bookplate features a print of Joshua Reynolds's portrait of Sterne, showing him in the full, austere black robes of an Anglican minister, and accompanied by the caption, "Laurence Sterne, A.M., Prebendary of York, Vicar of Sutton on the Forest, and of Sullington near York." In addition, many readers would have been familiar with Sterne from magazines or collected miscellanies that were curated specifically to omit objectionable, potentially immoral passages. As the preface to "The Beauties of Sterne," one of these miscellanies published in 1789 in Philadelphia, argues, reading Sterne had such an array of potential moral benefits that his few indiscretions could be ignored. Arguing that a new edition of Sterne's work was particularly necessary so that "Chaste" readers could also be safely exposed to the work of the master author, the preface intones: "A selection of the Beauties of Sterne is

what has been looked for by a number of his admirers for some time . . . the CHASTE lovers of literature were not only deprived themselves in the pleasure and instruction so conspicuous in this magnificent assemblage of Genius, but their rising offspring, whose minds would be polished to the highest perfection were prevented from taking enjoyment likewise" (iii). Addressing those who, before, had never had the opportunity to read works like *Sentimental Journey* and *Tristram Shandy* because of their occasional "obscenity," the curator of this collection reassuringly explains: "I have, (I hope with some degree of judgement), selected the most distinguished passages on which the sun of Genius shines so resplendent, that all his competitors, in his manner of writing, are lost in an eclipse of affectation and unnatural rhapsody" (iii-v). While *Werther* was regarded as new evidence of the artificiality and extravagance of European culture, *A Sentimental Journey*, despite its British origins, was a familiar, instructive, and pleasurable part of the American literary landscape.

The American preference for Sterne and the general willingness to dismiss his "obscenities" as minor infractions that did not cast too great a shadow on the "sun" of his "Genius" are almost certainly attributable to the familiarity with his English roots. As Leonard Tennenhouse suggests, though citizens of the United States set out to claim their political independence after the Revolutionary War, members of the new republic could not entirely shed the desire to "feel English." As colonists, Americans had considered themselves British and had taken pride in their long cultural history as subjects of a grand and virtuous empire. This pride, according to Tennenhouse, was not necessarily dampened by the Revolution (*Importance* 1-12). This is not to say, however, that Americans necessarily harbored a nostalgic longing for a past English identity. Literary theory of the late eighteenth century made it possible for the United States both to claim a shared common past with England (Americans could claim Shakespeare as

their own as easily as eighteenth-century Londoners could), and to distance itself from the England of their contemporaries, which could be seen as a fallen version of a once-great nation. Choosing Sterne as his preferred literary antecedent, William Hilll Brown was probably not eager to import the novelist's clout as a distinctively English writer, but he was happy to look to him as a model of universal beauty, just as he would have looked to Homer.

In constructing the "First American Novel's" literary history, then, Brown is selective. First, not all authors alluded to or referenced in the course of his novel are afforded equal weight, and American readers would have seen the distinctions Brown drew between the sentimental authors he sought to condemn and the authors he applauded more distinctly than modern readers have. Secondly, *The Power of Sympathy* is not interested only in claiming didactic texts as appropriate models for American literature. Brown, rather, takes it for granted that his readers would see the instructive value in beauty as clearly as they would see it in overt sermonizing. Showing Mrs. Holmes and Worthy as models of discretion and virtue as well as avid readers and even "sentimentalists" in their own right, Brown opens a space for safe aesthetic pleasures and suggests that American literature should not only be edifying, but that it should also be pleasing. As we shall see, however, Brown was not entirely unafraid of the potentially corrosive power of aesthetic sensibility. Though he invokes the sentimental novel as a fitting genre for the newly-independent United States, he plays with a number of its conventions so that it might also be turned into a form that could regulate the sometimes dangerous passions it incited. In Brown's hands, aesthetic pleasure is a key marker of American identity, but not a signifier of unfettered, romantic feeling. Loving beauty becomes, in *The Power of Sympathy*, a way soberly to avoid the dangers of lust and desire rather than the first step on the road to excess.

The Sentimental Novel in the "democratick empire of virtue"

I have suggested that the logic of literary theory, as seen in the works of Rollin and Blair, certainly informed Brown's thought about *The Power of Sympathy*'s place as the inheritor of a grand tradition of literary achievement. Brown traced his novel's lineage back to early eighteenth-century English novelists, for instance, and he claimed Shakespeare as a relative and Homer and Virgil as still more distant ancestors. Brown's engagement with the literary theoretical frameworks available to him, however, goes much further. In painting his most virtuous characters so often in the act of reading, evaluating, and discussing with one another the beauties and moral content of literature, thereby defining American society as readerly and literary, Brown attempts to illustrate what American life, organized according to the precepts of eighteenth century literary theory, would look like. What *The Power of Sympathy* offers in its portrayal of right-judging characters like Mrs. Holmes, Mr. Holmes, Myra, and Worthy, who are often shown inquiring about or recommending reading material, reviewing the merits of particular genres, and admiring beauty in both literature and in nature, is an idealized picture of a society that has not lost its originary good taste. These characters achieve social harmony in Brown's novel, a harmony that is the result of shared pleasure derived, in Blair's terms, from experiencing "the beauties of nature and of art" together (*Lectures*, 20).

Brown himself was, as his preface suggests, worried that his sentimental novel might be likened to others that could not tell the story of a virtuous society, one that reiterated and romanticized the sins of the luxuriant, aristocratic world instead of encouraging morality. The preface's claim that *The Power of Sympathy* avoided the faults of many other works of the same genre that "*expose* no particular vice, and *recommend* no particular virtue" immediately takes a defensive position against critics who railed against the novel's immoralities and saw the genre

as a danger to republican values. Brown addresses these concerns by combining sentimental formulas with the language of literary discourse, a marriage that allows him to assert that emotions could be evoked without exciting passions—that sentiment, in fact, did not have to equal sex. If the sentimental novel's emphasis on sexual intrigue were replaced by a focus on more refined literary pleasures, Brown thought, it could be the defining genre not of an aristocratic, worldly nation, but of a virtue-loving, unadulterated democratic republic.

Brown's interests in representing a truly literary, virtuous society and in constructing sentimental narratives appropriate to it were not confined to *The Power of Sympathy*. These topics are also the central concerns of his lesser-known novella, *Ira and Isabella*.[18] Like *The Power of Sympathy*, *Ira and Isabella* offers a story that revolves around the threat of incest, but, in this shorter novel, this threat is resolved much more happily than it is for Brown's more famous lovers, Harrington and Harriot. Ira and Isabella are two orphans who are raised together, fall in love, and marry before they are informed moments after the marriage ceremony has taken place that they are, in fact, brother and sister. This startling revelation, however, proves to be false and eventually the two find out from a knowledgeable source that they are not, in fact, related by blood, and are, thus, allowed to unite as husband and wife. Although published in 1807, fourteen years after Brown died, at the age of twenty-eight, in 1793, *Ira and Isabella* was most probably written within a few years of *The Power of Sympathy*, which first appeared in 1789.[19] This novella shared the central conceit of incest with its sister novel and also shows a

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[18] Little scholarly attention has been devoted to this work. Terrence Martin's 1959 piece, "William Hill Brown's *Ira and Isabella*" called for a greater recognition of the novella's treatment of the problem of "writing fiction in America," but this call does not seem to have been answered (238). A few notable studies do include some reference to Brown's second novel: Petter includes a short synopsis of its plot in *The Early American Novel*, and Dalke discusses *Ira and Isabella* as the only instance in the early American novels she studies in which the threat of incest proves unfounded (431, 193-4).

[19] Much is unknown about William Hill Brown's life, including the order in which he composed his works, but, as

clearly-stated intent to incorporate literary theoretical philosophy into its thematic framework.

The epigraph to *Ira and Isabella* is drawn from a familiar source. To explain the tongue-in-cheek assertion that the novel, as its subtitle reads, is a work "Founded in Fiction," Brown includes a few words from Hugh Blair on *Ira and Isabella*'s title page: "'Fictitious histories might be used for very useful purposes: They furnish one of the best channels for conveying instruction; for painting human life and manners; for shewing the errors into which we are betrayed by our passions; for rendering virtue amiable, and vice odious.'" The sentimental novel, even one that was not "founded on fact," as many novels, including *The Power of Sympathy*, claimed to be, could still prove instructive, and, as Brown later explains, the best novels centered on love, but condemned unruly passions. The best novelists, furthermore, could make chaste love seem attractive and sexual license seem detestable. Brown's further preferatory comments on the motivation for *Ira and Isabella* also acknowledge the debt he owes to Blair as a theorist who believed that literature taught the value of encouraging appropriate pleasure while regulating the inclination toward over-indulgence: "There is one truth concerning novels, which is in our time pretty well established," writes Brown, and

> none will controvert the authenticity of my remark, that the foundation of these elegant fabricks is laid on the passion of love . . .
>
> Whatever precepts or examples are given for the government of the young inclinations, the tender affections, the infantine offspring of the heart, are highly important, and merit a scrutinizing inspection. The passions 'grow with our growth, and strengthen with our strength;' it is a duty therefore to discourage the unruly, and curb the headstrong. It is incumbent on the other hand, and which stands beyond the reach of argument, that to allure the untutored mind to the practice of virtue by an example which is rewarded, and to deter it from vice by the representation of its misery, are means often found adequate to win vivacity to the side of prudence, and fix sensibility in the cause of discretion. Thus far I am

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Mulford's short biographic notice discusses, Brown probably began writing around 1787, at the age of 22, when his first article was published in the *Massachusetts Centinel*. Because Brown passed away in 1793, the whole of his writing career comprised about six years.

the friend of novels, and thus far I am a novelist. (xi-xii)

Brown, in other words, claims that novels should, indeed, be considered serious literature and that, as a genre, the novel could be relied upon to guide tender emotions usefully. Literary enjoyment figures, in *Ira and Isabella's* preface, as the best deterrent or corrective on other, more dangerous types of enjoyment, “vices” that lead only, eventually, to “misery.”

Though *Ira and Isabella*'s premise offers untold potential for sensationalism and scandal, its title characters are pictures of both sensibility and chastity. Early in the narrative, we are told that Isabella is under the care of a Mrs. Savage, in whose household she "[has] frequent opportunities of improving her mind, which was susceptible of cultivation; and of ameliorating her heart, which was feeling by nature," and that Ira and she share a "congenial sincerity, and a mutual talent for the disinterested politeness of nature" (18, 19). Ira and Isabella’s relationship is never threatened by sexual attraction. Attempting to make this absence of sexuality clear, Brown often portrays Ira in conversation with his friends, a group of rakes whose romanticized, Italianate names mark their near kinship to the Lotharios that run amok in European sentimental novels. The mild-mannered Ira, Brown’s Americanized sentimental hero, can barely comprehend these friends’ jibes when they attempt to recast the narrative of his love in the familiar terms of the seduction plot. Ira’s exchange with his confidant, Lorenzo, is particularly telling of the distinction Brown hopes to draw between the normative European libertine and his upstanding, sensitive American lover:

> [Lorenzo:] "Why so formal and proud, Ira? I know very well the situation of your mind; you are sick."
> [Ira:] “Heartsick."
> [Lorenzo:] "You have unfortunately looked upon Isabella with too amorous an eye—and indeed I am really of opinion she is a woman capable of inspiring true passion. You have heard with rapture her words, you have seen with desire"
> [Ira:] "Desire!"
> [Lorenzo:] "Yes, desire; you sigh to possess"

> [Ira:] "Possess! Lorenzo why do you reiterate the same idea? (desire, *possess*!) you shock my delicacy! (24)

Lorenzo's word, "desire," may, as Ira protests, be a misnomer. Ira is not attracted to women, as his friends are, for their physical attributes. He is not tempted, for instance, when the ardent Florio, another of his intimates, reels off a catalogue of local women, complete with commentary on their most praiseworthy features and their sexual availability, in order to coax him away from his "moral" life:

> In the first place there is Rosella, a perfect divinity, with the most beautiful complexion in the whole female world . . . Flirtilla, a pretty, vivacious thing that you may love with convenience. Cynthia, very handsome, but fickle and pettish, very apt to change her mind and her lover . . . Diana is a capital figure, not so handsome as some; more majestick than beautiful. However, not of quite so good a character, being turned out of the house of a kind of old batchelor, her friend; because my gentleman had missed half a dozen guineas. (82-3)

Uninterested in, and, in fact, deterred by the physical attractions and free sexual license of other women, Ira is drawn to Isabella, and she to him, for a different set of pleasures. Approaching Mrs. Savage, Isabella's foster mother, to request permission to visit Isabella on a regular basis, Ira intones, "she is the *friend*, whom I have, in time passed, entertained a presentiment that I should find, and to whom I am firmly persuaded I should ever remain indissolubly tied by every *sentiment of esteem*. How happy should I think myself, were I allowed the privilege of calling daily, and being blest with her *conversation*!" (22, Brown's italics) As the narrator makes clear, Ira is granted his request: "He was indulged with several of these conversations. He was entranced in her presence; he was charmed by the meaning so clearly expressed, in words, the very sound of which sunk into his unresisting heart" (22). More than fifty years before the publication of *Ira and Isabella*, as Nancy Armstrong argues, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* both reflected and participated in an unprecedented moment of socio-cultural change that saw the displacement of male desire from the body of a female to her interiority: "To understand the

power Richardson embodies in the non-aristocratic woman, one need only observe how he endows her with subjective qualities" (113). Brown, however, takes this displacement of desire one step further. While we are by no means meant to ignore Isabella's virtue, her "subjective qualities," in Armstrong's terms, we must also notice that these virtues, the strength of her "mind" and her "feeling nature," are signaled by her ability to use language eloquently. The language of Blair's rhetorical philosophy has replaced that of romantic love, or, in more lurid terms, Lorenzo's possessive desire. Ira admires Isabella's "*conversation*" and, instead of the content of her speech itself, the fact that it is "so clearly expressed" is what incites his love. In Brown's world, influenced as it is by Blair's concept that unadulterated human subjects are all naturally drawn to truly beautiful ideas, beautifully rendered, romantic lovers remain chaste by admiring phrases instead of physiques.

The Power of Sympathy attempts a similar replacement of sexual desire (coded as corrupt and European) with aestheticism (presented as the love of beauty, at large, but often expressed as a love of the literary), but carries this replacement out on a grander scale. Sexuality alone is not the problem in Brown's earlier novel; rather, *The Power of Sympathy* condemns the entire patriarchal, aristocratic paradigm that generates the licentiousness exhibited by the likes of Ira's friends and posits that proper literary education, if extended to both men and women, will prevent the illicit sexuality inherent in aristocratic societies while providing the basis for a stable democratic social structure. Rollin and Blair both drew connections between social practices and the character of a nation's prevailing taste. Corrupt governance or religious principles are cited as reasons for the decline of taste in nations where right judgment initially prevailed. Ornament, embellishment, and self-indulgent affect are markers of unstable social organizations that would, sooner or later, succumb to "strange revolutions."

The male Harringtons, both father and son, typify a European, decadent, aristocratic worldview. Each of them starts out as much of a rogue as *Ira and Isabella*'s Lorenzo, and neither hesitates to pursue illicit sexual relationships in order to preserve class-based notions of social worth that depend upon heredity and wealth instead of personal virtue. Maria, Harriot's unfortunate mother, ascribes the cause of her misfortunes to the elder Harrington's unwillingness to sacrifice social position by marrying a woman whose family had fallen into poverty: "We lived happily together in the days of my father," Maria writes, describing her family's initial comfort, "but when it pleased Providence to remove him, we no longer asserted our pretentions to that rank of life which our straitened finances were unable to continue—A young woman in no eligible circumstances, has much to apprehend from the solicitations of a man of affluence" (65). Harrington, Sr., also recognizes the wanton self-indulgence he demonstated as a young man in following the dictates of his "heated imagination," even as it led him to activities that were increasingly socially and morally corrosive: "At an early period of my life, I adopted a maxim, that *THE MOST NECESSARY LEARNING WAS A KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD*, the pursuit of which, quadrating with a volatility of disposition, presented a variety of scenes to my heated imagination. The *ECLAT* of my companions gratifying my vanity and increasing the gale of passion, I became insensibly hurried down the stream of dissipation" (70). Harrington, Jr., upon reaching adulthood, harbors his own aristocratic pretensions, rejecting both Harriot as a serious prospect for marriage and the core republican ideal that social worth is derived from personal virtue rather than birth. Responding to Worthy's admonishing remarks on his proposed treatment of Harriot as a mistress rather than a wife, Harrington counters:

> I suppose you will be ready to ask, why, if I love *Harriot*, I do not marry her . . . But *who* shall I marry? That is the question. *Harriot* has no father—no mother—niether is there aunt, cousin, or kindred of any degree who claim any kind of relationship to her . . . Now, Mr. *Worthy*, I must take the liberty to acquaint you,

> that I am not so much of a republican as formally to wed any person of this class. How laughable would my conduct appear, were I to trace over the same ground marked out by thy immaculate footsteps—To be heard openly acknowledging for my bosom companion, any daughter of the democratick empire of virtue!" (11)

They may reside in Boston, but, as Brown illustrates in no uncertain terms, the male Harringtons are "American" in name only, not in thought or in practice.

The younger Harrington might ultimately read as a more sympathetic character than his father. He does, after all, decide to pursue Harriot's hand in marriage rather than her consent to become his mistress, and, after doing so, at least nominally takes up the banner of the republicanism that he previously disparaged. Writing to Worthy after witnessing the tumult that ensues when a young lady at a social gathering is referred to as merely "'a mechanick's daughter,'" he rails against "INEQUALITY among mankind" because it is "is a foe to our happiness" that "even affects our parties of pleasure" (34). "For this reason," he continues, "I like a democratical better than any other kind of government" (34).

But, though his matrimonial plans change, Harrington, Jr., retains the taste for affect that represents a still undissolved connection with an irremediably corrupt, self-indulgent worldview. That Harrington rails against the aping of aristocratic privilege most vehemently only when it breaks up his party is perhaps the first tell that he has not relinquished all hold on those privileges himself. Harrington's passion for Harriot, more seriously, has by no means been made more chaste or circumspect by his determination to marry rather than seduce her, since even after declaring his intention to make Harriot his wife, he delights in describing his own affections and wringing his emotional state up to a fever pitch. One letter on the subject sent to Worthy asks, "What is love?" and answers, with bald melodrama, "Is it not an infinitude of graces that accompany every thing said by *Harriot*? That adorn all she does?" (32) Another, lamenting that Harriot will be absent for a short time, exclaims, "My beloved has left me for a while . . . and

here am I—anxious—solitary—alone!— . . . [she] is in my view all the day long, and when I retire to rest my imagination is still possessed with ideas of *Harriot*" (35). The proposed marriage with Harriot does not indicate a complete change of heart: Harrington's desires and the language he uses to express them are just as ungoverned and exaggerated after his proffered proposal as they were before it.

The most blatant assurance that Harrington's taste for empty affect has not been set aright, though his marital convictions have changed, is found in his description of a slave woman he encounters on a visit South Carolina. Describing the incident, once again, to his confidant, Worthy, Harrington notes that he remarked a scar on the woman's shoulder while walking behind her one day. In answer to his inquiries about the cause of the scar, she tells him that when her young son broke a glass in her master's home, she accepted blame for the "crime" herself and was whipped in punishment. The woman's assertion that she "rendered thanks to the best of beings that [she] was allowed to suffer for him" leads Harrington into paroxysms of praise for her "heroically spoken" sentiments (62). He begins with a lengthy benediction, of sorts—"may he whom you call the best of beings continue you in the same sentiments—may thy soul be ever disposed to SYMPATHIZE with thy children, and with thy brethren and sisters in calamity." "Then," he continues, offering this sentimentality as an all-too simple solution to the problem of slavery, "shalt thou feel every circumstance of thy life afford thee satisfaction; and repining and melancholy shall fly from the bosom—all thy labors will become easy—all thy burdens light, and the yoke of slavery will never gall thy neck" (62). Proud of his own decorous oration, Harrington is blind to the woman's tangible distress: "I was sensibly relieved as I pronounced these words," Harrington continues, "and I felt my heart glow with feelings of exquisite delight, as I anticipated the happy time when the sighs of the slave shall no longer expire in the air of

freedom" (62). Only after a further lengthy apostrophe to "Sensibility" and the "Author of Nature" does Harrington conclude the letter (62).

Harrington's ostensible causes—democracy and the extension of its freedoms to all individuals—seem faultless in and of themselves, but they are consistently undercut by his privileging of style over content. Just as he did with his salute to the "gentle God of Love" that hemorrhaged forth from his first letter to Worthy, Harrington still, even in the novel's later stages, takes more pleasure in providing romanticized descriptions than in working towards the "equality" and "freedom" he purports to love. When, after Harrington's death, Worthy writes that the disappointed lover had turned to *The Sorrows of Young Werther* for consolation after the death of Harriot, he also lays bare the fact that what seemed to be republican idealism was actually only the mirror image of European affect and emotionalism in Harrington's case, not, as might have been hoped, its opposite. Having never fully been reformed, Harrington's tastes revert back to the affective sentiments of Goethe's *Werther* as soon as they encounter an obstacle. The demise of the male Harringtons is tragic, but, as Brown suggests, unavoidable: the "Consequences of SEDUCTION"—illicit sexual behavior that results, in *The Power of Sympathy* from reverence both for Europe's social mores and for its hyperbolic, affective taste—are "fatal," both to the men (the senior and junior Harrington) who perpetuate unprincipled behavior and to the women (Maria and Harriot) who fall victim to the desires and, in the elder Harrington terms, the "heated imaginations" of the men who pursue them.

Myra and Worthy's relationship, conversely, offers a model of social organization that is at once more moral, equitable, and stable than the Harringtons' aristocratic life, a social order that draws its strength from the willingness of its citizens to pursue literary study. Both partners in this couple are defined by their good taste rather than by their capacity for ornamental language

and affinity for pathos. Worthy's eminent literariness is often called to our attention. In writing to Myra, for example, Mrs. Holmes sings the praises of Worthy's attention to aesthetic detail: “It is very agreeable to read with one, who points out the beauties of the author as we proceed. Such an one is *Worthy*!” (57) He has no trouble serving as Mr. Holmes's interlocutor, offering nuanced opinions on a variety of genres, from poetry, to history, to novels, as the two carry on an extended conversation on suitable reading material for young ladies. Myra, too, is defined largely in the context of her continued literary instruction. As the recipient of most of the comments on “female education” promised in the novel's preface, Myra accepts advice about various topics such as “the difference between truth and fiction,” reading and supporting American authorship, and cultivating “sentiment, morality, and benevolence” though literary study (53, 57).

This literary education, as Mrs. Holmes makes clear, is intended to set Myra on an equal footing with her male counterparts: "I was this morning reading *Swift*'s letter to a very young lady, on her marriage," she writes in an epistle on suggested reading,

> If you are in company, says this writer, when the conversation turns on the manners and customs of remote nations, or on books in verse or prose, or on the nature and limits of virtue and vice, it is a shame for a lady not to relish such discourses, not to improve by them and endeavour by reading and information, to have her share in those entertainments, rather than turn aside, as is the usual custom, and consult with the woman who sits next her, about a new cargo of fans. (56-7)

Such consistent attention to Myra's education only casts Harrington's effusive sentimentality in a more negative light: figures like Mrs. Holmes are conscientiously performing the work that will result in the equality that Harrington loves so much but goes only so far as to talk about. Furthermore, while women are, as Tennenhouse notes, moved around merely as capital in the patriarchal system that Harrington, Sr., perpetuates, and two of his children fall victim to, they

are seen as equal partners in a continuing process of moral instruction in the emerging paradigm of republican literariness modeled by Mrs. Holmes, Worthy, and Myra (*Importance* 48-50).

Myra's taste does come to be regarded as just as important as Worthy's (she, too is an admirer and judge of beauty rather than a passive example of it), and the relationship between the two is legitimated by their mutual ability to recognize and appreciate beauty, not by parity of rank or wealth. The culminating demonstration of the success of both Myra's and Worthy's literary education—in accordance with Blair's teachings, an education that is meant to prepare them to recognize and take pleasure in the true "beauties of nature and of art"—and of their fitness for each other occurs on Worthy's visit to Belleview. In the midst of a bevy of letters from Harrington to Worthy that describe the former's passion for Harriot (an ordering of letters that makes it hard to ignore the contrasts between the first lover's unguarded affect and the second lover's calm admiration,) Worthy, writing to Myra, admits that the pleasantries of his surroundings call her to mind. "There is something within us congenial to these scenes," he remarks, "they impress the mind with ideas similar to what we feel in beholding one whom we tenderly esteem" (30). Mrs. Holmes, acting as the virtuous version of the immoral socialite friends that Brown writes for Ira in his later novel, names Worthy's true feelings for him: "I was making this observation to Mrs. *Holmes*, and she told me I was in love—'These are the very scenes,' said she, 'which your beloved *Myra* used to praise and admire, and for which you, by a secret sympathy, entertain the same predilection'" (30). Echoing, as he does, the vocabulary of the work's title in Mrs. Holmes's comment, Brown makes his point more than clear: the "power of sympathy" that binds virtuous citizens together does not have to resemble the tumultuous, affective attractions of the Harringtons—it can also take the quieter form of shared taste, the "secret sympathy" that brings Worthy and Myra together.

But Worthy's missive does not end with the recognition of the couple's mutually agreeable aesthetic judgments. What Brown also illustrates in Worthy's letter is the idea that the same taste that draws virtuous citizens together can also preserve the probity of their expression of the love they feel for one another. Love in the "democratick empire of virtue" is just as ardent as that in Harrington's aristocratic paradigm, but its admiring eye is safely directed away from the love interest herself and toward the fruits of her imaginative labors. In Worthy's case, his most sentimental moments are prompted when he gazes on a piece of embroidery that Myra made for Mrs. Holmes's summer house:

> It is the work of *Myra*, said I to myself—Did not her fingers trace these beautiful, expanding flowers?—Did not she give to this carnation its animated glow, and to this opening rose its languishing grace? Removed as I am, from the amiable object of my tenderest affection, I have nothing to do but admire this offspring of industry and of art—It shall yield more fragrance to my soul than all the *boquets* in the universe.
> I did not care to pursue the thought—it touched a delicate string—at first, however, I flattered myself I should gain some consolation—but I lost in every reflection. (31)

The judiciousness of Worthy's romantic love is, for one, suggested by his inclination toward restraint—"I did not care to pursue the thought—it touched a delicate string." The pangs he feels when this string vibrates can be read also as evidence of his ability to recognize truth and beauty at large, not just as a desire for sexual fulfillment. When Worthy notes that regarding Myra's handiwork leads to thoughts that "touch a delicate string," his metaphor is not wholly new. Blair, in fact, uses the same metaphor to describe why true beauty appeals to everyone and why its power will eventually prove to be greater than any corrupting influence:

> [Taste] is built upon the same sentiments and perceptions which belong to our nature; and which, in general, operate with the same uniformity as our other intellectual principles. When these sentiments are perverted by ignorance and prejudice, they are capable of being rectified by reason. Let men declaim as much as they please, concerning the caprice and uncertainty of taste, it is found, by experience, that there are beauties, which, if they be displayed in a proper light,

> have power to command lasting and general admiration. In every composition, what interests the imagination, and touches the heart, pleases all ages and nations. *There is a certain string, to which, when properly struck, the human heart is so made as to answer*. (*Lectures*, 44, my emphasis)

Worthy's love for Myra is no threat to republican ideology that depends on the love and pursuit of virtue; rather, it is an expression of good taste, or the proper recognition of true, universal beauty. Ultimately, it is in the terms in which Worthy offers his love that we can read Brown's fullest response to critics who denigrated the novel for its Europeanness and for its romanticization of unnatural "passions." Coupled with the language of literary discourse, the conventions of the sentimental novel could be made safe for a republican audience. Young, virtuous love is possible, if Hugh Blair is asked to chaperone.

Prose and the "profitable moral"

The Power of Sympathy, then, echoing the precept, most accessible to Brown through Hugh Blair's work, that taste was the bedrock upon which virtuous society was built, is a novel that tells of citizens who come together on the basis of their capacities to read and interpret, to appreciate real beauties instead of affected ones. The story of the interpretive process—a story we read through Mrs. Holmes's comments on appropriate literature, through Mr. Holmes's and Worthy's discussions of different genres, and, most prominently, through Myra and Worthy's burgeoning love for one another—is just as important as story itself (in this case, the narrative of Harrington and Harriot's relationship). *The Power of Sympathy*, thus, draws distinctions between many related ideologies very carefully. Brown, for instance, painstakingly demarcates American creativity from English influence, and deliberately and sedulously separates aestheticism from sexuality, attempting to prove the capability of American genius while at the same time affirming its morality. But *The Power of Sympathy* is also a work that renegotiated traditional boundaries

between the literary and the critical in order to work toward the dual purpose of representing both characters and readers (and characters who are defined, primarily, as readers). The form of the novel itself allowed for these renegotiations. Brown looked to the novel not only for its ability to communicate a moral—to "expose" a "particular Vice" and "recommend" a "particular Virtue"—but also for its ability to show both beauty and the correct judgment of it at one and the same time.

Brown saw the novel as a genre that disguised its own genericism, a literary form that thrived because it eschewed the obvious constructedness of poetry in favor of prose, a form, closer to natural human speech than verse, that affected to be, in Ian Watt's terms, "real" (27). What Watt called "authenticity," however, was not precisely, or not only, what Brown was aiming for (27). It was not so much to appear "real," or faithful to the lived experience of individuals, that Brown turned to the conversational prose of the epistolary novel, but to appear extra-literary, or other than and distinctive from the ornate stories and passages of poetry that he offered up to his characters' and his readers' judgment. In the case of the multiple seduction narratives Brown embeds in his novel's first half, we certainly see this reliance on colloquial prose as a way of mediating reactions to overtly literary scenes. Myra is the recipient of both the tale of Ophelia from Harriot and that of Fidelia from Worthy, each scene supported by commentary on the stories themselves, while the story of Miss Whitman, which appears as a footnote, is commented on at length by both Mr. Holmes and Worthy. *The Power of Sympathy*'s final letter, however, contains the most obvious attempt to define the American novel as a metagenre that illustrates the process of interpretation even as it narrates plot and story.

We hear two voices speak in the last letter of Brown's text. One voice is Harrington, who has penned his own "Monumental Inscription," and the second is Worthy, whose letter to Mrs.

Holmes frames Harrington's text. Harrington's poem outlines the circumstances that led him to take his own life: "Here rest their heads, consign'd to parent earth, / Who to one common father ow'd their birth; / Unkown this union—Nature still presides, / And Sympathy unites, whom Fate divides" (102). Harrington also warns against sexual indiscretion and illicit, unwedded romantic relationships, the sins, in fact, that caused his sorrow:

> Stranger! contemplate well before you part,
> And take this serious counsel to thy heart:
> Does some fair female of unspotted fame,
> Salute thee, smiling, with a father's name,
> Bid her detest the fell Seducer's wiles,
> Who smiles to win—and murders as he smiles. (102-3)

In addition to the measured couplets that Harrington uses to denote the pathos and poetic tragedy of his grief for Harriot, he also calls attention to the literariness of his story by uniting his own lines to those of a famous English poet—Alexander Pope. Harrington concludes his "Inscription" with two couplets that appear in the penultimate stanza of Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard":

> If ever wandering near this dark recess,
> Where guardian spirits round the either press;
> Where, on their urn, celestial care descends,
> Two lovers come, whom fair success attends,
> "O'er the pale marble shall they join their heads,
> "And drink the falling tears each other sheds,
> "Then sadly say, with mutual pity mov'd,
> "O! may we never love as these have lov'd." (103)

Worthy's letter, though describing scenes of similar pathetic potential, focuses more on reporting and assessing than on eliciting emotional responses. He begins by describing Harrington's funeral and records reactions to the young man's death. Noting that many at the funeral were deeply saddened by the young man's death, Worthy relates that one attendee spoke of Harrington as a man of "violent passions . . . possessed of too nice sensibility," though he was also "of a

promising genius" (102). Ultimately, however, Worthy proffers some comments on Harrington's poem and some remarks about how it may help his surviving friends whenever their grief at his loss returns. Concluding his letter to Mrs. Holmes, Worthy offers this consolation:

> I send you inclosed a copy of the Monumental Inscriptiom, as written by *Harrington*. I found it with many loose papers. It contains the story of our unfortunate friends, and a profitable moral is deduced from it.
> Though a few weeks begin to spread a calm over our passions, yet the recollection of our misfortunes will sometimes cause a momentary agitation, as the ocean retains its swell, after the storm subsides. (102)

Initially, it seems these two writers, Worthy and Harrington, work toward the same end: both could be said to moralize, since they both attempt to control the perception of the sentimental tragedies they experience by offering up lessons. Harrington's "Stranger! . . . take this counsel to thy heart" is the counterpart of Worthy's injunction to read the "Monumental Inscription" because "a profitable moral is deduced from it" (103, 102). Worthy's prose, however, signals a distinction between his own project and Harrington's. While Harrington deliberately seeks to demonstrate artistry and to tug at heartstrings, seeking comfort from his pains in literary expression, Worthy, a more detached witness and observer, seeks to recognize the beauty in that artistry, to identify its universal morals, and to describe how they may be applied. After the narrative's most tragic events have transpired, the surviving hero's final act is not merely one of moralization, or even one of memorialization; it is, rather, an act of literary criticism. Believing, with Blair, that taste was essential to the strength and perpetuity of a virtue-loving society, Brown found, in the novel, the perfect genre for an American audience. The novel—a polyglot form that could move between poetry and prose, that could at one moment strive to be literary and in the next step into the realm of the "real" where literature could be explained and assessed—could tell a beautiful love story, but also the story of those who wished to evaluate it. *The Power of Sympathy* placed the American novel in the context of a centuries-old literary history and defined the true

American as, above all, a literary critic.

Chapter 3

Wieland's Revolution in American Literature

Sometime before 1790, Charles Brockden Brown penned a letter to his friend John Davidson, who was also a member of the Belles Lettres Club that Brown had helped start in 1787 at the ripe age of sixteen.[1] In the letter, Brown briefly laments that his lack of medical knowledge prevents him from addressing the content of an essay draft Davidson had sent to him for critique, but then discusses, at length, an important question about the style of the composition. After assuring Davidson that his draft is "certainly not deficient" in "correctness and perspicuity," Brown meditates on the relationship between ideas and style in composition at large:

> May it not be disputed . . . whether those hours devoted to rhetorical exercises would not be far more usefully employed in storing the imagination with images and the understanding with ideas, in enriching our minds with just and valuable sentiments, in collecting and arranging the elements of knowledge? Those whose conceptions are ardent and vigorous cannot fail of expressing themselves with sufficient energy, and all the defects of composition may perhaps be outweighed by just arguments, useful relations, and humble perspicuity. May not your performances be highly celebrated, your own doctrines be incontestably established, and the position of your opponents be unanswerably confuted though you should be deficient in propriety of terms or harmony of phraseology? . . . Elegance of style is of no value when put into competition with solidity of thought . . .
>
> I confess that were I to consult my own taste that I should willingly assume a different opinion. I am seldom profited by instruction unless it be conveyed in elegant and pleasing language, but I know that the bulk of mankind are very differently affected, and that in performances which are designated to be generally useful, uncommon solicitude with regard to style would be not only useless but improper, that our language and ideas are to be reduced to the standard of common mind and familiar diction. (Clark 49-50)

[1] This letter is quoted in David Lee Clark's *Charles Brockden Brown: A Critical Biography*, but is reproduced without a date. Most likely, it was written sometime in the late 1780s, during when Brown and Davidson's most frequent contact with one another as members of the Belles Lettres Club, but before December 1790, when Davidson died at a young age (*Collected Writings* 8 n1).

Behind the reflection of the young man for whom hours of rhetorical exercises in a schoolroom were a recent memory, and perhaps the young critic maintaining a generous respect for a friend's ego, we read an uneasiness with some primary principles of literary discourse and traditional understandings of the belles lettres and a desire to articulate a new standard of the literary. Questioning the real import of "harmony of phraseology" and "elegance of style," Brown calls into question the classical and neoclassical rhetorical tradition's emphasis on style and beauty, which tradition asserted that eloquence was both a signifier of truth and the quality that made truths pleasurable, and therefore accessible, to man. As I have discussed, this was the tradition Charles Rollin and Hugh Blair propagated in the eighteenth century in their respective works on the belles lettres, and it was the tradition that suggested, both to an American public and to public's "first" novelist, William Hill Brown, the expediency of encouraging American literature. A shared love for "harmony of phraseology" and a shared taste for universal beauty could cement the social bonds that held citizens of the new republic together and could stand in for the unnatural ties, knotted by aristocratic lineage and divinely-granted kingship, that had given pre-Revolutionary society its shape.

Prior critics have demonstrated that Philadelphia in the 1790s, the world in which Brown lived when he wrote *Wieland*, was not a world characterized by strong social bonds and harmonious communion among citizens.[2] The sources of this unrest were numerous. Religious leaders, distressed at what they perceived to be an onslaught of skepticism resulting from Enlightenment-era rationalist inquiry, had begun to foment the Second Great Awakening

[2] See Christophersen Chapter 1 "The Condition of Our Country" 1-15, Kafer "Interlude: Philadelphia, 1795-1799: "renderings in the bowels of nations" 105-109, and Tompkins 47-8.

(Christophersen 1-3). Troubling reports of the French Revolution's growing violence and of Toussaint L'Overture's slave insurrections in St. Domingue began to undermine the idea of justified revolt from which Americans had drawn confidence for their future.[3] The vagaries of the market economy succeeded in adding much to the coffers of a few, while further disenfranchising broad segments of the American population, including slaves, Indians, and women, all of whom were required to submit their labor and resources for the good of this economy though they were rarely viewed as equal or significant partners in economic ventures (Kafer 8-12). What was more, Americans had begun to turn towards other Americans all of the energies they had previously spent degrading British interests in the halls of government, pages of newspapers, and even on the battlefield. Mounting party factionalism led people to the streets—Kafer describes a 1794 riot in which a crowd met to "hang, guillotine, *and* blow [John Jay] up in effigy"—and mob violence was widespread (105).[4]

Wieland reflects the tumult of its times on many fronts, as a brief summary of its complex plot will show. Brown sets the scene for his novel along the banks of the Schuylkill River during the period of time "between the conclusion of the French and the beginning of the revolutionary war" (4). Clara, the young heroine and narrator, begins with a brief restatement of her family's history which culminates in the circumstances of her father's death. After living for weeks under the impression that he has violated a divine decree, the deeply religious elder Wieland is found in

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[3] Christophersen 1, Kafer 105.

[4] Tompkins describes the extent of mob activity in Pennsylvania and other states in the 1790s: "Riots, mob actions, and the raising of semi-private militias were recurrent features of American civil life before the Revolution; and in the decades that preceded the writing of *Wieland*, the country was threatened by civil insurrection in the doctors' riot in New York, Shays' Rebellion in western Massachusetts, and the Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania. Mob violence was endemic; there were fist fights in state and federal legislatures; ordinary people took to the streets, destroying property and beating men; dueling became widespread; 'everything,' writes Godron Wood, 'seemed to be coming apart, and murder, suicide and drunkenness were prevalent'" (48).

his habitual place of worship after a strange light appears there, “his skin throughout the greater part of his body . . . scorched and bruised” (19). Though Clara and her older brother, Theodore, also lose their mother while quite young, they grow up in relative comfort under the auspices of a kind aunt, often joined at their family estate, Mettingen, by Henry and Catharine Pleyel, two children from the surrounding neighborhood. Theodore eventually marries Catharine, and the members of both Wieland and Pleyel families live peacefully, often meeting to read together, play music, and enjoy each other's conversation until the appearance of a young man named Carwin. Unbeknownst to anyone in the novel's small social circle, Carwin is a talented “biloquist” who can throw his voice and imitate the voices of others. This secret ventriloquist causes mischief for no pronounced reason, even effecting a rupture between Clara and Henry Pleyel, whom Clara has come to love. After Carwin's appearance, Theodore begins to hear a voice he believes to be divine instructing him to kill his family as a show of faith and obedience. Theodore does take the lives of his wife and their children, but turns his knife on himself before he can kill Clara, too. Not much is resolved by the end of Clara's narration. Carwin denies having ever been the source of Theodore's divine voices, though he admits to causing the rift between Clara and Pleyel, and Clara leaves the Pennsylvanian countryside for Europe, where she eventually reunites with Pleyel, but never recovers the happiness she enjoyed before the onset of her brother's “manias.”

In *Wieland*, Brown looks anxiously at the vacuum of power created when ties with England were disbanded, and yet he cannot place unmitigated faith in any of the institutions—whether traditionally found on American soil or newly realized there—vying to assume the authoritative, structuring roles that English government and social conventions had once filled. As Larzar Ziff noted in one of the earliest and still most trenchant studies of *Wieland*'s critique of

democratic rationalism, what lurks behind all of the "real horrors" described in *Wieland* is the central assumption of man's "depravity" (Ziff 53). The Wielands cannot trust their literal senses, their capacity to rightly perceive information from the world around them, or even their abilities to make figurative sense of the world they perceive.[5] From this fundamental insistence on man's psychological limitations, as prior critics have argued, Brown's skepticism expanded, to assert, in *Wieland*, a number of far-reaching critiques of systems of belief and social practice that reigned in America. Bernard Rosenthal writes that, in painting Theodore Wieland and his father before him, for instance, as manically religious, Brown examines the efficacy of belief in "revealed religion," or the assumption that a subject would feel and perceive the direct presence of a higher power when God chose to make himself known, a fundamental tenet of many protestant denominations in America.[6] While not precisely atheistic in its stance, *Wieland* asserts that men like the Wielands, who lived in the midst of a social experiment and whose faculties were susceptible to corruption needed a more pragmatic, rational morality that did not depend on the communications of distant and incomprehensible mysteries.[7] If man's depravity rendered the

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[5] The trend of reading *Wieland* as an exploration of the limits of human psychology was longstanding, and always led to the claim that what Brown found in the midst of his explorations was always the fallibility of the human mind. Donald A. Ring's 1966 biography, *Charles Brockden Brown*, concludes that Brown demonstrated consistently that "human beings are much more complex than the contemporary psychology [of Lockean rationalism] assumed." Carl Nelson, Jr.'s "Brown's Manichaean Mock-Heroic: The Ironic Self in a Hyperbolic World" (1975) likewise asserts that "the psychological polarities of the human mind" were central to Brown's work. James F. Russo's "The Chimeras of the Brain" (1981) casts Ziff's focus on Calvinist "depravity" as a matter of philosophical inquiry for Brown, citing "epistemology" as the foremost problem in *Wieland* and concluding that Brown's prmary claim is that "man is incapable of perceiving things correctly." David Seed's "The Mind Set Free" (1996) also discusses Brown's distrust of man's psychological constitution and connects this distrust to the novel's frenetic form: "the novel's ambiguities and very lack of resolution reflect a profound skepticism on Brown's part over the mind's capacity to grasp truth and order perceptions."

[6] See also Axelrod 69-75 for discussion of reconciling Brown's Quaker identity with his espousal of the doctrine of inherited depravity, a Calvinist belief, and with his apparent stance against religious authority.

[7] For more on Brown's struggles with Christian belief, see Watts 54-56. Christophersen also reads *Wieland* as a novel that reflects anxiety over the tumult in religious communities during the 1790s, as the nation was on the verge of the Second Great Awakening. Clara, according to Christophersen, like many American citizens in the late eighteenth century who had experienced the onset of Enlightened rationalism (personified, in *Wieland*, in

time-honored institution of the church incapable of ordering a society wracked by war, however, it also served as an obstacle to the unimpeded functioning of democratic republicanism and called into question the feasibility of republicanism's attendant ideology, liberal individualism.[8] Like Carwin, citizens could use their voices for their own gain, even their own amusement, potentially impinging on the lives and happiness of others. Disinterestedness, Brown warned, though a byword of republican ideologues, did not always appear to be more attractive than self-promotion.[9] Brown's Americans are left adrift in a sea of voices, unable to distinguish true authorities from false, even when those authorities are their own reasoning faculties. *Wieland*, thus, is hardly a novel of "harmony"—of "phraseology" or otherwise.

My first proposition in this chapter is that, in the midst of Brown's critique of republican

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Pleyel), is unsettled because she can no longer be sure that God was knowable (41-49).

[8] Beginning with Chris Looby's account of Brown's use of the figure of the "voice" in *Wieland*, many critics have studied the novel's "voices" as devices employed to illuminate the disjunctions and instability of the democratic state. The argument Looby advances in *Voicing America* (1996) shows just how expansive the field of Brown's critique of republican idealism really is: "*Wieland*," Looby writes, "is possibly the most profound reflection on the aporias of time, history, language, and knowledge that can be found in the literature of the early national period. As such, it is at the same time a reflection on the very conditions of existence of an unprecedented social experiment, a nation deprived of trditional sources of legitimacy: the security and harmony of the United States depended, in Brown's view, on the risky exercise of something called "voice" (146). More recently, David S. Hogsette's "Textual Surveillance, Social Codes, and Sublime Voices: The Tyranny of Narrative in Caleb Williams and Wieland" (2005) has examined the ways in which *Wieland* reveals the difficulties of managing the dispersion of power that resulted after the Enlightenment as ruling capability was decentralized from its historical locus in the body of the king and spread among the general public. Carwin, in Hogsette's discussion, presents the harrowing idea that the integrity of the *vox populii* is vulnerable if not all of its members act from the purest of motives, or can be expected to differentiate the value of voices that are all, politically speaking, afforded equal weight. Eric A. Wolfe's Ventriloquizing Nation: Voice, Identity, and Radical Democracy in Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*" (2006) focuses more specifically on Brown's use of disconnected voices as a critique of the "Federalist fantasy" of the pure, unified, national voice. In the years leading up to *Wieland*'s publication, Wolfe notes, Brown witnessed the unfolding of the XYZ affair which soured American attitudes toward the French and toward foreigners in their own land, and of the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts which further increased the persecution of foreign "voices."

[9] See especially Gordon Wood's *Creation* 53-65, in which he elaborates on the central claim that "the sacrifice of individual interests to the greater good of the whole formed the essence of republicanism and comprehended for Americans the idealistic goal of their Revolution," and the expanded version of Bailyn's *Ideological Origins*, in which he discusses how Federalist thinkers revisited ideas of virtue and disinterestedness after the Revolution (374-6).

idealism and its implicit faith in reason, he offers, along with it, a specific, targeted critique of the neoclassical literary discourse looked to as a mainstay of that republicanism and as the means through which its ideologies could be regenerated and reproduced.[10] *Wieland*, written in the enthusiasm of Brown's first year as a novelist, a career on which he embarked after more than a decade of voracious study and devout application to the project of becoming a man of letters,

[10] For a long time, critics saw Brown as deeply critical of the aesthetic, suspicious of both the imagination and of literature for their seductive power. Paul Witherington's "Benevolence and the 'Utmost Breach': Charles Brockden Brown's Narrative Dilemma" (1972) and Mark Seltzer's "Saying Makes it So: Language and Event in Brown's *Wieland*" (1978) both suggest that *Wieland* plays out what Seltzer calls a "deep fear of art and its effects" (88). Witherington argues that this "fear of art," for Brown, resulted from a realization that he came to over the course of his short career as a novelist: "Brown simply found that imagination is 'revolutionary,' that it threatened the values of benevolence he wanted most to preserve," while Seltzer attributes Brown's "fear" of literature to a darker cause. Brown, in *Wieland*, explores the lack of connection between intent and utterance, between meaning and language, and then he sees that the failures in these linkages must necessarily undermine the credibility fiction (even his own.) Michael Bell also reads Brown as profoundly distrusting of of the imagination, and in "'The Double-Tongued Deceiver': Sincerity and Duplicity in the Novels of Charles Brockden Brown" (1974) makes explicit connections between Brown's suspicion of imagination's unruly qualities and the seductive potential of literary fiction, which he sees as a vehicle through which the imagination is given free reign (146-7). More recent critics have found in Brown's work a much more nuanced, and more appreciative view of both aesthetics and fiction. Anthony Galuzzo's "Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* and the Aesthetics of Terror" (2009) sees, in Carwin, an "at least partially valorized" aesthetic force who does the necessary work of bringing the Revolution's terrors home to the Wieland clan, who are otherwise happy to contemplate these terrors from afar according to a rubric of disinterested Kantian aestheticism (255). Similarly, Edward Cahill's *Liberty of the Imagination* (2012) hopes to correct the tendency of past scholarship to see only Brown's critique of imagination's dangers by demonstrating that the tension in Brown's novels is more accurately described as one between imagination's simultaneous destructive and creative powers (165-7). James Dillon and Thomas Koenings, lastly, have mounted an effort to revisit Brown's theory of fiction and the role of the novel. Dillon's "'The Highest Province of Benevolence': Charles Brockden Brown's Fictional Theory" (1998) asserts that Brown saw, in fiction, the capability to improve upon the genre of the history, which had, throughout the eighteenth century, laid claim to higher purpose and literary value than the novel, because the novel could contend with "the unknowability of human motives" better than history ever could. Koenings's "'Whatever may be the Merit of My Book as a Fiction': Wieland's Instructional Fictionality" (2012) also sees Brown's turn to fiction as the result of the young author's hope that fiction as a genre could help new republicans, living in an uncertain world, learn to look for possible readings and interpretations rather than hope for definitive moral proclamations. The merits of these readings are many—as I will discuss, Brown's reflections on literature and the literary were certainly nuanced, and often included both critique and approbation. My reading hopes to improve on many of the terms set forth in the critical history of Brown's own vision of literature by providing a more specific account of the definition of literature that he was writing into, sometimes even against. Prior criticism has not been particularly attentive to Brown's engagements with eighteenth-century literary theory, focusing, perhaps too broadly, on Brown's assessment of the larger concept of aesthetic theory, or, perhaps too narrowly, on Brown's emphasis only on critiques of the novel launched in the 1780s and 1790s. Both of these lines of inquiry deny that polite literature was very much, as I have discussed previously, a longstanding "institution" in America with a specific discourse of its own and deny the novel's place in this institution's history, oversights that obscure the particularities of the critique of literary discourse's authority that Brown launches in *Wieland*.

addresses the same concerns over the suitability of eighteenth-century literariness that appear in Brown's letter to his friend Davidson. As Brown's first major novel, *Wieland* communicates its author's intense interest in assessing the value and also the weaknesses of literature itself as an institution, the authority of which was derived from its supposed ability to direct and refine reason and judgment. *Wieland*'s very title both points forward to the story of the fictional Wieland family that unfolds against the backdrop of an American setting, and backward, to the German writer and poet Christoph Martin Wieland's epic poem *The Trial of Abraham* (1753), which provided inspiration for Brown's novel.[11] Theodore and Clara's surname is an allusion: they are imbricated in literary history from the very start. Moreover, any summary of *Wieland*'s plot even slightly more detailed than the one provided thus far would have to take note that nearly every major plot event is precipitated by an act of reading, a desire to read, or, in some cases, a misreading or misinterpretation of stylized language. The Wielands' father's obsessive religiosity is triggered when he comes across a book of Camisard theology. Theodore first hears mysterious voices while searching for a letter from a friend with a descriptive passage he would like to revisit. Clara encounters Carwin in her closet, a meeting that leads Pleyel to rebuke her for immorality, when she approaches her closet to retrieve and read her father's journal. Carwin's "voice," furthermore, demonstrates, as I will show, some particularly literary qualities. The need to read and assess the written word is everywhere in *Wieland*, and one of the novel's central problems is, as Brown makes clear, that his characters are not always fitted to the task.

Thus, while posing a few central questions about the integrity of the human mind, the

[11] Robert Hughes discusses Christoph Martin Wieland's poem as one that relies on "beauty, truth, and goodness," and emphasizes the morality in the Biblical Abraham and Isaac story. Brown, of course, complicates this account significantly, asking if it can truly be moral for God to make such a request (63).

capability of the senses, and the viability of democratic authority, I argue, Brown poses a number of related, equally pressing questions about whether the conventional terms of literary discourse that called for elegantly crafted language and close attention to style could define the literature Americans needed or the literary sensibility that could keep a fledgling republic together. Could literature anchor a stable democratic society, for instance, if the taste required to understand and appreciate it required years of study—years that, perhaps, only aristocrats could afford in terms of available leisure time and financial resources? Was literature, in fact, inextricably tied to a class-based paradigm that promoted the rights of some citizens over others on the basis of birth and wealth? Could humankind's natural taste for beauty really be kept within appropriate bonds, or was the constitution of man so prone to depravity that literary beauty would always prove seductive rather than enlightening? And, last but not least, were the standards by which neoclassical literary discourse granted authority to literary works as proper instructors of taste and judiciousness—standards that, on the one hand, claimed to locate a text's authority in how well it illuminated universal truths, but, on the other hand, often promoted the reading of ancient literatures whose authority seemed seated only in the perception that their longstanding history lent them relevance- really appropriate for life in America at the turn of the nineteenth century?

Secondly, however, I propose that Brown addressed these difficult questions about the insufficiencies of eighteenth-century literary theory in the style and form of his own text. Problems inherent in the guiding principles of neoclassical literary rhetoric provided thematic material for Brown, the imaginative, frenetic storyteller aiming to explore, dissect, even explode the fissures between the rhetoric chosen to describe American life and the reality of living it. They also posed a problem for Brown, the literary craftsman, engaged in producing a literary text even as he deconstructed the discourse surrounding how that text should be read, what stylistic

features should define it, what cultural ends it should work toward, and what institutions it supported. Brown approaches the questions he unearths about the literary's traditional guises most clearly, I argue, in the construction of his novel's narrator, the young Clara Wieland, and, furthermore, I suggest that by analyzing Clara in comparison to Samuel Richardson's and William Godwin's narrators that we arrive at the most accurate picture of the revolutions in literary style that Brown effected in *Wieland*. In the midst of the avid reading that occupied Brown's childhood and enriched his young adulthood, Brown came to admire many novelists, but none so ardently as Richardson, in many respects the father of the English novel, and Godwin, the father of the English radical novel.[12] As Brown demonstrates by admitting to his friend, Davidson, however, that he himself loves "elegant and pleasing language," though such language might not be the most suitable for communicating the true worth of "ideas," the young author was not unwilling to anatomize his own predilections or view even his favorites with skepticism. For Brown, these two English predecessors set the precedents from which further definitions of the literary could evolve—both Richardson and Godwin critiqued neoclassical ideas of the literary, accepting some, rejecting others, and demonstrating improvements on traditional principles in their own novels—but such evolutions needed to be more fully accomplished and accurately tailored to the uncertainties of life in the new republic. We must understand Clara, then, as a product of a revisionist attitude toward literature, as well as a revisionist or, even,

[12] Axelrod offers this list of novelists with whose work Brown was familiar: "We do know . . . that he read Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, of course, and *Hermsprong*, Robert Bage's response to Godwin's novel. Moreover, the yellow fever scenes in *Ormond* and *Arthur Mervyn* suggest a familiarity with Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, and, for that matter, the treatment of Philadelphia as the stage for deceit, swindling, and even counterfeiting calls to mind the London of *Moll Flanders*. *Arthur Mervyn*, its plots rising one upon the other like so many hydra heads, suggests (in light of Brown's knowledge of French) and affinity with Denis Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste et son maître*, a novel to which Elihu Hubbard Smith and William Dunlap make reference. *Wieland*, we have seen, indicates a familiarity with German fiction. And, of course, Brown must have known something of the English gothicists, though he never mentions any gothic works by name, and alludes to the genre in his preface to *Edgar Huntley* only to revile it" (112).

perhaps, revolutionary, figure herself.

However, the answers to which Brown arrives as the result of his inquiries into the nature and viability of traditional literary discourse are not, on the whole, reassuring. *Wieland*, as past critics have noted and as each new critical revision has, for the most part, only reaffirmed with mounting evidence, is not an optimistic book. This discussion does not hope to mitigate any of its pessimism. What Brown illustrates in his first major novel is not the idea that literariness may be the antidote to political and social unrest caused, in large part, by unalterable human depravity, but that the literary is also an institution that can be undermined by this depravity. Clara is not, ultimately, the source of redemptive beauty that traditional ideas of literariness would dictate she should be, and she does not extend to her readers the comfort of a traditional narrator's authoritative, stabilizing, and explanatory voice. Rather, in Clara, Brown suggests that for literature to truly reflect American life—and for *Wieland* to be, in fact, as its subtitle offers, an "American Tale"—it must not demonstrate the qualities of "elegant and pleasing language" Brown himself admitted to prefer. Literature could not proclaim certainties, or illustrate virtue through "harmony of phraseology." For literature to speak to flawed people, finding their way in the midst of unprecedented upheaval, then literature itself, Brown suggests, had to acknowledge its own fallibility.

I. "This stamp must of consequence be in perpetual change"

Charles Brockden Brown was part of the first generation of Americans to have been born subjects of the English crown but raised as citizens of the United States. Brown saw firsthand, however, that the fight for independence was not one innocent of all crime, and that liberty for all was not, in fact, its primary goal. Peter Kafer reads Brown's experiences growing up in a Quaker

family in Pennsylvania in the 1770s as integral to the young man's character and to the themes of isolation and instances of violence that pervaded his work later in his life. Brown's father, Elijah, owned a mercantile business in the 1770s, but experienced serious difficulties when patriot groups attacked his storefront in retaliation for his refusal, on religious grounds, to bear arms (Watts 27). Charles was a six-year-old boy when, in 1777, his father was exiled to Virginia under orders issued by the Continental Congress, and the young Brown spent a good part of his childhood watching as friends and neighbors in the Quaker community were rounded up and put on trial for "Tory" beliefs (Watts 1-6; Kafer 1-14). In 1784 Elijah Brown was jailed again, this time for debt. Carrying large amounts of debt forward from the war, taxed by a government in which he could not participate because he was designated as a "nonjuror" who did not swear allegiance to the state (Quakers did not sign political oaths), and finding his enterprise to be in competition with new European-owned businesses that moved into Philadelphia after the war, Elijah Brown was unable to keep his mercantile business solvent.[13]

Neither did life in the new republic become free of care for Charles as he grew older. Once he graduated from the Friends Latin School in 1787, he faced the task of choosing a profession. Brown's biographer and friend, William Dunlap, describes this transition as one, perhaps, doomed to fail from the start: "That freedom almost amounting to licentiousness with which Charles roved unguided in pursuit of knowledge, had not fitted him for the severe study of one science, however, he made his choice of the profession of law" (11).[14] Pushed into

[13] See Watts 43 for more on Elijah Brown's experiences in the Philadelphia market, and Doerflinger 242-50 for a discussion of Philadelphia's post-war mercantile economy.

[14] Dunlap takes a sunny view of Brown's law career (sunnier, certainly than Brown would have himself), and he details his friend's successes in the field, as well as the Brown family's urgent desire that he should remain within it (11-27).

professional life by his family, who, of course, in the 1780s needed every bit of financial help they could get, Brown turned to the law as a professional course that might still allow for rigorous study, exploration into the high ideals of justice and virtue, and the refinement of his writerly talents. After six years spent studying with Alexander Wilcocks, a highly respected lawyer in Philadelphia, Brown left before completing the necessary requirements to practice. The great amount of work the study of law required was not, as Watts has noted, Brown's complaint; rather, Brown left, to the great dismay of many of his family and friends, for ideological reasons. Even if the study of law satisfied the intellect, the practice of it was stiffling, and, in Brown's view, law as a profession was not immune to the ideology of market individualism that gained ascendency in the United States after the war. Brown's own assessment of the legal profession, written in a letter to his friend William Wood Wilkins in 1792 before Wilkins himself commenced studying law, shows not only his dissatisfaction with law as a professional choice, but also his dismay at finding that the American environment was somehow to blame for the degradation of its practice:

> I look forward with pleasure to the time when my friend will step forth on the theater of the world, and yet my satisfaction is much less than it would have been at an earlier age, when the purpose of your labors would have appeared not so much the acquisition of wealth as the attainment of glory. Our intellectual ore is apparently of no value but as it is capable of being transmuted into gold, and learning and eloquence are desirable only as the means of more expeditiously filling our coffers. In England the profession of law is indeed the road to glory, and genius and application may derive new vigor from the contemplation of a double object, wealth and reputation. (*Collected Writings* 162)

Brown, thus, had every reason to distrust both the wisdom of crowds and the disinterestedness of individual voices, as the many critics and biographers who have usefully contextualized the critiques of republican idealism in the corpus of his novelistic works within the framework of his

personal history have found.[15] These same points of contention with republicanism, however, also appear in Brown's thinking about literature and the social meaning of literariness in the United States.

In many respects, Brown approached the creative work he did with vigor and optimism. Even while studying law, he sedulously made time for his own literary pursuits, meeting with fellow members of the Belles Lettres Club regularly and publishing his first well-known series of articles under the name, "The Rhapsodist" in the *Columbian Magazine*. Once he began his career as a full-time novelist, furthermore, he wholeheartedly subscribed to several principles that were essentially neoclassical in nature. Brown's "Walstein's School of History," a series of articles written for the *Monthly Magazine* in New York in the summer of 1799 (right in the midst of his four active years as a novelist), and probably the most consolidated definition of fiction the young man offered during his early period, claims, as Rollin and Blair always had, that the aim of literature was to promote virtue.[16] It was the author's job, Brown asserts, to turn stories from actual life into fiction for the edification of readers: "the narrative of public events," he writes, "with a certain license of invention, was the most efficacious of moral instruments" ("Walstein" 191). Brown also, as his sentiments in "Walstein's School" make clear, assumed literature's "public" function and saw the author's purpose in promoting virtue as part of the broader project of promoting the nation's best interests. No better example of Brown's commitment to literature's social responsibilities can be found than the fact that, once *Wieland* was published in

[15] Here I refer to Brown's contemporary and to his modern biographers: Dunlap, Clark, Watts, Axelrod, and Kafer.

[16] Brown's critics often look to "Walstein's School" as a key to understanding his novelistic work and the role he envisioned for himself as a novelist. See Watts 75-78, Kamrath 78-80, Dillon 241-243, and Emerson 125-6 for discussions of how Brown defined the role of the novelist in "Walstein's School" as a writer who improves upon or supercedes the limitations of traditional historiography.

the fall of 1798, he sent a copy to Thomas Jefferson, who responded cordially, even though it is unclear whether or not Jefferson ever actually read the text.[17]

Brown, however, also had a number of concerns about the United States' literary climate in the 1790s, and he embarked on a full-time writing career with some consternation. The young author had quit his career in law because it conflicted with the ideas and values he wanted to pursue as a literary man. He wanted to ply the depths of human experience and thought he could benefit his fellow citizens in doing so, while his fellow lawyers, heated with republican zeal for self-determination, were more interested in their own financial gain. In choosing to become one of the nation's first professional men of letters, that is, one who wrote for subsistence as well as from inspiration and who practiced no other profession alongside of his creative endeavors, Brown violated, as Robert A. Ferguson writes, "the eighteenth-century ideal of the gentleman of letters" that "presupposed the virtue of communal leadership based on visible station" (141). The young author, then, found himself between a Scylla and a Charybdis that were both born of a republican worldview: he was prevented from fully committing to his writing while serving as a practicing professional because his energies were expected to be channeled only toward the acquisition of financial, rather than intellectual, gain, and, yet, the presumption of cultural authority granted by the title of "esquire" was seemingly required to make his thoughts on justice, virtue, and mankind creditable. These conflicting cultural imperatives certainly gave Brown pause. They suggested both that the eighteenth-century emphasis on far-ranging literary study was quickly becoming unmanageable, and, therefore, obsolete, and that the public may

[17] Clark (163), Tompkins (44), and Kafer (xi) all discuss Brown's decision to send a copy of *Wieland* to Thomas Jefferson, citing it as evidence that Brown certainly intended to promote *Wieland* as a novel intimately connected with and reflective of the affairs of the state.

have vested its interests in quarters other than the refinement of true taste and good judgment.

Such concerns surfaced in Brown's pre-novelistic writings, especially, in a particularly telling early example, in his "Address on the Objects of the Belles Lettres Club."[18] At the age of sixteen, Brown, together with a few of the friends with whom he had graduated from the Friends' Latin School, formed the Belles Lettres Club for the purpose of communal literary improvement.[19] In his "Address," the club's inaugural speech, Brown outlines the merits of forming such a club for the continued literary instruction of youth and he comments on the various subjects that were to fall under the club's purview. It is clear that Brown is well-versed in his Blair and shares the general reverence for the Scottish thinker's work that took hold after the *Lectures*'s publication in 1783 and its subsequent translation and dispersal across both Europe and America. It is Blair's work, for example, to which he refers while defining the parameters of the group's studies:

> Polite learning, sometimes under the name of humanity, and sometimes of Belles Lettres, has long been the subject of academical education in the universities of Europe. Its nature and boundaries therefore must have been long since fixed, and determined with a precision sufficient for our purpose. According to my own observation, and in the main agreeably to the method adopted in a celebrated publication on this subject, Belle Lettres may be generally divided into three great departments—grammar, rhetoric, and poetry.[20]

But what the young scholar did not share was his predecessor's belief that true, natural, and correct taste would always prevail and would always guide societies, if their most distinguished

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[18] The full text of Brown's "Address" appears in Paul Allen's *The Life of Charles Brockden Brown* 21-31, which was comissioned by Elizabeth Linn Brown after the death of her husband in an attempt to turn some of his unpublished manuscripts to the benefit of his family.

[19] For more on Brown's early Belles Lettres Club, see Watts 29-30 and Kafer 49-50.

[20] Allen notes that the "celebrated publication" to which Brown refers here is "*Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* by Dr. Blair, of the University of Edinburgh" (27). This is commensurate with Carr's publication data on Hugh Blair's *Lectures*, which shows that, by 1787, when Brown and his friends formed the Belles Lettres Club, Blair's work had been reprinted in Philadelphia by Robert Aiken, whose edition came out in 1784 (Carr 96).

citizens be educated well enough, toward an unimpeachable standard of beauty and right conduct. Though, for example, Brown certainly regards his assemblage of colleagues as a group of readers pursuing a greater good, he regards the society as a small coterie with interests that are not reflected in post-Revolutionary society at large. He prefaces his remarks on the "laws" that will govern their literary society by remarking that, in entering the "theater" of literary improvement, the society takes up a project "which to others still remains in distant and imperfect prospect" (25). There is no mention in the address of the good such a society will be to the republic at large, and, in fact, Brown admits that participation in the club will be ancillary to a host of other professional concerns for each of its members: "It is not a matter of serious concern, but a matter of rational amusement only, that we thus associate together," he writes, since "our die is already cast, the path which his steps are to occupy is already pointed out to each of us; we are soon to throw aside that sub-ordinate character in which we have hitherto been trained, and to step forth upon the theatre of life, supported only by our own talents and address" (25).

Brown's dismay over the idea that the realities of how literature was studied in actual practice might not live up to Blair's optimism, though, is belied most by his willingness to dismiss the project of forging a comprehensive definition of the belles lettres because studies of literature were so entirely subject to the "variousness" of taste and the dictates of fashion:

> ["Belles lettres"] is a term of very peculiar signification. It does not denote any specific division of the sciences logically arranged; it even comprehends science and art, within the same circle. It has been generally understood to signify a combination of the most popular studies, and those which are best suited to the free and easy strain of conversation. If this definition be admitted as a good one, fashion alone must be admitted as the standard of decision. Different parts of the world, as well as different ages of it, may entertain different notions concerning the particular objects of study, which should be ranked under this denomination; one people may be totally absorbed in mathematical inquiries, and the abstrusest speculation in that science may become the theme of every literary circle. In

> another country he is the politest man, and most distinguished of the respectable band of the literati, who comes into the company of the learned fraught with profoundest erudition. The standard of taste is with them the dry discriminating spirit of the metaphysician. An enormous lexicon, or tedious commentary upon an inconsiderable classic, is placed upon a level with the most admired production of genius. Among a third people, a softer genius may prevail, captivated by the melody of sound, and the mimic creation of the pencil. The glory of a Handel or a Rubens, will be the sole subject of their refined conversation. The tribute of applause and admiration will be due to him, who best unfolds the hidden soul of harmony, or transfers nature into his pictures without blemish or defect. So great a diversity of tastes, cannot be conceived to be impossible; they have even actually appeared at different periods in the same nation. But a moment's reflection will convince us, that nothing is impossible to the restless caprice of fashion. Fashion may affix what stamp she pleases to the term of Belle Lettres, and this stamp must of consequence be in perpetual change. (26-7)

Though the "Address" may be read as celebratory and optimistic, the mission statement of a group of friends committed to pursuing the life of the mind together, it nonetheless reveals persistent worries that the terms of the neoclassical literary discourse which had dominated the eighteenth century needed to be reformed. It was not, for example, the natural seed of taste, but "fashion"—whimsical, capricious, and socially determined—that is seen to establish what is tasteful and what is not, which literature is enjoyed and which is ignored. Like it or not, literary theory must start to account for the caprices, even the natural "depravities," of a populace. Authors and readers alike, Brown suggests, must acknowledge that the old system of studying the belles lettres must be modified in the interest of fitting into a world that is, itself, in "perpetual change."

It is not hard, after examining Brown's early "Address to the Belles Lettres Club" to see how fully Brown understood the similarities between the concepts of reason and taste. Both were, by the republican establishment, seen to be inviolable, natural, internal senses, but, from Brown's perspective, it was possible that this maxim needed to be rethought. In *Wieland*, he took his first opportunity for doing so. *Wieland*'s interrogation of traditional attitudes toward the

belles lettres begins, even before the novel gets underway, with the “Advertisement” Brown penned to place before its first chapter. This advertisement marks both a recognition of the power of readerly taste and a critical distrust of that taste. Prior American novels emphasized the moral instruction that was to be found *if* readers would merely ignore their distrust of novels. William Hill Brown's preface to *The Power of Sympathy*, for example, highlights the work's moral focus, promising to "Expose the fatal consequences of SEDUCTION," to "inspire the Female mind with a principle of Self Complacency," and to "Promote the Economy of Human Life" (7). Novels that Charles Brockden Brown himself admired most from the English tradition promised similar new awakenings. Godwin's preface to *Caleb Williams*, a novel that was, by the late 1790s, one of Brown's perennial influences, also states an instructive mission: "If the author shall have taught a valuable lesson, without subtracting from the interest and passion by which a performance of this sort ought to be characterised, he will have reason to congratulate himself upon the vehicle he has chosen” (3). Yet any moralizing intention Brown communicates in the preface to *Wieland* is offered with a shrug and a frank admission that it is public sentiment, rather than any intrinsic merit his work may possess that will determine its success. Even while explaining his intent to "[aim] at the illustration of some important branches of the moral constitution of man," Brown also concedes that the ability to publish more such "illustrations" is contingent on whether his audience's taste demands more: *Wieland* is just the "first of a series of performances" which "favorable reception . . . will induce the Writer to publish," and he acknowledges that the question of *Wieland*'s literary value is out of his own hands, commenting that, "Whether this tale will be classed with the ordinary or frivolous sources of amusement, or be ranked with the few productions whose usefulness secures to them a lasting reputation, the reader must be permitted to decide" (3). Perhaps he meant the catastrophic events resulting from

continual displays of poor literary judgment in the course of the ensuing novel to sway his readers' interest in his favor.

Brown loses little time calling attention to the fundamental literary historical shift he is interested in interrogating once *Wieland* gets underway. Clara's history of her family connects the sources of its hereditary manias to a fundamental change in attitudes toward literature effected two generations before her time. Clara's grandfather, the German Wieland from whom the American branch of her family descended, in a situation reminiscent of Brown's in 1793 when he left Alexander Wilcocks's tutelage, finds himself caught in the midst of a transition between two historical epistemes. This eldest Wieland, Clara informs us, was noble, but he married the daughter of a merchant, an act that "mortally offended his relations" (6). Disowned by his own family, the patriarch of the American Wieland family joins his father-in-law's household, where he tries to make a living from his art:

> My grand-father found it incumbent on him to search out some mode of independent subsistence. His youth had been eagerly devoted to literature and music. These had hitherto been cultivated merely as sources of amusement. They were now converted into the means of gain. At this period there were few works of taste in the Saxon dialect. My ancestor may be considered as the founder of the German Theatre. The modern poet of the same name is sprung from the same family, and, perhaps, surpasses but little, in the fruitfulness of his invention, or the soundness of his taste, the elder Wieland. His life was spent in the composition of sonatas and dramatic pieces. They were not unpopular, but merely afforded him a scanty subsistence. He died in the bloom of his life, and was quickly followed to the grave by his wife. (7)

Clara's grandfather has one foot in aristocratic Europe and the other in what looks very much like the mercantile economy of late eighteenth-century America, and the ground falls out from beneath him on both sides. Marrying a merchant's daughter instead of choosing a wife from his own class and therefore placing himself of necessity within the bounds of a modern market economy in which he must prove his worth through his own ingenuity rather than relying on his

birth for social definition and wealth, this first Wieland learns that he cannot take neoclassical ideologies of the literary with him as he crosses the divide between aristocrat and independent free market capitalist. While “devoted” study to music and literature for the purposes of amusement and edification may have been a fit pursuit for the scions of the noble families that governed social bodies in Europe, without the financial support of an aristocratic family and the leisure time that was afforded only in the context of aristocratic life, literary endeavors are doomed. At the outset of Brown's novel, then, we read of a rupture with the past and the rise of a new, modern system of capital in which "soundness of taste," relative popularity, and true authorial skill offer no guarantees of livelihood or success. The neoclassical discourse that undergirded the call for American literature, Brown suggests, was created in the midst of a pre-modern aristocratic milieu, and it might very well be inextricably tied to this milieu, despite all republican claims that literature could, in fact, serve as the bastion of an entirely new democratic social order.

And yet, in the absence of neoclassical literary study, neither the refinement of taste and judgment, nor the stabilization of society can occur. The Wielands' grandfather dies as the last representative of his literary era: after him, every reader appearing in the novel is somehow denied a thorough education in literature and so is not prepared for life in the uncertain modern world. Wieland, Sr., son of the German dramatist and father to Theodore and Clara, is the first to fall victim to misdirected taste. This Wieland is raised without a requisite course of sustained study in literature, and he, like his father, must earn his bread in the midst of a mercantile economy. As a young boy, Theodore and Clara's father is apprenticed to a London trader, under whom, "his duties were laborious and mechanical" and by whom, "he had been educated with a view to this profession, and, therefore, was not tormented with unsatisfied desires" (7). Such an

upbringing results in a lack of the cultivated, refined judgment needed to interpret written texts, a lack that proves especially dangerous because of the immediate availability of texts encouraging suspect teachings and relying on untrustworthy authorities. Clara's father first happens across a book of Camissard teachings merely because it is lying in his garret: "He entertained no relish for books," Clara explains, "and was wholly unconscious of any power they had to delight or instruct," until "one Sunday afternoon . . . his eye was attracted by a page of this book, which, by some accident, had been opened and placed full in his view" (8). Unluckily for this Wieland, the book that first catches his notice is one that would have required particular care and discretion in the reading. The Camissards, a group of Protestant peasants in the rural south of France that had initiated a series of attacks and rebellions in 1702 against the Catholic French government, were known for their extremism.[21] During their revolt, they burned nearly two hundred churches and killed a number of priests. In America, the Camissards were known for preaching while in ecstasies in order to win converts (White 46).[22] Wieland, Sr. is seduced immediately by the Camissard book's lure, and the narrowness of his experience with literature prohibits him from judging texts soundly. Once moving to study the Bible to find the root of Camissard theology, he develops only frenzied, irrational readings:

> Every fact and sentiment in this book were viewed through a medium which the writings of the Camissard apostle had suggested. His constructions of the text were hasty, and formed on a narrow scale. Everything was viewed in a disconnected position. One action and one precept were not employed to illustrate and restrict the meaning of another. Hence arose a thousand scruples to which he had hitherto been a stranger. He was alternately agitated by fear and ecstacy. (9)

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[21] For a thorough background on the Camissards, see Schwartz's *The French Prophets* 23-36.

[22] Ed White reads Wieland, Sr.'s obsession with the Camissards as related to the geographical metaphors espoused by Camissard theology. An isolated, back country community of Protestants in an overwhelmingly Catholic world, the Camissards defined themseves as wanderers in a desert. This rhetoric, White argues, appealed to Wieland, Sr., because he, too, lives in the midst of an isolating, “empty and receptive urban culture” (46).

Wieland, Sr.'s madness, undoubtedly, indicates some natural proclivities to enthusiasm, but it also evidences the failures of his literary sensibilities. The Wieland family thus becomes caught up in an environment of religious "mystery," as Brown would term it, but also, he urges, in a crisis of taste.

It is this undisciplined taste that Brown points to as both the root of his villain, Carwin's, treachery and of his protagonists'—the Wielands and Pleyels—inability to recognize it. Before his mysterious ventriloquism begins to cause chaos, Carwin enters Mettingen signifying a broader problem: he has the address of a literary gentleman, without the true taste of one. Our first introduction to Carwin calls attention to his overwrought language, unfettered sensibility, and rhetorical prowess, and illustrates that his aestheticization of language is often misapplied. The first words we hear Carwin speak are addressed to Clara's servant girl, whose plain language foils the florid style of his entreaties:

> The door was opened by [the servant], and she was immediately addressed with "Pry'thee, good girl, canst thou supply a thirsty man with a glass of buttermilk?" She answered that there was none in the house. "Aye, but there is some in the dairy yonder. Thou knowest as well as I, though Hermes never taught thee, that though every dairy be an house, every house is not a dairy." To this speech, though she understood only a part of it, she replied by repeated her assurances, that she had none to give. "Well then," rejoined the stranger, "for charity's sweet sake, hand me forth a cup of cold water." The girl said she would go to the spring and fetch it. "Nay, give me the cup, and suffer me to help myself. Neither manacled nor lame, I should merit burial in the maw of carrion crows, if I laid this task upon thee." (59)

Clara herself reacts violently and immediately to Carwin's voice: "When he uttered the words, ' for charity's sweet sake,'" she relates, "I dropped the cloth that I held in my hand, my heart overflowed with sympathy, and my eyes with unbidden tears," and the vehemence of her response does not subside easily (59). In what is most often read as evidence of Clara's own manifestation of the family susceptibility to manias, she spends the whole of the preceding night

and the next day contemplating a portrait of Carwin that she has drawn because she is so utterly captivated by his voice.

The problems that arise as a result of Carwin's entrance, however, persist outside of Clara's psyche. Brown is careful to note the literariness and stylization of Carwin's speech in many instances. When he first visits with Clara, Theodore, Pleyel, and Catharine together, Clara and the company note the "polish" of his conversation: "All topics were handled by him with skill, and without pedantry or affectation. He uttered no sentiment calculated to produce a disadvantageous impression: on the contrary, his observations denoted a mind alive to every generous and heroic feeling. They were introduced without parade, and accompanied with that degree of earnestness which indicates sincerity" (82). On a later visit, after the group relates the tale of the inexplicable voices heard by Theodore on his way to retrieve a letter from the summer house, Carwin's response is again distinguished by its aesthetic qualities: "On being requested to relate these instances [of situations similar to Theodore's], he amused us with many curious details. His narratives were constructed with so much skill, and rehearsed with so much energy, that all the effects of a dramatic exhibition were frequently produced by them. Those that were most coherent and most minute, and, of consequence, least entitled to credit, were yet rendered probable by the exquisite art of this rhetorician" (85). The problem is, however, that though Carwin's eloquence may be unparalleled, it is not necessarily meaningful. Along with her descriptions of each instance of Carwin's speech, Clara notes not only its interest, but also its insufficiency. As the group sees more and more of Carwin, for example, its members do not meet with answers to the questions they pose about his origin and history. "Each day introduced us to a more intimate acquaintance with his sentiments," Clara relates, "but left us wholly in the dark concerning that about which we were most inquisitive . . . It may well be thought that he

modeled his behavior by an uncommon standard, when, with all out opportunities and accuracy of observation, we were able, for a long time, to gather no satisfactory information" (82).

When viewed against the backdrop of literary theory with which Brown would have been most familiar, and when compared with further information Brown provides about Carwin in *Memoirs of Carwin, the Biloquist*, a work that he attempted and then abandoned after *Wieland*'s publication, the scope of the problems Carwin represents becomes more clear. In *Memoirs*, Brown makes a point of drawing the source of Carwin's misbehavior back to the lack of literary education he so desired. Much like the Wieland's father, Carwin was made to work at "mechanical" labor under a tyrannical father who made every effort to prohibit him from studying: "He might enjoin upon me the most laborious tasks," Carwin describes, "set the envy of my brother to watch me during the performance, make the most diligent search after my books, and destroy them without mercy, when they were found" (282). Carwin's ventriloquism, the source of much of the novel's disorientation, was a skill he discovered specifically because he was kept from proper studies that could engage his mind. He first notices the echos of his voice across a canyon while on a fruitless search for his father's stray cattle, and he cultivates his talents during nights on which he would, "escape from [his] bed" and "hie with [his] book to some neighbouring eminence" because "the moonlight was strong enough to permit [him] to read" (286). It is not until later in his life that Carwin receives the undisturbed access to books he has so desired, but this access is the result of his connection with the dissolute Ludlow, an Irish man with whom Carwin makes acquaintance in his native Pennsylvania (in *Memoirs*, Brown makes it clear that Carwin started his life on American soil). It is eventually revealed that the sinister Ludlow is connected to the Illumnati. Instead of providing the type of camaraderie Carwin anticipated when he agreed to accompany Ludlow to his native Ireland, and the

preceptorship and direction that Rollin and Blair would have seen as so necessary to the refinement of Carwin's taste, Ludlow leaves his new accolyte to follow his own devices. Free range over a library with margin notes evincing a less than well-meaning mind (written by Ludlow's own hand) is the best that Carwin is offered. He reads voraciously but not, as is suggested in *Wieland*, rightly or usefully.

In the traditional, nationalistic view of the American literary and cultural landscape held by Brown's predecessors, such an interposition of corruption or bad taste would not have been so dangerous as Brown makes Carwin's presence out to be. Informed by Charles Rollin's and Hugh Blair's teachings about the unalterability of true taste, and the consistency that taste would demonstrate if it were cultivated with the right kind of study, the United States' first citizens thought of their world as the space in which natural, correct taste could flourish again, a space in which beautiful literature would be produced because liberty prevailed, and in which the unassailable direction of taste's moral compass could be read once more. What Brown suggests in showing the pervasiveness of his characters' inabilities to read Carwin is that taste may not, in fact, be so natural. The Wielands themselves, as Clara mentions, were brought up according to no sustained system of education after their parents' deaths. The Wieland children were not provided with the same consistent literary education that Rollin, Blair, and even prior American authors such as William Hill Brown had advocated, only what Clara calls, “an erroneous or imperfect discipline” (5). Clara, voicing the difficulties the entire Wieland-Pleyel circle encounters once Carwin enters the world of Mettingen, makes clear that none of the Pennsylvanians, born and raised in an idyllic countryside that would seem to be the perfect cradle for the natural taste, judgment, and sensibility that was so essential to the functioning of democratic society, are adequately prepared to tell the difference between truth and falsehood: "I

could not deny," Clara writes, "my homage to the intelligence expressed in [Carwin's face], but was wholly uncertain, whether he were an object to be dreaded or adored, and whether his powers had been exerted to evil or good" (81).

Wieland, then, penned by one of the pillars of the post-Revolutionary literary world, takes the deconstruction of eighteenth-century understandings of the literary and the socio-cultural work it can perform as one of its primary missions. Literature was not, as Brown argues, the antidote to tyrannical aristocratic rule. The tenets of prior literary discourse held that the best literature communicated moral ideals that would speak to the natural propensity toward good taste in any human subject, and that literary texts could therefore be relied upon to inculcate morality and rectitude in a democratic society in which authority was granted to the people at large. Brown, however, noted the many flaws in this optimistic attitude toward the literary. The stabilizing, legitimizing work literature could do was limited, for one, by the fallibility of the human consciousness, which, when left unattended or uneducated, could lose touch with a moral center—a problem that Clara articulates when she describes her inability to discern whether Carwin is "an object to be dreaded or adored." The idea, antiquated, in Brown's view, that good taste was, in fact, natural, was believable only in the context of an aristocratic, class-based society. Once individual subjects were tasked with proving their own merit and providing for their wants in a mercantile system that shunned the idea that lineage should define both social and individual worth, the requisite time for study and consideration of a broad array of literatures was hard to come by. Good taste could not serve as the agent that would allow for the abandonment of aristocratic class structures because it depended upon those structures for its existence.

And yet, men and women clearly had aesthetic sensibilities that needed moderation.

Wieland, Sr.'s obsession with the Camissard text and Clara's immediate reaction to Carwin's words are just two examples of the ease with which the human subject could be brought beyond the boundaries of his or her own judgment by even a casual encounter with enticing language. If these sensibilities could not be moderated through the study of a canon of beautiful, moral works, then how could these literary sensibilities be controlled? For answers to these questions, Brown looked to the novel as a genre that could create a new understanding of the literary, one that depended not on aristocracy and descent and on the idea of natural, universal taste, but rather on the continual reconstruction of rational moral codes, communicated through the voices not of irrefutable, established authorities, but of normal, flawed people.

II. Toward the "American Tale"

Although Carwin's voice wreaks the most obvious havoc in *Wieland*, it is Clara's voice that defines both the manner and matter of Brown's novel. Reading Clara has become the subject of many studies of *Wieland*: with few exceptions, she is regarded as an everywoman through which the concerns of post-Revolutionary America can be investigated.[23] Bill Christophersen has gone so far as to suggest that Clara's evolution from mild-mannered, loving sister to near murderer is, in fact, the primary "Transformation" to which *Wieland*'s subtitle refers, and he argues that "Clara's traumas and discoveries reflect the nation's" (27). In Christophersen's view,

[23] The critical vision of Clara has shifted since Ziff first took her as central to his argument in "A Reading of *Wieland*" (1962). Ziff's Clara is meek and sensitive, the sentimental heroine "perilously ripe for seduction" when the novel's plot turns, and *Wieland* becomes not a traditional seduction tale, but an exploration of the failures of the human constitution (51). John Cleman later suggests in "Ambiguous Evil: A Study of Villains and Heroes in Charles Brockden Brown's Major Novel's" (1975) that Clara cannot be seen as entirely innocent (indeed, that Brown means to make a "morass" of the normative divisions between innocence and evil) because she attempts to justify or otherwise explain her brother's madness and even his crimes (205-7). Cynthia S. Jordan's reading of Clara is probably the darkest. In "On Rereading *Wieland*: 'The Folly of Precipitate Conclusions'" (1981), Jordan asserts that Clara is an unreliable narrator from the start, but too speculatively suggests that Clara might, in fact, have had a hand in murdering her brother (154-74).

Clara's “transformation” into a “'creature of nameless and fearful attributes'” is traceable to “unaccountable impulses” (27). In declaring that “Ideas exist in our minds that can be accounted for by no established laws,” Clara exposes what Christophersen contends is a deeply-rooted fear that America's most recent “transformation,” one effected through a violent and bloody war, may somehow have resulted not from rationally justifiable resistance against arbitrarily-enacted tyranny, but from unjustifiable, unreasonable desires on the part of the colonial public that were not generated through Enlightened discourse.

Clara's voice, I want to suggest, does indicate, as *Wieland*'s subtitle promises, and as Christophersen has discussed, a "transformation," but I would like to add that, in addition to the socio-political transformations prior critics have examined, Clara's voice also indicates a number of literary transformations. Clara is, in many ways, an elusive figure. Sometimes detached and other times erratic, her experiences certainly have their terrors, but her conclusions about the horrors she experiences do not always seem satisfying. Her voice, however, is the result of Brown's own focused studies of the novelists he most admired, Samuel Richardson and William Godwin, and it is through examining *Wieland* in relation to the works of these two novelists that we can trace the history behind the formal “transformations” Brown hopes to achieve in his novel. In Richardson's and Godwin's works, Brown saw the beginnings of viable responses to the questions he had about the feasibility of importing eighteenth-century literary discourse into a modern environment. Richardson and Godwin provided examples that Brown built on and modified when he wrote Clara into being as the teller of what he also intended, as *Wieland*'s second subtitle promises, to be an “American Tale”—a fit example of literature that communicated the experience of life in the United States. Through Clara, Brown aimed at both a new definition of the novel, one that saw the genre not as a paltry vehicle for sentimentality, as

many of the novel's critics did, or even as the next great manifestation of American exceptionalism, as his predecessor William Hill Brown did, but as the genre most capable of communicating truth to an audience of everyday men and women trying to make the best way for themselves through a difficult world full of unprecedented situations. In essence, what Clara offers is a new understanding of what constituted literature in a culture that had itself been so recently transformed.

"I found no end and no bounds to my task": Problems with Richardson's Sentiment

Brown wrote about Richardson in both his personal correspondence and in the succession of newspapers he edited once he began his career as a literary man in the late 1790s. What Brown most admires about the venerated English author is his ability to paint characters of high ideals and uncommon excellence, and, thus, to fulfill neoclassical literary discourse's primary directive of promoting virtue, while still showing characters as believable, realistic exemplars in the midst of a world full of inequity. Writing as "H.E." in the *Port-Folio* in 1802, Brown takes up Richardson's cause against the writer "J.D.," who, the week before, had maligned the English novelist as an author of "faultless monsters":

> In [Richardson], [readers] will behold the opposite extremes of vice and virtue depicted with equal energy; the tenants of the cottage and the palace, the convent and the brothel, pourtrayed with equal truth; and the human character copiously and vividly painted, as it is modified by the differences of sex, rank, age, fortune, religion, and country. What chiefly provokes their wonder is, that he, who can descend so low, can, by turns, ascend so high; can realize, with equal exactness and force, the feelings of greatness and meanness; of riches and poverty; of humility and arrogance; of man and woman; of servant and master; and of vice and virtue.

Then, while comparing Richardson and Fielding in an article for the *Literary Magazine* in 1804, Brown writes glowingly of Richardson's moral strengths while denigrating the boorishness of

Fielding's characters: "The principal characters of Richardson are such as we seldom or never meet with: but it does not follow that the fable of one is probable, and that of the other improbable…Richardson's characters are rare, merely because moral and intellectual excellence is rare; while Fielding's are common, merely because vicious, and stupid, and mixed characters are common."

It is in his 1792 letter to his friend Joseph Bringhurst, though, where Brown most fully expresses his respect for his British predecessor and his interest in evaluating the usefulness of Richardson's moralism as a guiding code of conduct in the post-Enlightenment context of the new republic.[24] In his letter, Brown compares *Sir Charles Grandison* to the Bible, beginning with an explanation of why the gospels prove insufficient for teaching practical virtue:

> Shall I not say that the life only of one perfectly virtuous man has been recorded for the instruction of mankind? I can only mean that divine Son of Mary…But the Circumstances of his situation were particular to himself. Virtuous examples are useful to us in proportion as virtue is exhibited in circumstances similar to our own…It is surely not presumptious to point out the imperfections of the gospel history as a lesson of Instruction; to imagine that, as such, it would have been infinitely more useful to me; had it been a later and more authentic composition, were not its text embarrassed by the obscurities of a foreign language, and unintelligible idiom. Had the narrative been more accurate and uniform, were it accompanied with fewer metaphysical refinements, and mysterious circumstances, had it passed through the hands of fewer transcribers and had there been fewer incitements as well as fewer opportunities, to debase the purity of the text, and destroy the perspicuity of the narrative, by careless, ignorant or artful interpolations and omissions. (*Collected Writings* 206)

Richardson's novels, however, could be relied on for their "accuracy," and they did not depend on "mysterious circumstances," or divine action, the meaning of which had probably been lost in

[24] See Rosenthal's Introduction to *Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown*, in which the Bringhurst letter was first brought forward, for further discussion of Brown's relationship with his devoutly Christian friend Joseph Bringhurst (11). Rosenthal dates the writing of this letter to 1795, but subsequent scholarship has moved that date earlier. Barnard, Hewitt, and Kamrath's recent *Collected Writings of Charles Brockden Brown* dates the letter at 1792.

the centuries that intervened between the Bible's first codification and Brown's historical moment:

> Cannot I find one whose actions are perfectly and uniformly virtuous. Who more nearly resembles me in language country, rank and other incidental circumstances? Whose life is more minutely and accurately displayed? . . . Is there such a tale as this? What painter has drawn a picture of moral perfection? He is now before me. The painter is Richardson and the picture which his masterly skill, and wonderful invention is produced, is that of Grandison. Let it not offend your piety that I draw a parallel between an english novel and the evangelical history . . . Does not my reason compel me to give the preference to the performance of Richardson? (*Collected Writings* 206-7)

As his letter to Bringhurst evidences, Brown viewd the sentimental novel as a particularly modern genre, one that both introduced characters and contexts that more nearly reflected the reader's own than did the Biblical and classical texts that would have been taught together as part of a traditional literary education,[25] and one that resonated more fully with the United States' post-Revolutionary episteme. The novel, in other words, could teach morality without emphasizing the potentially dangerous supernatural world of "mystery"—a world that relied on the evidence of miracles to read otherwise distant and inscrutible divine intent.

Wieland puts the hypothesis posed in the Bringhurst letter to the test, juxtaposing Clara's sentimental narrative with the narrative of failed religious revelation posed by Theodore Wieland's experience. If the depravity of man is, indeed, *Wieland*'s central problem, and what the novel aims to do is to balance the merits of moral systems against each other in order to judge which is most fit for life "on the ground," as it were, in the 1790s, sentimentalism clearly has a better chance of winning out in the end than the system of revealed religion that Theodore adheres to. The purest demonstration of morality in Theodore's worldview depends upon

[25] See my discussion of the many types of texts integrated into Rollin's *Method* on page 40.

absolute, unquestioning submission to the seductive voices he hears: obedience to the voice of God as a moral center leads him to murder his wife and children and to attempt the murder of his sister. Clara's limited successes in *Wieland*, however, come about because, positioned as a sentimental heroine, her worldview depends on critique and resistance. Though subject, as we have mentioned, to the same types of manias her brother experiences—manias that manifest themselves, in Clara's case, in her overwhelming desire to draw Carwin's portrait after first meeting him and hearing his eloquence- Clara manages to subdue her attraction to the silver-tongued Carwin and to direct it toward a partner that would, in all respects, be appropriate. Pleyel is, after all, a family friend, a well-educated landowner, and the novel's voice of rational inquiry. As a sentimental heroine, one bent on adhering to the dictates of her own heart, but also one who listens to the voices that surround her with a degree of skepticism, Clara stands a much better chance of surviving the world than does her brother.

But, as Brown saw it, not every value the sentimental novel encouraged was to be applauded. In fact, as he wrote in an 1800 article for the *Monthly Magazine* entitled, "Objections to Richardson's *Clarissa*," the sentimental novel's focus on fine feeling over stolid "self-confidence" threatened to undermine its otherwise useful lessons in rational virtue that resulted from evaluating and critiquing situations that arose in the context of lived experience.[26] Brown

[26] Koenings writes about Brown's thoughts on Richardson in this 1800 article as well, concentrating on what he sees to be Brown's wariness of *Clarissa*'s moral messages and of the "exemplary" pattern that Richardson's work typifies. Brown, according to Koenings, thought *Clarissa* an unsuitable model for young women (and young republicans) because she put too much stock in parental consent, and, furthermore, Brown saw the premise of the exemplar as too limiting. Heroines that taught only single, incontrovertible moral lessons could not, Brown thought, serve as appropriate teachers for readers in the new republic who constantly encountered new, unprecedented situations. Koenings reads Clara as a recasting of *Clarissa*, but one that stands in not as a model for emulation (Brown takes pains to ensure that Clara is not read as a perfect figure of moral certainty), but as an instructor in "possibilistic" thinking that encourages readers to consider a multitude of responses to the problems they encounter. I certainly agree with Koenings's reading of Clara as the product of Brown's critique of prior narrational models, but his reading is perhaps too ready to propose neat solutions to the problems that unprecedented moral problems pose in *Wieland*, and, in granting Clara the role of preceptress, Koenings affords more certainty and authority to Clara than Brown perhaps intended. I will examine the ways in which Brown

finds particular fault with Clarissa's obedience to tyrannical parents and with her general lack of fortitude in the face of oppression: "Instead of that self-confidence, tranquility, steadfastness and magnanimous exemption from passion and repining, which clear conceptions of our duty as moral, and especially as religious beings, are sure to confer, we find her rendered completely miserable by the unjust opinions and actions of others." Her death is less tragic than Richardson would like it to be, in Brown's view, because Clarissa dies, "not a martyr to any duty, but a victim of grief; a grief occasioned by an unreasonable value set on things of which she is deprived, not by her own fault, but by that of others." The "passion," "repining," and eventual "grief" Clarissa feels as a result of her victimhood, feelings indicating an over-sensibility, were perhaps meant to elicit the same over-sensibility from the novel's readers. The sense of beauty and pathos Richardson hoped to evoke, depended too heavily, in Brown's view, on the aestheticization of extreme feeling.

In *Wieland*, it is the impulse to view the female heroine as an aesthetic subject and to place emphasis on finer beauties and delicate feelings that destroys Clara's otherwise successful negotiation of her world. Unlike Richardson's Clarissa, whose problems arise when she is caught between her parents' oppressive tyranny and Lovelace's seemingly chivalrous offers of protection, and Pamela, who is besieged by the unwelcome advances of the persistent Mr. B, Clara does not find herself bereft of agency until Pleyel misjudges her character completely and cannot be convinced that his censure of her is unjust. This misjudgment arises when the highly aestheticized, overly sensible vision Pleyel has constructed of Clara proves unable to withstand

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hoped to undermine the idea of Clara (or any narrator) as a centralized authority in my discussion of Brown's engagement with Godwin's work, and I think it is safe to say at the outset that Brown considered Clara as a far more experimental figure than Keonings sees her to be. Brown, in other words, was open to the possibility that Clara's voice would completely fail to provide security and to reinstate moral certainty.

attack. In *Wieland*'s most trenchant engagement with sentimental didacticism and sentimentalism's penchant for dwelling too fondly on outward beauties, Pleyel confronts Clara after hearing what he supposes to be a midnight tryst (in actuality, Carwin by himself playing both his voice and Clara's), describing his former esteem for her and castigating her for the transgressions he believes he has apprehended: "I have watched your eyes;" Pleyel relates,

> my attention has hung upon your lips. I have questioned whether the enchantments of your voice were more conspicuous in the intricacies of melody, or the emphasis of rhetoric. I have marked the transitions of your discourse, the felicities of your expression, your refined argumentation, and glowing imagery; and been forced to acknowledge, that all delights were meagre and contemptible, compared with those connected with the audience and sight of you. (138-9)

From here, he enumerates a project that places himself in the capacity of the author of a didactic text that takes Clara as its heroine. "You know not," he asserts, "the accuracy of my observation. I was desirous that others should profit by an example so rare. I therefore noted down, in writing, every particular of your conduct. I was anxious to benefit by an opportunity so seldom afforded us" (139). Then, invoking the language of Clara's earlier reproduction of Carwin's image, he describes, "I laboured not to omit the slightest shade, or the most petty line in your portrait" (139). By all appearances, it looks as if he has made good on his intent: "I found no end and no bounds to my task," he describes, "No display of a scene like this could be chargeable with redundancy or superfluity. Even the colour of a shoe, the knot of a ribband, or your [Clara's] attitude in plucking a rose, were of moment to be recorded. Even the arrangements of your breakfast-table and your toilet have been amply displayed" (140).

The connections between Pleyel's description of his written "portrait" and the manner in which it was produced and Clara's earlier description of her carefully drawn image of Carwin are, ultimately, too heavy-handed to be ignored. These connections suggest that the sentimental novel, in placing such a high premium on beauty and refined sensibility, encourages its own

version of Clara's depraved obsession with aesthetic, rather than moral, qualities. Pleyel cares less, it seems, for any record of Clara's moral rectitude than he does for sentimental descriptions of the "colour" of her shoes and the way she picks flowers. The dangers that attend this privileging of the aesthetic and the elevation of sensibilities were, according to Brown, many, and were of such a nature that rendered the sentimental novel unfit, in many ways, to tell the story of a free democratic republic.

One such danger that Brown identifies in the scene of Pleyel's "sentimentalization" of Clara was a familiar concern for detractors of the novel in the 1790s: sentimentality could all too easily lead to sensuality, and there was perhaps too fine a line between the search for beauty and the search for titillation. Though Pleyel, referred to as the novel's "arch rationalist"[27] interprets his own perspective as unbiased, the unwarranted meticulousness of his observation—an echo of Clara's in her previous scene with Carwin in which her position as an observer was portrayed as obviously dangerous for its susceptibility to uncontrollable sexuality- belies his self-interest. Read in conjunction with Clara's scene, Pleyel's scrutiny approaches the boundaries of voyeurism. Not stopping short at even minor details about her person, his description pulsates with a desire that his sentimental text seems to nurture rather than control. Furthermore, it is not insignificant that Clara is not the only character left at a disadvantage by her position as the object of Pleyel's gaze. Though Pleyel evinces most interest in Clara, he is, we remember, engaged to a Saxon heiress, one reader for whom the narration of Clara's "model" is intended. The example Clara sets may not appear to be a particularly negative one, but this attempt to transpose all of her attractive qualities onto another (more affluent and better connected)

[27] Christophersen's fitting description (27).

marriage partner makes the didactic text that manages the transfer look suspiciously like an instrument used to devalue female subjectivity in favor of aligning male sexual desire with the most proper object for social advancement. The sentimental novel, in the hands of men who were unavoidably flawed, could become not an instrument for regulating desire, but for manipulating the world to match desire's dictates.

In addition to critiquing the sexual overtones that accompanied the sentimental novel's focus on beauty, Brown's description of Pleyel's sentimental didactic project questions whether refinement is a useful enough social good to merit its place as the central focus of an American literature. Comparing Pleyel's descriptions of Clara to *Alcuin*, Brown's most pointed commentary on the rights (and lack thereof) of women in the United States, reveals Brown's thinking that beauty, in short, may be beside the point. *Alcuin*, posed as a discussion between Alcuin, a schoolmaster, and Mrs. Carter, a widow who serves as hostess during her brother's weekly gatherings of town intellectuals, was completed by the winter of 1797 (not quite a year before *Wieland* was finished in September of 1798), and by March of that year the first two parts of the four-part dialogue began to appear in Philadelphia's *Weekly Magazine*. Parts one and two were published collectively in 1798, but the third and fourth were not printed until 1811.[28] As Cathy Davidson posits, it looks as if Brown may have withheld publication of the second half of his dialogue in response to the increasingly hostile reception of avowedly feminist works in the years between 1792—which saw the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*—and 1799, the year William Godwin produced Wollstonecraft's biography. "Godwin's publication of his late wife's memoirs," writes Davidson, "was misguided to say the

[28] For a detailed account of the publication histories of both *Alcuin* and *Wieland*, see Clark 108-125 and 162-169.

least. An account of the famous feminist's extramarital entanglements, of her bearing an illegitimate child, and of her belated marriage to Godwin could hardly serve the purpose Godwin intended and win converts to Wollstonecraft's cause."[29] Though *Alcuin* was by no means so radical as to argue in favor of extramarital sexual relationships, it did broach a number of controversial subjects—voting rights, for example, and the proper division of labor between women and men.

Our earliest introduction to Mrs. Carter begs us to consider the superficiality of the standards by which her womanhood is assessed: "Skill in the superintendence of a tea-table, affability and modesty, promptness to inquire, and docility to listen, were all that were absolutely requisite in the mistress of ceremonies . . . Some one was required to serve the guests, direct the menials, and maintain, with suitable vigilance, the empire of cleanliness and order" (*Alcuin* 4-5). If we have managed to miss the disapproving tone with which this description is communicated, the feebleness of the excuse rendered to differentiate between the positions of female exemplar and hired help make the work's criticism of such criteria all too clear: the office Mrs. Carter fills, *Alcuin*'s narrator describes, "might not be servile, merely because it [is] voluntary. The influence of unbribed inclination might constitute the whole difference between her and the waiter at an inn, or the porter of a theatre" (5). Domestic goddess, yes, but one who is expected to remain silently in a corner (where Alcuin makes her acquaintance) while the men in the drawing room discuss "the edicts of Carnot," a French politician who advocated the equal right of all citizens to a common education. The irony is too clear: as citizens of the United States, women should be expected to do more than set a table by choice.

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[29] See Davidson, "The Matter and Manner of Charles Brockden Brown's *Alcuin*" 73.

Pleyel's early description of Clara's merits seems to focus on substantial concerns such as the real social merit she shows in treating the members of her community with dignity and her desire to perfect her mind and judgment. He admires her "in relation to [her] servants, to [her] family, to [her] neighbors, and to the world," and he acknowledges her ability to manage her household and to seek out "books and writing" so as to improve her understanding. Keeping the problems identified with traditional definitions of femininity identified in *Alcuin* in mind, however, we realize when Pleyel comes to record "the colour of [Clara's] shoe, the knot of a ribband, or [her] attitude in plucking a rose," he has gone astray of his project to identify what is truly virtuous about his heroine. Like Mrs. Carter, Clara is lauded for her delicacy and for qualities too minute to be meaningful. Once regarded as an aesthetic subject, Clara becomes little else to Pleyel: as the heroine of a traditional sentimental novel, she is stripped of subjectivity and regarded for little more than her delicacy and refined taste. Losing sight of her character and capacity for making right decisions, Pleyel quickly brands her a fallen woman because of the faulty evidence he has apprehended about her relationship with Carwin.

Though Brown took such pains to critique the sentimental formula Richardson had established five decades before the publication of *Wieland*, the young American author's respect for the models set by his British predecessor did not necessarily flag in response to the ill-findings this critique revealed. Brown continued to write admiringly of Richardson well into the early years of the nineteenth century and repeated the form of the domestic sentimental novel in his final two novels, *Jane Talbot* (1801) and *Clara Howard* (1801).[30] But Brown did take issue

[30] These two novels, Brown's last, have come to be seen by the few critics who have taken them up as the undersung heroes of the Brown canon. Witherington writes admiringly of them in "Brockden Brown's Other Novels: *Clara Howard* and *Jane Talbot*" (1974), arguing that it was in these two works that Brown came to accept the sentimental genre as the most apt formula for the powerful expression of the most important ideas he hoped to communicate in his fiction—namely, restraint and benevolence. Sydney J. Krause's "*Clara Howard* and *Jane Talbot*: Godwin on Trial" (1981) also views these final two novels as the works in which Brown finally

with the Richardson's willingness to rely on beauty—both physical as well as moral—to communicate the otherwise useful lessons it had to teach. For the sentimental novel to truly earn its place as an American genre, Brown thought, it had to warn against vice and enable its readers to recognize and regulate their own human shortcomings, but it also had to rely less on the reader's sympathies, desires, and feelings—it had, in short, to be less sentimental.

"Months in severe study": Godwin's Classical Authorities

Like his respect for Richardson, Charles Brockden Brown's esteem for Godwin ran deep, and even started, as Peter Kafer has shown, as a family affair. Brown's father, the devoted Quaker Elijah Brown, admiringly copied passages from Godwin's *Political Justice* into his journals as early as 1795, struck by the British radical's insistence that the individual man had a responsibility to stand up for truth if he was so moved by his own conscience, despite resistance from community or country (Kafer 66). By October of 1795, Charles had been so moved by Godwin's work as to refer to the philosopher as "[his] Oracle," and he was so taken with *Caleb Williams* that he seemed to regard it as the purest extant example of the novel as a serious literary genre (Kafer 67). Writing in his journal about a long prose work that has since been lost, Brown congratulates himself that his production was above average, but still states that it is in no way comparable to Godwin's mastery: "When a mental comparison is made between this and the

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makes sense of many of the central Godwinian themes he had experimented with in the four novels that preceded them. *Clara* and *Jane* are, for Kraus, final meditations on disinterested moral benevolence that Godwin sees as so central to society's progress. Erica Burleigh's recent account, "Incommensurate Equivalences: Genre, Representation, and Equity in Clara Howard and Jane Talbot" (2011), also views Brown's late espousal of the sentimental genre as every bit in line with the innovation and moral intensity demonstrated in his earlier works. Burleigh illustrates that *Clara* and *Jane* are not straightforward recitals of normative sentimental tropes; rather, they use familiar sentimental formulas to imagine new ways of thinking about equity, consent, and the nature of contractual relationships.

mass of novels, I am inclined to be pleased with my own production. But when the objects of comparison are changed, and I revolve the transcendant merits of *Caleb Williams*, my pleasure is diminished, and is preserved from a total extinction only by the reflection that this performance is the first."[31] Brown's own friends would most likely point to Godwin as their cohort's single most direct influence, and, in fact, as Elihu Hubbard Smith's often-quoted description that, for his friend Charles, "Godwin came, and all was light!" demonstrates in no uncertain terms, they thought that Brown's admiration was perhaps a little too enthusiastic.[32]

Much has already been written about how Godwin's influence is reflected in Brown's work, and how, in Warner Berthoff's terms, Brown turned to fiction to "investigate," "test," and "expose [Godwinian doctrines] to the risks of human nature and conduct" (46).[33] In *Wieland*'s

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[31] This journal entry is reproduced in Allen's *Charles Brockden Brown* 106.

[32] Fiedler 132-3 and Watts 67-8 comment on Smith's assessment of Godwin's influence on Brown as a young author.

[33] David Lee Clark was the first to argue that Brown should be read as the American version of Godwin, an author who wrote "novels of purpose" meant to teach and promote radical principles (192). More recent critics have been more careful to view Brown as less of an acolyte than an interpreter or even curator of Godwinian ideas. Rather than arguing that Godwin's anti-government, anarchist philosophies should be directly imported to the United States, Brown aims, as these critics have pointed out, to identify those of Godwin's principles that will work on American soil and those that will not. In keeping with Berthoff's view of Brown as an "investigator" of Godwin's theories, contemporary critics have attempted to refine our understanding about how Brown responded to Godwin's example and how he incorporated Godwin's "radicalism" into his broader beliefs about republican ideology. Dietmer Schloss has illustrated, for instance, that Brown viewed Godwin's emphasis on the private individual's moral and intellectual education as in keeping with republicanism's focus on personal virtue: in Borwn's view, according to Schloss, "Godwin's philosophy must be understood not so much as a repudiation of traditional republicanism, but as a radicalization of it. As has been argued before, the mainstay of republican order did not reside in the political institutions but in the moral discipline of its citizens. Godwin went one step further and wanted to rid the republic of governmental and legal institutions altogether. Social order must emerge out of virtuous activities of the individual citizens alone" (175). W. M. Verhoeven has also urged the necessity of greater attentiveness to the ways in which Brown tempered Godwin's radical ideologies: "Brown," Verhoeven asserts, "combined eighteenth-century European intellectual radicalism with homegrown, conservative American political instincts" (11). Christopher Apap also warns against making too much out of Brown's attraction to *Caleb William*'s anti-authoritarianism, as the type of authorities against which Caleb (and Godwin) rebelled philosophically were also those against which the United States had just rebelled in a very literal sense. Brown, in all likelihood, did not want to take apart Jefferson's government, as Godwin did of George III's state. Godwin guided Brown as more of a formal, rather than an entirely ideological teacher in Apap's view, and the primary lesson Brown took from his British predecessor was one in using "the sensational as a platform from which to launch philosophical musings" (24). My own analysis of Brown's relationship to Godwin is very much in keeping with the idea that Brown was intrigued by Godwin's ideas, but also interested in

case, many critics see parallels between Brown's and Godwin's approaches to the subject of the individual and his relationship to broader social and political institutions that constrained him. Both writers, critics agree, harbor a similar distrust of political institutions and ideologies, though Godwin's was directed toward an aristocratic and Brown's toward a liberal worldview. As both Lisa M. Steinman and David Hogsette have argued, for example, Godwin's use of gothic formulas to advance a commentary on the plight of British society, defined by an aristocratic system that deprived ruler and ruled alike of self-determination, is echoed in Brown's reliance on gothic conventions to unveil haunting truths about the relationship between individual men and the democratic institutions that governed them in the post-Revolutionary United States. The disembodied voices that torment Brown's characters represent the fear that the problem of tyranny was not necessarily solved when governing authority that had once been centralized in the hands of a king or an oligarchy was dispersed among individual men who each had a voice. It would seem, then, that the legacy *Wieland* inherits from Godwin is the willingness to critique institutionalized authority, no matter what guise that authority assumed.

What has gone unnoticed, however, in the long history of examining the ways in which Brown followed in and diverged from Godwin's footsteps, is the critique of a very specific element of Godwin's anarchist, utilitarian philosophy that Brown launches in *Wieland*, a critique, namely, of Godwin's philosophy of literature and his thinking about the role of literature in society. Just as Brown examines the idea of the literary upheld by Samuel Richardson's works in *Wieland* to assess which aspects of Richardson's ouevre spoke to the needs of the American reader in a post-Revolutionary setting and which did not, Brown also casts a critical eye on the

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experimenting with them—a process he undertook with every willingness to find flaws in his predecessor's work.

philosophy of literature communicated in Godwin's work, and, though Godwin was his "Oracle," he finds Godwin's thoughts in this respect wanting. Godwin's focus on the perfectability of man and the importance of inculcating moral values in the breasts of private citizens was commendable, in Brown's eyes, but Godwin's preferred program of literary education—one that shared a number of similarities with the programs Rollin and Blair recommended—was, as Brown saw it, hindered by a reliance on antiquated theories of literature and literary authority. For the young novelist who hoped to formulate a specifically "American" tale, Godwin's theories of literature and of the necessity of literary education were not radical enough. The authorities that Godwin himself upheld also had to be reexamined.

Published in 1793, Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness* takes an optimistic view both of human nature, interpreting it as capable of "perpetual improvement" and self-governance through the practice of reason, and of the goal of human progress, which he takes to be "the happiness of the human species" (33; Bk.1, ch.6; 11; Bk.1, ch.1 intro). Central to Godwin's thinking is the sovereignty and innate rationality of the individual. In its natural state, Godwin contended, the individual man would advance toward "perfection," and modern man was only hindered in his progression of perennial improvement by the influence of institutions, both political and social (government, marriage, and even public education) (33-7; Bk.1, ch.6). This is not to say, however, that each man's duty was only to attend to his own interest. Rather, Godwin's theories had a decidedly utilitarian premise: each individual man's perfectibility was, in fact, the reason that social bodies could be held together without the interposition of governments. As an actor capable of discerning truth and forming right moral judgments, man's duty is to work to benefit his fellow man: "I am bound," Godwin explains, "to employ my talents, my understanding, my strength, and my time, for the production

of the greatest quantity of general good" (56; Bk.2, ch.2).

The study of literature played a crucial role in this system. It was through this study that man realized his true potential and, thus, his ability to act for the general benefit of mankind. Especially in the modern world, one which had already been subjected to the polluting influences of state government, Godwin thought, a literary education enlivened the mind and offered the best possible mode for the extirpation of any prejudices that may have been learned from contact with unnatural institutions. Books allowed men to commune with each other and thereby to continually evaluate their own principles. "Indeed," Godwin poses, "if there be such a thing as truth, it must infallibly be struck out by the collision of mind with mind" (21; Bk.1, ch.4).

Importantly, though, Godwin contended that not just any literature would do. He believed a true understanding of the original, sublime nature of man could only be derived from thorough study of the classics, as he elaborated in his seminal work on education, *The Enquirer, Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature* (1797). "If there be in the present age any wisdom," Godwin urges in a section in the *The Enquirer* entitled, "Of The Study of The Classics," "any powers of reasoning, any acquaintance with the secrets of nature, any refinement of language, any elegance of composition, any love of all that can adorn and benefit the human race, this is the source from which they ultimately flowed" (98). Translations into English, or any student's native tongue, what is more, were insufficient to communicate the grandeur of sentiment found in ancient literatures. Latin writers, for instance, demonstrated, "an exquisite skill in the use of language; a happy selection of words; a beautiful structure of phrase; a transparency of style; a precision by which they communicate the strongest sentiments in the directest form in a word, every thing that relates to the most admirable polish of manner," that could not be transferred, even in the most competent translations (99).

Though working toward the radical end of rendering institutionalized governments obsolete, Godwin's philosophy on education is still an extension of the earlier pedogogical programs described by Charles Rollin and Hugh Blair, both of whom recommended close study of the classics as a means of teaching universal truths and transcendent values for the good of king and kingdom. Literariness—or the ability to comprehend and appreciate delicate subtleties of both content and style in a written text—was, in fact, enormously important to Godwin's anarchist principles. Individual freedom could not be achieved without first gaining a proper knowledge and respect for the human condition through reading texts that were recognized for their beauty, and the texts that had most thoroughly proven their merit in this regard, as Rollin, Blair, and Godwin would all agree, were the classics.

The connection Godwin's philosophy retained to traditional ideas of literary authority—the most ancient texts were read as those that least reflected corrupting influences of advanced human civilization, and, therefore, were regarded as more authoritative—was, in Brown's eyes, a problematic one. Though a thorough education in classical texts was supposed to lead to the reader's capability for self-determination and self-governance, this education required the use of authority and the direction of the individual's will and interest by some outside hand, subverting reading subjects' will both to the dictates and teaching of the classical texts themselves, and to the will of the instructor charged with their education. Gaining the facility with language required to read and comprehend the intricacies of Greek and Roman material was, in itself, an undertaking that required minute and specific instruction. Godwin himself at various points recognized the ways in which pedagogy necessarily relied on a hierarchical divide between teacher and student, an idea he described most forcefully in *The Enquirer*: "All education," he writes, "is despotism. It is perhaps impossible for the young to be conducted without introducing

in many cases the tyranny of implicit obedience. Go there; do that; read; write; rise; lie down; will perhaps forever be the language addressed to youth by age."[34] Attempting to depose this normative view of the instruction of children, Godwin describes an ideal system in which the teacher- student model of pedagogy is preserved, without the expectation that the teacher be tasked with bending or shaping the child's will to his own. "The most desirable mode of education," Godwin writes in *The Enquirer*, "is that which is careful that all the acquisitions of the pupil shall be preceded and accompanied by desire . . . the pupil should go first and the master [follow]" (115). The student's curiosity, then, was the ultimate authority, leading him to new texts and new knowledge, while the teacher stood benevolently in the background, at the ready in the event of a question.

A harmonious picture, indeed, but not one that Brown fully believed in. Just as Brown explicitly probed the potential problems with Richardson's sentiment in *Wieland* in his depiction of Pleyel, he offers Theodore Wieland's veneration of the Cicero as a critique of the centrality of traditional, neoclassical views of literature to Godwin's theories of self-government, and by extension, to the centrality of classical literature for eighteenth-century programs of literary education. Theodore reads curiously and voraciously, exactly as Godwin's model student would, but his focus on classical texts seems only to enthrall him in esoteric minutiae instead of improving his mind and making him more able to advance the cause of human happiness. Clara's description of Theodore's admiration of Cicero paints a man who sees grammar, pronunciation, and the mechanics of language not as the tools that, once mastered, unlock

[34] This excerpt is also quoted in Graham Allen's "Godwin, Fénelon, and the Disappearing Teacher" (207). Allen offers a detailed discussion of the influence of Fénelon, a French educational theorist whom Charles Rollin also greatly admired, on Godwin's work and further analysis of Godwin's awareness of his own reliance on authoritative literary instruction.

broader knowledge and a closer connection with the beautiful and the ideal, but as ends in themselves:

> My brother was an indefatigable student. The authors whom he read were numerous, but the chief object of his veneration was Cicero. He was never tired of honning and rehearsing his productions. To understand them was not sufficient. He was anxious to discover the gestures and cadences with which they ought to be delivered. He was very scrupulous in selecting a true scheme of pronunciation for the Latin tongue, and in adapting it to the words of his darling writer. His favorite occupation consisted in embellishing his rhetoric with all the proprieties of gesticulation and utterance.
> Not contented with this, he was diligent in settling and restoring the purity of the text. For this end, he collected all the editions and commentaries that could be procured, and employed months of severe study in exploring and comparing them. He never betrayed more satisfaction than when he made a discovery of this kind. (27)

Chris Looby has discussed the ways in which Theodore's near-obsession with Cicero reveals an anxiety that language, regarded as the means through which democracy worked, wielded a power that it did not, perhaps, deserve. Theodore and Pleyel, Looby points out, get into an intellectual argument about a specific word in Cicero's *Pro Cluentio*, the one work in which Cicero himself believed that he had been guilty of manipulating his listeners' judgment with his loquacity and of convincing them to acquit a man of a crime that he had clearly committed. In response to this anxiety, Looby claims, and despite protestations on the part of American ideologues like Jefferson that "the world belongs to the living"—that current citizens, rather than past authorities, should hold the power to create and enact laws of the land—American culture was still inextricably tied to previous authorities. Americans clamored after centralized, longstanding authorities wherever they could find them. Theodore, here, in taking up Cicero, has taken up the project of bolstering an authoritative voice whose power he accepts because of its comfortable familiarity.[35]

[35] See Looby's section "Ciceronian Elocution" in *Voicing America* 158-165.

Brown's representation of Theodore's reading practices does belie a preoccupation with legitimizing traditional authorities as a way of coping with the uncertainties posed by republican ideologies, but, more specifically, what Brown takes issue with here is the idea that literature could somehow provide the answer to the tyranny posed by aristocratic political and social institutions when the prevailing terms of literary discourse so closely mirrored the discourses that described aristocracies in the first place. How could Theodore be expected to develop into a rational actor, capable of self-determination and of responsibly enacting the power he wielded as a citizen in an egalitarian society, if the study of the literature that was expected to refine his mind necessarily involved him in a system of hierarchical rule that was not, in Brown's view, always completely just? Traditional, neoclassical literary discourse of the type propounded by educators like Rollin and Blair, and then preserved even by radical thinkers like Godwin, saw true authority as resting in the pages of canonized texts. This authority governed generation after generation of readers and was passed down to those who had the resources to pursue an education (but not, importantly, to those who did not have access to the financial and social resources that would enable them to do attend school or pursue private methods of education). Eventually, Brown's depiction of Theodore's reading practices suggests, readers of ancient, seemingly authoritative texts, were so removed from the context in which Roman and Greek works were written that the messages of these texts were easily lost, or, at least, obscured by the study of the language and grammar that were necessary prerequisite topics to the study of the literature itself. The authority these texts may have held originally by virtue of their beauty, by the end of the eighteenth century, had come to look unfounded, and the study of them appeared to hinder rather than promote the acquisition of useful knowledge for the benefit of individuals and the society in which they lived.

That Brown saw classical definitions of literary authority as guilty of perpetuating ideologies that were both iniquitous and useless for many students, as, in fact, directly counter to Godwin's egalitarian and utiltarian ideals, is apparent in both his early and late writings. Brown's *Henrietta Letters*, written between 1788 and 1792 from the perspectives of two lovers and sent initially to his friend John Davidson (the very same friend to whom he wrote about his willingness to sacrifice the "harmony of phraseology" in order to foreground ideas and arguments), contain a debate over whether classical learning is beneficial to the formation of the intellect and suggest that the classics may not provide the surest route to an egalitarian society. The *Henrietta Letters* presage *Alcuin* in that they reflect Brown's concern that women were not offered the same opportunities for intellectual advancement and participation in civic life accorded to men, and that, because of this difference, the United States was not living up to the democratic ideals it championed. The *Henrietta Letters* argue, in no uncertain terms, that relying on classical modes of literary education could do little to remedy the disparity between female and male citizens that *Alcuin* discussed. Henrietta herself initiates the critique of classicism by writing to her lover with the request that he teach her: “Why should women be outstripped by men in literary pursuits? For is not female curiosity insatiable, and what other passion is requisite to render learned labor successful? . . . Tell me whether the Latin language be to one in my circumstances worth the labor of acquiring, and what period of time and what degree of application the acquisition would necessarily demand” (65).[36] The lover responds with a condemnation of ancient texts that focuses on its inaccessibility to those readers who have not already been trained up in both Greek and Latin:

[36] Page numbers used for the *Henrietta Letters* refer to Clark's *Charles Brockden Brown*, in which the first nearly complete version of the *Letters* was made available.

> Are you really desirous of wading through the crudities, obscurities, and discords of the grammatical chaos, of conning old Lillie's rule, and talking with colloquial Cordier and Erasmus? . . . You could not possibly receive pleasure from the brutalities of Anacreon and Aristophanes, the obscure flights of Pindar, whose progress is discernible only through the glosses with which you can be furnished only by scholiasts and antiquarians, the mysticism of Plato, or the subtleties of Aristotle. There is nothing, however, valuable, for which too great a price may not be paid. Before you engage in any study it is to be considered whether the labor of pursuit and the pleasure of acquisition be proportionate to each other, and whether the time which is this consumed might not be more profitably employed. (69-71)

To "one in [Henrietta's] circumstances," that is, female, and not likely to have gone to a school that focused on classical languages, but desiring to follow the dictates of her own intelligence, the benefits of reading ancient texts were unavailable and not likely to be made more pleasurable by the aspect that education in classical texts had taken on. To study the classics, the lover explains, is to be mired in footnotes and esoteric commentary, much, we should note, as Theodore Wieland is in his sister's description of his habits, hardly, it seems, the direct experience of sublimity that eighteenth century educational theorists proclaimed it to be.

Brown's concerns about the accessibility of classical literature extended to its availability not only to women, but also to members of the merchant and working classes. Though the initial critiques of classicism launched in the *Henrietta Letters* were leveled a few years before Brown declared Godwin to be his "Oracle," he later expressed skepticism about the usefulness of learning to read ancient languages specifically as a facet of Godwin's educational theory, and only expanded on his earlier assertion that this type of education would hinder rather than facilitate the continual progress and happiness of the modern individual. An 1805 article Brown wrote for the *Literary Magazine* entitled "On Classical Learning" shows that his critique of the position classical learning held in the modern curriculum was straightforwardly directed toward Godwin: "I am sorry to find that sensible and well meaning persons of both sexes," Brown

writes, "have been influenced by the arguments or the authority of Mr. Godwin. I say Godwin, for I have not seen the same sentiments in any other writer. He advises parents to give their sons a classical education, because, says he 'they can never certainly foresee the future destination and propensities of their children.' This argument is very weak and inconclusive" (256). While in the *Henrietta Letters*, Brown's primary complaint with classicism seemed to be its tendency to be exclusionary, here, his argument is that it is useless to the pursuits that many Americans had to follow for the sake of their livelihoods. Godwin argued that studying ancient Greek and Roman literature could prepare students for nearly any walk of life because of the universal values and truths it would impart. Brown refers to Godwin's comments on studying the classics because "future [destinations] could not be predicted," but Brown counters with the assertion that classical learning, in fact, fitted the student not for everything, but for nothing: "How few can read a page of Latin, after they have been absent from college two or three years! Men of a liberal education, who are engaged in trade or business, find the superficial knowledge of Latin and Greek, which they acquired at school, entirely useless, and therefore take no pains to retain it.—They regret the loss of the time and money which they have expended in such vain pursuits" (*256*). Brown, himself a member of a family that relied on trade for financial support, did not see any meanness in preparing for life as a merchant, but does evince frustration here over the fact that the merchant class was not offered the type of education that would allow them to achieve their full potential in the work they had to perform. Cicero was not, in short, the man to help Americans progress at the turn of the eighteenth century. If Godwinian teachings on the capability of man were to have any credence in the United States, these teachings must be fitted to the contemporary arenas—the marketplace, for instance, and not the forum—in which its citizens participated.

In both the *Henrietta Letters* and in "On Classical Learning," Brown does, however, broach suggestions to remedy the need for a new definition of literature that does not privilege texts that could be either inaccessible to many readers or ineffective in their aims at engaging the reader's intellect and encouraging success in the socio-political world in which he or she lived. His recommendations in both the *Henrietta Letters* and his 1805 article are remarkably consistent. In place of endorsing classical education, Henrietta's lover advocates for the benefits of a modernized version of literary study that answers the needs of a reader seeking truth and universal values, but not at an abnormally high cost of time and energy. Rather than study Greek and Latin, in short, the lover suggests that literature written in English, or, at the very least, other modern languages that may be easily learned:

> It is of more importance to you to become an adept in your native language than in any other . . . I cannot admit that the knowledge of ancient languages is otherwise to be esteemed than as they humanize the heart and polish the understanding, and though I am sincerely of opinion that it does not merit even this encomium, which I must confess to be extremely high. Yet I am willing to bestow it, but must ask whether the study of British, French, or Italian literature is not equally conducive to the same end? (71)

The Brown of the *Literary Magazine* also advises his readers, instead of sending their children to schools to learn Latin, to ensure that they are given a thorough education in their native English. Quoting Robert Lowth, a former bishop of London most well-known for the textbook on English grammar he published in 1762, he proposes that "'a competent grammatical knowledge of our own language . . . is the true foundation upon which all literature, properly so called, should be raised," and he notes that adopting a system of teaching literature that depends upon English instead of Greek would make literary study more useful to a broader percentage of the population. "'It has been the custom of our nation,'" Brown continues, still quoting Lowth,

> for persons of the middle and lower ranks of life, who design their children for trades and manufactures, to send them to the Latin and Greek schools. There they

> wear out four or five years of time in learning a number of strange words, that will be of very little use to them in all the following affairs of their station. It is a thing of […] [Brown's redaction] greater value and importance that youth should be perfectly well skilled in reading, writing, and speaking their native tongue in a proper, a polite, and graceful manner, than in toiling among foreign languages. (256)

In Theodore, we read a subject who is perhaps too late to be helped. Too far tied up in an antiquated understanding of literature and incapable of discerning meaning along with the less pressing concerns of pronunciation, Theodore puppets his reading rather than "clashing his mind against the minds of others" through his books, and he is left, because of his dependence on the manner rather than the matter of classical authorities, unable to withstand the impressions and ideas, emanating from unseen sources all around him, that command him to tragic acts of violence. If one question raised by Theodore Wieland's misapplied efforts in reading Cicero is, in short, "if not classicism, then what?" a partial answer is to be found in these arguments in favor of focusing literary studies on works written in contemporary languages. French, Italian, and, most importantly, English, were spoken by the "living generation," and therefore could be more easily comprehended by a broader cross section of American society, even, as Brown hopes, women and merchant laborers.

What Brown's comments on the usefulness of studying literature in modern, rather than classical, languages reveal is his thinking that Godwin's theories of human perfectibility needed was the disruption of the patriarchal tendencies that governed literary study. Looking to contemporary works to "humanize the heart" and teach readers how to communicate "in a proper, a polite, and a graceful manner," a shift that relocated literary authority to the present moment, was one step in Brown's attempt to affect this disruption. In *Wieland*, however, he also took this literary revolution one step further, asking not just, "can we write literature that brings authority (a knowledge of truth and a broader perspective on human experience) closer to present

day readers?" but "can we show the reader truths without any sort of coercion or heavy-handed instruction?" and even, "can we write literature that does not presume any authority whatsoever, and only attempts to cultivate the reader's own agency?"

"Make what use of the tale you shall think proper": Narration Transformed

Setting out to write his own novel, Brown had the precedents set by Richardson and Godwin in mind, and he hoped both to improve upon the traits he admired in each author's work, but at the same time to avoid their missteps. Richardson was a master at teaching morality in a rational, familiar, secularized context, without relying on "mystery" as Brown supposed the Bible to do. In Richardson's hands, the novel became the perfect vehicle through which to touch the consciences of citizens living in a world that was no longer certain it could hear the voice of God, directly or otherwise. Clarissa, Pamela, and Grandison needed only their own consciences to direct themselves to moral right (or, at least in Clarissa's case, to feel guilt when that moral right had been abnegated to the wiles of a seducer). And yet it was, for Brown, essential to avoid the type of over- aestheticization and objectification, the tendency toward empty ornament and inappropriate solicitation of sentimentality that were all-too closely related to the admiration for beauty and virtue the sentimental novel hoped to evoke. As for Godwin, Brown hoped to retain this predecessor's interest in the use value of texts as key elements in the sustainability of benevolent, progressive societies, but wanted to find a way around Godwin's unwitting reliance on potentially tyrannical authorities—teachers left with the charge of instructing future readers in languages thy would need to comprehend written texts, and even the texts themselves, which required hours of laborious study to understand. How, in short, could he downplay the sentimental novel's focus on beauty and the Godwinian educational system's need for uneven

balances of power? How could he author a text that did not itself seduce or command, and how could he safegaurd a reading audience's sensibilities while "illustrating," as he terms it, "some important branches of the moral constitution of man" in the pages of a novel that would stand forth as one of the "few productions whose usefulness secures to them a lasting reputation"? Clara, and the relationship with her audience that Brown imagines for her, are responses to these problems. *Wieland*, though it critiques both Richardson and Godwin, also models potential solutions to the difficult questions it raises.

The defining feature of Clara's narrative style, especially apparent when compared with the narrative styles of the novels Brown most admired and other sentimental novels with which his audience would have been familiar, is detachment. Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747), for example, each begin by dropping the reader immediately into the midst of a network of intimacies. Clarissa's first exchanges are with her friend Anna Howe, who has written to comfort her in the wake of a conflict between her family and one of her sister's suitors (none other than Lovelace), while Pamela's first letters are to her parents and show her requesting comfort and advice from her parents after the death of her much- loved mistress. Pamela's distress is particularly crafted to evoke sympathy: she is shown as a dutiful supplicant to her parents' kindnesses, and she makes no secret of the tears she has shed ("Don't worry to see the paper so blotted," she abjures her parents) because of the mentor she so innocently loved (11). Many American texts continued this trend of proving the sentimental heroine as worthy of immediate sympathy by picturing her in relation to her dearest friends, expressing the tenderest regard for their thoughts and advice and soliciting and receiving their own tenderness with grace. Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), for example, begins with a letter from the novel's protagonist, Eliza Wharton, to her "dear Lucy," in whom she immediately confides her wish for

friendship and comfort, and Susannah Rowson's eponymous female heroine, Charlotte Temple, endears herself to readers immediately as a fresh-faced *ingénue*, emerging from church with her school friends (Foster 5; Rowson 9).

Clara's introduction, in contrast, evidences resignation and estrangement. As Brown explains in his preface, Clara addresses her story to "a small number of friends, whose curiosity, with regard to it, had been greatly awakened":

> I feel little reluctance in complying with your request. You know not fully the cause of my sorrows. You are a stranger to the depth of my distresses. Hence your efforts at consolation must necessarily fail. Yet the tale that I am going to tell is not intended as a claim upon your sympathy. In the midst of my despair, I do not disdain to contribute what little I can to the benefit of mankind. I acknowledge your right to be informed of the events that have lately happened in my family. (5)

Clara resists "consolation," insists on the distance between herself and those who cannot comprehend the "depth of [her] distresses," and consistently thwarts the expectations of any reader who might hope to encounter the soft-spoken complaints characteristic of the traditional sentimental narrator. Rather than creating the conditions under which *Wieland*'s reader could envision him or herself as a member of a circle of sympathetic exchange, Brown begins his novel by intentionally holding the reader at arm's length, underlining difference instead of inviting identification.

More interesting than Clara's overt resistance to sympathy and sentimentality, however, are the less obvious omissions from the normative sentimental formula that make her declarations of singularity convincing. Nina Baym, in her "Minority Reading of *Wieland*," which has long held the distinction of being the most outspoken critique of Brown's novel, cites what she sees as Clara's incomplete characterization as one of the novel's unmitigated imperfections: "the flaw in Brown's *Wieland* is basic and central: there is a continuous sacrifice of story line and character—hence, long-term coherence—for the sake of immediate effect" (88).

Clara, according to Baym, appears merely as a "register for melodramatic effects" instead of as an active participant with a full-fledged psychology in the course of Brown's novel (94). And Clara may very well appear to be only a "register," rather than a well-rounded subject, but only if she is read against expectations that the sentimental novel had firmly established for female characters by the late 1790s.

Revisiting both Richardson and then Rowson, who provides an alternate example of how sentimental formulas were used by American writers, we see that the sympathetic responses sentimental heroines elicit are largely the result of references to their physical beauty and the aestheticization of even minor qualities that reinforce a sense of their overall morality and innocence. One of Mr. B's first assessments of Pamela, for instance, is that she "[writes] a pretty hand," and Richardson does not make his readers wait long (only until the novel's fourth letter) for the debate between Mr. B and his sister, Lady Davers, over whether such a pretty young maid should be allowed to remain in a bachelor's household (12, 16). Clarissa, likewise, is presented as an exemplar of discretion whose moral virtues are only reaffirmed, even proved, by her status as the family beauty. Lovelace rejects Clarissa's sister, Arabella, for her ill-temper, and, it is suggested, for her plainness (Arabella herself initially regrets that "she [is] not handsome enough for [Lovelace]"), but he is instantly captivated by Clarissa's appearance (42). Charlotte Temple's arresting beauty is also a signifier of her innocence. Charlotte is first described through the eyes of Montraville, who will become her seducer, and his friend Belcour, who pushes Montraville toward the villainy he undertakes in abducting Charlotte:

> They had gratified their curiosity, and were preparing to return to the inn without honouring any of the belles with particular notice, when Madame Du Pont, at the head of her school, descended from the church. Such an assemblage of youth and innocence naturally attracted the young soldiers: they stopped; and, as the little cavalcade passed, almost involuntarily pulled off their hats. A tall, elegant girl looked at Montraville and blushed: he instantly recollected the features of

> Charlotte Temple, whom he had once seen and danced with at a ball at Portsmouth. At that time he thought on her only as a very lovely child, she being then only thirteen; but the improvement two years had made in her person, and the blush of recollection which suffused her cheeks as she passed, awakened in his bosom new and pleasing ideas. Vanity led him to think that pleasure at again beholding him might have occasioned the emotion he had witnessed, and the same vanity led him to wish to see her again.
> "She is the sweetest girl in the world," said he, as he entered the inn. Belcour stared. "Did you not notice her?" continued Montraville: "she had on a blue bonnet, and with a pair of lovely eyes of the same colour, has contrived to make me feel devilish odd about the heart." (9-10)

No such references to Clara's appearance—no "prettiness," "fineness," or "elegance"—are mentioned in Brown's introduction to his heroine. Only Pleyel, who, as I have mentioned, makes the mistake of ignoring Clara's real virtues—her fortitude and constancy—in order to obsessively catalogue irrelevant details like her "attitude while plucking a rose," falls victim to the fault of falsely prioritizing the protagonist's beauty over her substance. While Baym may read this resistance of traditional characterization as a fault, it is more accurately interpreted as part of Brown's attempt to avoid the same mistaken idea of the literary that he writes into the figure of Pleyel. Clara is a subject to be studied and thought over, but she is not meant as a physical specimen of loveliness or as a young woman to be beloved by her readers.

This substitution of detached observationalism for sentimental intimacy is not merely a preliminary ploy to entice readers to continue on in the novel after its first page by pointing to all that the narrator may be withholding from her audience; rather, Clara often reverts to her aloof, analytical position, even after the novel's most troubling or terrifying events. In the wake of Theodore's first experience with Carwin's disembodied voice, Clara narrates not just her own feelings about the event—which she describes as "wonder . . . unmixed with sorrow or fear"—but also a studied conclusion, scientific in its logical progression. "The will is the tool of the understanding," Clara muses, "which must fashion its conclusions on the notices of sense. If the

senses be depraved, it is impossible to calculate the evils that may flow from the consequent deductions of the understanding" (39). Her nighttime encounter in her bedroom with Carwin, similarly, provokes a torrent of questions, not, importantly, a flood of tears, as it might in Pamela's, Clarissa's, or Charlotte's case. Upon retreating, Carwin tells Clara that his advances on her virtue have been stayed by an unseen second power (in fact, Carwin whispers commands in a second tone, meaning only to keep Clara from screaming out loud until he departs). Clara stands apart from her distress and relentlessly turns over the events that transpired in her bedroom after they have occurred: "That power [to which Carwin referred] is invisible. It is subject to the cognizance of one of my senses. What are the means that will inform me of what nature it is? . . . Why should I be selected as the object of his care . . . what were the limits and duration of his guardianship? (108).

The most compelling example of this observationalism, however, and also perhaps the moment in which we most hope that it will be relinquished so that the narrative may finally resolve into a redemptive, unguarded sentimentalism, is *Wieland*'s final letter. Written three years after Theodore's murderous spree and his own death, and dated from Montpelier, three thousand miles away from Clara's native soil, the novel's final epistle informs us that Clara has married Pleyel, but we read no descriptions of realized joy or overwhelming relief that affections have, at last, been recognized. Rather, we read only passive reassurances that her life is "not destitute of happiness" and stilted reflections not on the inevitability of time to produce healing, but merely the absence of pain: "Such is man. Time will obliterate the deepest impressions. Grief the most vehement and hopeless, will gradually decay and wear itself out" (267).

Read against Richardson's sentimentalism, then, and against other American authors who followed in Richardson's footsteps, *Wieland*'s innovation seems to be its rewriting of the

sentimental heroine as not just a figure of fine feeling, one whose beauties, both physical and moral, invite interest and sympathy, but as a figure of reflection and rationalism. Robbed, in a sense, of the opportunity to practice sensibility, readers were left with a model of measured pragmatism. Clara's detached perspective, also, however, responds to the problems of authority in neoclassical literary discourse that were raised for Brown most urgently by their appearance in William Godwin's work. Here, too, holding *Wieland* up to a British predecessor reveals stark changes, this time in the authority assumed by different narrators in the process of making meaning or developing moral pronouncements on the basis of the experiences they relate. The eponymous Caleb of Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) makes no secret of his reasons for telling his story, and he does not hesitate to ascribe blame for his difficulties in order that lessons may be extracted that will be useful to the reader. "Every one," Caleb laments, bitterly, at the outset of his tale,

> as far as my story has been known, has refused to assist me in my distress, and has execrated my name. I have not deserved this treatment . . . I am incited to the penning of these memoirs only by a desire to divert my mind from the deplorableness of my situation, and a faint idea that posterity may by their means be induced to render me a justice which my contemporaries refuse. My story will, at least, appear to have that consistency which is seldom attendant but upon truth. (5)

Deprived of the acknowledgment of his fellow men, Caleb is nonetheless confident that at the heart of his tale lies the seed of a universal truth, a truth discernible, he notes here, by the "consistency," or direct style of his narration. His tale serves as a representative example of, as the novel's full title attests, "Things As They Are," not merely as the story of one isolated or introspective man. Caleb reasserts this stance as he draws his story to a close with overt moralization:

> Falkland, I will think only of thee, and from that thought will draw ever-fresh nourishment for my sorrows! One generous, one disinterested tear I will

> consecrate to thy ashes! A nobler spirit lived not among the sons of men. Thy intellectual powers were truly sublime, and thy bosom burned with a god-like ambition. But of what use are talents and sentiments in the corrupt wilderness of human society? It is a rank and rotten soil, from which every finer shrub draws poison as it grows. All that, in a happier field and a purer air, would expand into virtue and germinate into usefulness, is thus concerted into henbane and deadly nightshade. (336)

Caleb could hardly put a finer point on Godwin's message. Echoing the argument put forth in *Political Justice* the year before *Caleb Williams* was published, Caleb, driven to exhaustion by his efforts to avoid Falkland, his aristocratic oppressor, declares that Falkland himself was oppressed by the very aristocratic system that seemed to elevate him and grant him power over lowlier men. The "rank and rotten" "human society" is the actual villain of Caleb's tale, and Caleb himself, the most obvious victim of "society," claims, without hesitation, an authoritative position by telling his story and enumerating its lesson in no uncertain terms (336).

Clara, conversely, for all her ability to stand apart and perform analyses, surrounds her morals with caveats and "ifs," and denies opportunities to claim or delineate absolute truths. Instead of a blatant plea for consolation and understanding reminiscent of Caleb's requests that his story may be reassessed and credited, Clara instead calls into question the very idea that she should be regarded as an authority at all: "Listen to my narrative," she enjoins her "small number of friends," "and then say what it is that has made me deserve to be placed on this dreadful eminence, if, indeed, every faculty be not suspended in wonder that I am still alive, and am able to relate it" (6). Caleb's assumption that he has the knowledge and ability to communicate simple truths is ironized when it evolves into Clara's "dreadful eminence." She claims not superior knowledge as a result of her experiences, but its opposite—bewilderment, and the need for others to participate in the process of making meaning with her. The best she can do at the outset of her own tale, tellingly, is to make passive postulations about its use value and to place

the final burden of deriving a moral on the reader's shoulders. “I acknowledge your right to be informed of the events that have lately happened in my family,” she begins, again, holding her addressees at a distance, challenging her readers to “make what use of the tale you shall think proper. If it be communicated to the world, it will inculcate the duty of avoiding deceit. It will exemplify the force of early impressions, and show, the immeasurable evils that flow from an erroneous or imperfect discipline” (5). Caleb, as insistent as Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, grabs the reader by the shirt sleeve and sits him down to listen, certain of his tale's urgency and importance. More contemplative, even puzzled, than obsessed, Clara logically concedes that meaning is a possibility, but she will not own up to definitive lessons, leaving the specific “use” of her tale up to the discretion of her audience.

Cicero this is not. If Brown makes one thing clear to anyone who would approach his novel, it is that *Wieland* is not the type of work that pretends to have access to a trove of knowledge and beauty. Clara, moreover, does not assume the position of preceptress, or even, perhaps more aptly, “Oracle,” to use Brown’s epithet for Godwin. Instead, what Clara's unrelenting detachment attempts to accomplish is the dispersal of literary authority, or the authority to communicate and interpret truths, across the reading audience, a dispersal of power that Brown regarded as necessary to avoid the potential tyranny a text itself could enact. Just as Brown's unwillingness to characterize his heroine as beautiful testifies to his intent to safeguard his imagined reader from the dangers of sympathy, his reluctance to allow her to pronounce morals bears witness to his efforts to truly unseat the authorities that had been set in place by what Caleb Williams called “human society.” *Wieland* does not aim to enforce one hegemonic moral. It aims to expose the possibility of many lessons and to encourage readings rather than certainties.

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Wieland famously, or, more likely, infamously concludes with Clara's relation of what has come to be known as the Conway-Stuart-Maxwell plot.[37] Brown's heroine forgets, momentarily, to trace her own family's history to its end and shifts focus, instead, to the fate of the family of Louisa Conway, the Wielands' ward, a character who seemed to have been otherwise forgotten many chapters before. Clara relates how, years before meeting the Wielands in America, Mrs. Stuart, though at first in love with her husband, unexpectedly came to harbor affection for Maxwell, who later turned out to be a villain. Fleeing with her daughter, Louisa, to America to avoid shaming her husband (Louisa's natural father), Mrs. Stuart lost contact with her husband before she died. After befriending the family, Mr. Stuart eventually came to recognize his daughter at the Wielands' house and returned with her to Europe. Clara's final mention of Louisa's family comes with the sad news that Maxwell has stabbed Stuart in a late night encounter and that both men are now dead. The Wielands themselves are remembered only in the final moments of Clara's tale, in which she hastily moralizes both on the demise of the Stuarts and on her brother's circumstances:

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[37] Many of Brown's critics, like Hedges, Cleman, and Katz, have taken him to task for what they see as poor, hasty writing and faulty construction in *Wieland*, though Katz optimistically attributes the text's "failures" to the facts of the novel's publication history, since Brown, he has illustrated, published the novel as it was being written. Seltzer sums up this entire camp's argument in regard to the Conway-Stuart-Maxwell plot thusly: "The flaws in the novel's onstruction are apparent and undeniable, the most prominent being the abortive conclusion in the narrative of Louisa Conway" (81). More recent critics have given Brown a little more credit and have suggested that, even if the final turn to the Conway-Stuart-Maxwell affair does seem hurried, Brown nonetheless uses it intentionally. Christophersen sees, in Mrs. Stuart's transference of affections from her husband to the evil Maxwell, described in *Wieland* as a "revolution in sentiment," the novel's mournful, final reminder that mankind is capable of unexplainable changes and conversions in principle (35). Koenings, likewise, sees the reappearance of this plot as Brown's way of showing Clara to his readers in the practice of developing "possibilistic" interpretations of a story. I believe we are supposed to notice Clara's haste, here—*Wieland*'s ending isn't perfect, and it isn't meant to be—but this, as I will discuss, is Brown's way of holding on to the practice of moralization while critiquing it at the same time.

> That virtue should become the victim of treachery is, no doubt, a mournful consideration; but it will not escape our notice, that the evils of which Carwin and Maxwell were the authors, owed their existence to the errors of the sufferers. All efforts would have been ineffectual to subvert the happiness or shorten the existence of the Stuarts, if their own frailty had not seconded these efforts. If the lady had crushed her disastrous passion in the bud, and driven the seducer from her presence, when the tendency of his artifices was seen; if Stuart had not admitted the spirit of absurd revenge, we should not have had to deplore this catastrophe. If Wieland had framed juster notions of moral duty, and of the divine attributes; or if I had been gifted with ordinary equanimity or foresight, the double-tongued deceiver would have been baffled and repelled. (278)

Wieland's ending is, in its own way, "double-tongued." On the one hand, the novel ends with a reminder of everything that would appear to be most uncomfortable about Brown's new proposed definition of true, authentic literature. Clara's narrative digression calls attention, once again, to the complications attendant on viewing her as a figure of "eminence": the controlling voice of this novel is no more sure of what to make of events than readers themselves may be. Clara is shown here, after all, as a reader, and as one who can only make what seem to be insufficient attempts to apply lessons derived from her own reading to her own experience. In the end, she hastily groups a number of morals together, attempting somehow to map lessons derived from the Conway-Stuart-Maxwell plot onto the narrative of her brother's madness. Clara's hurried, erratic elision of these two tales serves as a reminder that, ultimately, nothing can actually be solved in *Wieland*'s world.

On the other hand, there is more to be said about Clara's last-minute return to neoclassical literary principles. In the end, Clara claims that there must be a moral to her tale, a way to derive meaning from her experiences by reframing them so that they may be viewed through the lens of a literary discourse that required moral beauties and focused on the teaching of right judgment. In so doing, in fact, she heralds a broad-scale return to several of the principles of neoclassical discourse that Brown had initially rejected in his work. By the time Brown arrived at the last

two novels of his short career as a novelist, as I have mentioned, he took up more normative sentimental modes entirely. *Clara Howard* (1801) and *Jane Talbot* (1801) center on young, beautiful heroines and do not shy away from making them sympathetic characters. The narrators of these two works, too, are confident in the usefulness and moral instruction their tales will offer. *Clara Howard*'s intoduction offers a particularly relevant example. In it, Edward Hartley, the deserving male hero who marries the virtuous Clara Howard, salutes a friend, and, by extension, Brown's readers, with eagerness and optimism, proclaiming the happiness he has won and the interest his tale will provoke in the breasts of those who would like to share in it: "Now am I rich, happy, crowned with every terrestrial felicity, in possession of that most exquisite of all blessings, a wife, endowed with youth, grace, dignity, and discretion . . . You ask me how all these surprising things came about? The inclosed letters, which I have put into a regular series, contain all the information you wish" (iv). Brown, perhaps, began to see the novel as a benign enough form to entrust it, as Richardson had done, with the voices of beautiful, virtuous women, and, as Godwin had done, with a narrator who spoke from a position of superior knowledge.

This return to the neoclassical idea of literature as a moral authority, however, also suggests that Brown found the answers to his questions about the effectiveness of traditional literary discourse in the modern world a little too daunting. If literary discourse was flawed, as Brown indeed found it to be, it nonetheless offered citizens a set of principles through which they could hope to make sense of other flawed institutions that governed their post-Revolutionary environment. Removing even the chance that conventional literariness could redeem a tragedy was, perhaps for Brown, who himself had grown up as a young boy in the midst of chaos and who had chosen to find meaning for himself in the pages of the texts he read with unflagging passion, a step too far. Clara's last moralizing act thus illuminates the act of "biloquism" with

which Brown brings his novel to a close. On the one hand, Brown strips away the underlying assumptions that lent neoclassical discourse its shape, pointing out that taste itself may be fallible, thus unable to thrive in a republican world. On the other hand, Brown claims, desperately and at the last possible moment, that though the validity of neoclassical discourse may be a fiction, it is, nonetheless, a necessary one.

Ultimately, neither the results of Brown's critique of neoclassical literary theory in *Wieland*, nor his urgent caution that, in the end, the neoclassical view of literature must not be forgotten, become lost to literary history. In questioning the viability of eighteenth-century understandings of taste and literary study, Brown effectively expanded the roles that literature could be expected to perform. When not confined to extolling the beautiful and affirming morality, literature could also expose iniquities, grapple with ideas, and value uncertainty over resolution. The narrator, in accordance with this new role, no longer had to operate as a paragon of unassailable morality, but could express less-than-epic sentiments: confusion, reluctance, even restlessness. Clara's answers may invite skepticism more than they provide assurance, but, as such, she effects a revolution in thought about literature without which Hawthorne could not have written about a community that wronged Hester in shunning her, and Melville could not have sustained an entire novel about a captain's search for a whale, to say nothing of his ability to subtitle his 1852 novel *Pierre* "The Ambiguities."

Brown's immediate followers, however, took up the idea of literature's essential commitment to beauty and truth once more, insisting once again that what the United States needed most was a literature that could refine its citizens' taste. Isaac Mitchell's *Alonzo and Melissa* (1811) and Rebecca Rush's *Kelroy* (1812) both have their ways of communicating the "horrors" of life in the new republic—the first features a Gothic castle, and the second an evil

mother whose body and language deteriorate before the reader's eyes, but not until her daughter's life has been destroyed. Mitchell and Rush take up the banner of universal taste and argue that, above all, recognizing beauty was that which could save the United States from peril. Even this reinvigoration of neoclassical discourse, however, like Clara's return to moralization at the conclusion of *Wieland*, was motivated by the desperation of having nowhere else to turn. While the late 1790s provided a volatile environment for Charles Brockden Brown, the nation's first internationally recognized novelist, as the nineteenth century dawned, political unrest only continued with mounting vehemence. Partisan rancor under the new republic's First Party System persisted, and another war loomed on the horizon. Authors insisted on literature's beauty once again, because, in this beauty, they could invest their last hopes.

Chapter 4

Jefferson's Lovers: Isaac Mitchell's *Alonzo and Melissa* (1811)

In his recent work on the role of aesthetic discourse in the early United States, Edward Cahill has brought to light much about the rise of "Federalist criticism," or the literary critical conversation carried out in America's Federalist-leaning periodicals, in the first decade of the nineteenth century and its relation to later approaches to aesthetic theory, especially Ralph Waldo Emerson's (205). Cahill's assessment of the role of "genius" in these literary critical articles is particularly striking. First, he identifies a shift in the connotation of the term "genius" that took place from the late 1790s to the early 1800s, a half decade that saw the Federalists' fall from power and the Democratic-Republicans' concomitant rise in the halls of Congress. Slowly but surely, "genius" came to denote not an ungovernable, unpredictable force, one that should be suspected even when the productions it inspired proved to be brilliant, but "a world of heightened aesthetic capacity and enduring moral truth outside of politics and beyond the influence of illiberal criticism and the deracinated regimes of taste" (208). Genius was not necessarily a maverick impulse; it was just lofty, and not many were in the position to fully comprehend it (though, of course, the subtext to many of the literary critical reviews that appeared in America's newspapers at the turn of the nineteenth century was that Federalist critics, as opposed to their Democratic-Republican counterparts, certainly could see genius in all its glory). According to Cahill, this redefinition of genius led to a sense of aesthetic sensibilities as both exclusive and inclusive:

> The Federalists' idea of genius, however, did more than construct the aesthetic as a cultural refuge from a politics they no longer controlled. As it challenged the universal aesthetics of taste, it constructed a more politically effective universality. For this new conception of genius was *both* universal *and* restricted. It appealed

> to democratic values by proclaiming the creative potential inherent in every person, cultivated or not, while muting such radicalism in an abstract vision of aesthetic humanism and a cultural reality of elitist exclusion. As an electrical force, it was potentially everywhere and in everyone, but its expression was limited to those Emerson in "Self-Reliance" (1841) would call the great men in whose work ordinary men recognize their "own rejected thoughts." (208)

Cahill has done literary critics a great service in shifting critical focus to a period, the decade before the War of 1812, in which literature has not had the benefit of much scholarly attention and of effecting a reassessment of the power aesthetic discourse held over the early national imagination.[1] There is more to the story, however, of the intellectual, political, and cultural developments that laid the foundations for Emerson's claims that every man could be a genius, if he could only regain his original cognizance of his own capabilities. There is also more to be said about the definitions of literature and the literary (more specific subsets of the broader discourse of aesthetics that Cahill examines) that prevailed on both sides of the political aisle in the years preceding the United States' second war with Britain. *Alonzo and Melissa* was first published in novel form in 1811 by Isaac Mitchell, an inveterate Jeffersonian who, until *Alonzo*'s publication, was known primarily as a Democratic-Republican newspaperman. *Kelroy* was published in 1812 by Rebecca Rush, styled only on the novel's cover page, "A Lady of Pennsylvania," though she was, in fact, the daughter of Jacob, a high Federalist judge, and the niece of Benjamin Rush, the well-known intellectual and reformer, thus more accurately labeled one of Pennsylvania's preeminent ladies. When read against each other, these works reveal commonalities in thinking about literary sensibility that show why literariness remained an

[1] Had feminist scholars in the 1980s and early 1990s not worked so diligently for the recovery of novels, like Tabitha Tenney's *Female Quixotism* (1801) and Rebecca Rush's *Kelroy* (1812), authored by women writers, literary works of this period may be all but forgotten in the pages of most current literary histories and anthologies.

important concept for Americans at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Though Mitchell and Rush wrote from opposing political perspectives, it is in the similarities between their definitions of literature and their understandings of its social function that testify to the strength of the literary as a guiding, unifying concept, one that could weather Revolution, but also its aftermath.

Alonzo and Melissa's and *Kelroy*'s reception histories run in almost opposite directions. Isaac Mitchell published the first version of *Alonzo and Melissa* in installments in the *Political Barometer*, a newspaper he edited and contributed to, in 1804, and then published the novel in expanded form in 1811. The work was pirated almost immediately. By 1812, an abbreviated version of *Alonzo* extracted directly from the newspaper editions in which it had first appeared was published under the name of Daniel Jackson, and it went on to become one of the most widely read novels of the nineteenth century. Both Mitchell and his publisher, Joseph Nelson, died in 1812, so the piracy was never prosecuted and Mitchell, unfortunately, never realized any financial gain from his work (Davidson, *Revolution* 225). The rise of the twentieth century, however, also saw the sun set on *Alonzo and Melissa*'s popularity. No scholarly edition exists today, and, in the few instances the novel is studied, it is most often taken up only briefly.[2] *Kelroy*, on the other hand, should have been enormously popular by any estimation, yet was not. Though penned by a scion of one of the early national period's most reputable and politically

[2] To date, there are only three article-length studies of *Alonzo and Melissa*: Cathy Davidson's "Isaac Mitchell's *The Asylum*; Or, Gothic Castles in the New Republic" (1982), much of which was later condensed and used in *Revolution and the Word*, Joseph Fitchelberg's "The Sentimental Economy of Isaac Mitchell's *The Asylum*" (1997), and Christian Knirsch's "Transcultural Gothic: Isaac Mitchell's *Alonzo and Melissa* as an Early Example of Popular Culture" (2013). I should also note that, like Knirsch, I have opted to refer to Mitchell's work as "*Alonzo and Melissa*" because this title most often appears as part or all of the title's construction in the nineteenth century, though the novel was known under other titles, such as *The Asylum* and *The Unfeeling Father*.

active families, *Kelroy* fell into early obscurity soon after its publication in 1812, an unfortunate state of affairs that has been attributed to its nonconformity with "the previously-held belief in the generic superiority of the romance over the domestic novel" in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Derounian 125). *Kelroy*, however, has fared slightly better with modern critics than *Alonzo* has. Rediscovered by feminist critics in the latter half of the twentieth century, it has received more sustained critical attention than at any earlier point in its history since its republication in 1992 under aegis of the Oxford Early American Women Writers series.[3]

When critics do turn to *Alonzo and Melissa* and *Kelroy*, they read them similarly, as both general critiques of the political, economic, and social life in America a generation after the Revolutionary War, and as more specific critical exposés of the ways in which political, economic, and social pressures exerted undue force on women, limiting their opportunities for participation in political life and confining them, largely, to the same roles they had always played in the contexts of western patriarchal societies. *Kelroy* and *Alonzo and Melissa* are both seen to use the tools offered up by the sentimental and gothic genres (as each partakes a little of both) in order to help citizens understand the financial and political fallout of the Revolutionary War. *Alonzo and Melissa*, for instance, as Joseph Fitchelberg has shown, situates the vagaries of the American system of domestic and international trade in the familiar language of the sentimental novel. *Kelroy*, similarly, according to Bridgette Copeland, works to model a number of responses to British encroachment (personified in the character of Mrs. Hammond, the

[3] Perhaps some credit should be afforded to Harrison T. Meserole for the resurrection of interest in Rush's *Kelroy*. In his "Some Notes on Early American Fiction: *Kelroy* Was There" (1977), a retrospective of the first two hundred years of literature written in the United States, Meserole offers *Kelroy* as the clearest evidence that there is more work to be done by scholars of American Literature in unearthing lost texts of the early national period and in calling for their republication in modern editions (5).

protagonist's overbearing, even evil mother, who is the centerpiece of most critical inquiries),[4] thereby rewriting the political discourse surrounding the decision to go to war with Britain a second time into Rush's version of the domestic novel. Some of the earliest and perhaps most convincing analyses of these works, however, come from Cathy Davidson, who addresses both of them in *Revolution and the Word* as works that reveal the fundamental hypocrisy of American claims that citizens of the United States at the turn of the nineteenth century lived in a "classless" society. To the contrary, as Davidson points out, the lingering presence of wealth- and bloodline-based social codes and the system of female exchange used to perpetuate them was still thriving even in circles of "plain Connecticut farmers," as Melissa's wealthy father styles himself in Mitchell's text. So, too, were these aristocratic codes still active among seemingly virtuous tradesmen's widows, like *Kelroy*'s Mrs. Hammond, who throws extravagant parties and clothes herself in extravagant dress, though she is, in fact, destitute and literally banking on the idea that she can regain the wealth she had become accustomed to by marrying her daughters to rich men.[5]

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[4] Mrs. Hammond seems to be such a singular character (a heartless mother in the midst of a culture that rallied behind the ideal of the hallowed role of the republican mother), that she has attracted a lot of critical attention, even from those critics who only bring *Kelroy* up briefly. Herbert Ross Brown saw Mrs. Hammond as a departure from the sentimental novel's normative passive mother: "The mothers in these novels usually resemble Mrs. Harlowe [Clarissa's mother] in their reluctant but passive submission to their husbands' treatment of their willful daughters. An exception is to be found in the conduct of the flinty-hearted Mrs. Hammond in *Kelroy* who stopped at no villainy to prevent her daughter's marriage" (37). Mereole's most ardent admiration for Rush is expressed over her treatment of the evil mother: "It is in the realization of Mrs. Hammond . . . that Rebecca Rush has drawn what may be the most memorable female villain in American literature" (7). Steve Hamelman "Aphasia in Rebecca Rush's *Kelroy*" discusses the facility with which Mrs. Hammond manipulates language to carry off her broader dissimulations (convincing Philadelphia high society, for example, that the family is still wealthy, even though they are, in fact, in debt), and Richards goes so far, in his "Decorous Violence: Manners, Class, and Abuse in Rebecca Rush's *Kelroy*," to read Mrs. Hammond in the context of the history of domestic violence in early American culture.

[5] Tennenhouse also writes about the problems with a persistent classist mentality in *Alonzo and Melissa* and argues that Melissa's staged death and then reintroduction into society enables a new way of imagining communities that are not held together by shared bloodlines. Melissa "dies" the daughter of Bloomfield who must adhere to his fatherly dictates and participate in his plans to maintain the family fortune; when she unveils herself to Alonzo and exposes the fact that her death was staged, however, she emerges as a woman capable of choosing her own associates (most importantly, her own marriage partner), and she returns to the Bloomfield estate to unite herself with Alonzo and to choose reentry into the circle of her biological family (104-7). Jill K. Anderson, who also takes up the terms of Davidson's critique, discusses *Kelroy* as a novel intent on working

Critics who do write about one or both of these works have not, however, taken into account the deep political divide that separated Mitchell and Rush, a divide that certainly gives each author's treatment of similar issues such as trade, national identity, and the status of women different tenors.[6] What has also been all but absent is an examination of what *Alonzo* and *Kelroy* say about the roles literature, and the novel in particular, were expected to play in the context of a world increasingly marked by inconsistencies in the theory and practice of harmonious republicanism.[7] Such inconsistencies only seemed to grow more obvious with the increased polarization of political life, as Federalist and Democratic-Republican debates became more rancorous with each coming year. Interrogation of the definition and uses of the literary in *Alonzo and Melissa* and *Kelory* has been notably absent. Yet, it can be no coincidence that the heroes and heroines of each novel are presented as singular for either their literary sensibility (they are good, tasteful readers), their poetic ability (Kelroy is himself, for example, a poet), or

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toward a definition of femininity that would uphold the republican ideal of egalitarianism. Both Mrs. Hammond (who is too tied to European social morés) and Emily (who Anderson reads as too meek and submissive) provide only insufficient models of feminine agency, whereas Helen Cathcart, who emerges, for Anderson, as *Kelroy*'s true hero, can claim equal footing with the novel's men, participating in their conversation, but never submitting herself to unwanted romantic overtures.

[6] Davidson's account of *Kelroy*, in particular, seems not to give much credence to the fact that Rush was a Federalist and, therefore, was probably not entirely opposed to the notion that class was a necessity. I read *Kelroy* as more of an attempt to reform the idea of class in the United States. Rush critiques Philadelphia's high society not for assuming class privilege, but for trying too fervently to appropriate the manners of a European upper class. I will also suggest, however, that Rush does certainly acknowledge the tension between the classism of her fellow Federalists and rhetoric of egalitarianism. While she does not aim to obliterate class structures, she perhaps aims to make them more accessible by using the form of the novel as a way of educating her readers into the appropriate mindset of the Federalist elite (thus, paradoxically, making it possible for *anyone* to participate in the goings on of elite circles).

[7] Hamelman's short consideration of Kelroy's poetic talents are an exception to this general critical oversight. He discusses Kelroy's poetry in the context of the novel's focus on the persistence and power of verbal falsehoods, viewing poetic expression as inherently tragic in a world of "Mrs. Hammonds, Lucy Walsinghams, and Marneys" where "poetry is no match for well-executed forgery" (101). While Hamelman views Kelroy's poetic prowess as ancillary to the novel's larger critique of linguistic manipulation, I read it as far more central to the novel's critique of early nineteenth-century feminism. Rush characterizes Kelroy as a poet not only to highlight his artistic, and therefore, as Hammelman assumes, innocent relationship to language, but also to put forth the literary as that which could salvage Federalist principles from decay.

both. Mitchell and Rush were each, as I will discuss, astute writers, familiar with literary trends and desirous of encouraging literary sensibilities in their readers by demonstrating the worth and necessity of taste.

What we should note, too, in even these preliminary details about Mitchell's and Rush's characters is that each author has taken up, once again, the terms of neoclassical literary theory that Charles Brockden Brown, in his early career as a novelist, so thoroughly problematized and, in *Wieland*, rejected. Each of these authors owes at least an indirect, if not a direct debt to Charles Brockden Brown, as each has benefited from the example he set in bringing the gothic to American soil and using the novel to communicate the real as well as the ideal.[8] But beauty, truth, taste, fine feeling, and a certain degree of descriptive ornament all return in these novels: Rollin and Blair still survive, though the realist Godwin (via Brown) has made his appearance. Mitchell and Rush took up the traditional discourse of the literary, I argue, because this discourse could be easily appropriated to the ends of both parties' arguments: novelists from each of the United States' major parties could look to the literary as a naturalized authority capable of legitimating their own political stance, and each side looked to the literary as a discourse that, if taken to heart, could preserve a truly "American" way of life in face of both internal, domestic strife and external, international tensions. What is most important to ask is not whether the literary became more Federalist or Democratic-Republican by 1812, but rather to examine this

[8] Mitchell most certainly read Charles Brockden Brown's works and refers to him directly, as I will discuss, in an afterward to a story he serialized in the *Political Barometer* in 1802. Rush's access to Brown is harder to ascertain because of the lack of biographical information available about her, but *Kelroy* has been compared to the work of Charles Brockden Brown since Arthur Hobson Quinn, in *American Fiction, An Historical and Critical Survey* (1936) cited it as a shining example of a novel modeled on Brown's precepts: "*Kelroy* (1812) . . . stands out even more definitely from its contemporaries . . . the character of Mrs. Hammond, the mother who deliberately spends her capital in two years in order to marry her daughters advantageously, then wrecks Emily's happiness because of her hatred for her intended son-in-law, Kelroy, is a real person" (39).

concept's resilience. Throughout a period of incredible division and early partisan hostility, as Americans began to realize that their house was, in fact, not only assailed from without, but also very likely crumbling from within, the literary offered a discourse in which consensus and egalitarianism could still be imagined.

I. The First Party System

In a formulation certainly not uncharacteristic of studies of the early nineteenth century in America, Gordon S. Wood has called the War of 1812 "the strangest war in American history" (*Empire* 659). It was, Wood writes, "a war in its own right but also a war within a war, part of a larger war between Britain and France that had been going on since France's National Convention declared war on Britain in February 1793" (*Empire* 659). In many senses a global phenomenon, this war did involve a dense, complicated network of international relations and caused the still-new United States to grapple with an array of domestic and foreign affairs, even as it struggled to forge its own national identity. What this "strange" war eventually accomplished, however, was the end of a decades-long battle between the United States' first two longstanding political parties, the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans.

America's First Party System had its roots in the debate between Federalists, who favored a strong central government, and Anti-Federalists, who advocated for states' rights when Congress debated the tenets of the newly-authored Constitution in 1787. In the late 1780s and early 1790s, these initial Federalist and Anti-Federalist camps underwent some reorganization (James Madison, for example, known as the "father of the Constitution," originally sided with the Federalists, but came to oppose principles later touted by the Federalist party), but solidified into two well-defined parties by the mid 1790s. On one side were the Federalists, led by

Alexander Hamilton, and, on the other, were the Democratic-Republicans, chiefly headed by Thomas Jefferson and Madison. The two parties were deeply divided in their beliefs about how a modern republic should be run. Hamilton and his supporters advocated a traditional, British-style approach to republicanism in which qualified citizens elected government officials and representatives, and then let those officials, who were well-informed and well-educated about the state's affairs, make decisions without consulting everyday citizens themselves, who did not have an intimate knowledge of statecraft. Democratic-Republicans, on the other hand, urged a more hands-on, participatory approach. Citizens at large should be informed, should have the right to express opinions about events and issues as they arose, and should expect that their elected representatives would take public opinion into account.

External forces caused the rifts generated by internal differences to grow: the war between France and Britain forced the hands of both Federalists and Democratic-Republicans at one time or another, requiring American lawmakers to decide on policies that would often sacrifice relations with either France or Britain and would, invariably, anger members on the opposite side of the aisle in Congress at home. It was not until the War of 1812 ended "successfully" in 1814 that tensions between Federalists and Democratic-Republicans began to ease. While we cannot here tell the whole story of the complications America faced during the development of the First Party System, to review a few ground-shifting events speaks to the Federalist and Democratic-Republican differences in belief concerning foreign trade, domestic policies on foreign nationals, and domestic social organization that all come to the foreground in *Alonzo and Melissa* and *Kelroy*.

Though earlier contentions between Alexander Hamilton's camp of supporters and Jefferson's backers certainly did exist, it was the Jay Treaty of 1795, signed with Britain, that

caused these camps to solidify into parties. The Jay Treaty, signed under the administration of the Federalist-leaning Washington, for a time, repaired relations with Britain that had been left asunder since the end of the Revolutionary War by reestablishing trading rights with the United States' so-called "mother nation." Congressional Federalists favored the measure because recreating ties with Britain boded well for American business affairs abroad. While France was in the midst of its own Revolution, Britain was governed by a stable monarchy and an established government with well-developed trade interests in many corners of the world. Jefferson and his Democratic-Republicans, however, objected to forging ties with Britain once again on ideological grounds. Jefferson did not want close connections with monarchical or Parliamentary rule which would tie the fate of American citizens to these potentially repressive forms of government. Additionally, Democratic-Republicans, in keeping with public opinion, as Richard Buel has demonstrated, initially identified with the French, who had provided aid to the United States that was instrumental in their own bid for independence and were, ostensibly, now fighting for their own right to political voice against an entrenched monarchy. When Americans looked to the French, Buel writes, "in general they liked what they saw, because it seemed in many ways to follow the American example" (Buel 36).

Unrest over the conflict between England and France also led to the event that many historians see as that which sealed the doom of the Federalist Party's political control. In 1798, still under the Federalist Adams administration, the Alien and Sedition Acts were signed into law. The Federalist government wanted to keep out, or be able to keep an eye on, foreign nationals because of the growing perception that war with France was imminent. Americans had refused to pay back debts to France carried over from the Revolutionary war on the grounds that the debt was owed to the French monarchy, not to the current French administration, after which French

ships started seizing American ships trading with England. Statesmen in the United States government feared infiltration by French spies, and so instituted a series of acts, including the Alien Friends Act, which allowed the president to sign deportation orders without a trial as a protective measure (Wood, *Empire* 249). Democratic-Republicans, while they did not favor a complete open-door policy for new immigrants to the United States, had consistently resisted measures, like the Alien Acts, which denied immigrants trials. Such measures placed too much power in the hands of a central authority (a familiar refrain among Republican camps), and, furthermore, as Marilyn C. Baseler has discussed, legislation that restricted the civil rights of foreign nationals was regarded as evidence of derogation of what Democratic-Republicans saw to be America's duty to serve, in the words of Thomas Paine, as an "asylum for all mankind" (Baseler 7). The Republican press, the primary targets of the Sedition Acts, while nonetheless under attack as a result of Federalist legislation, managed to mobilize public opinion against Federalist measures that hoped to restrict the civil liberties of both foreign nationals and native-born Americans suspected of speaking against government policies. Jefferson took up the Alien and Sedition acts as a primary cause in the presidential election of 1800—and won.

Jefferson took many steps while in office to correct what he perceived to be the wrongs of the American trade system. Trade was, in fact, booming in some areas of the United States, particularly in New England, and the Anglo-French war was, in effect, making some Americans, largely Federalist owners of trade fleets, very wealthy. In general, Jefferson fought hard for trade neutrality, a policy that would, he believed, prevent the United States from becoming embroiled in the affairs of foreign governments that did not share his nation's commitment to republican ideals. Neutrality would safeguard the liberty of Americans by making their livelihoods less subject to unpredictable foreign governments. American trade at the beginning of Jefferson's

time in office was not precisely neutral—rather, many American businessmen earned their profits by facilitating trade between centers of agricultural production (such as the East and West Indies) and France, England, or both. While goods did arrive on American shores that were intended for domestic sale, more lucrative trading opportunities were available to merchants who would re-export goods obtained from international markets to different international markets. Ships would stop in American ports, pay duties on their cargo, and continue on to Europe. Because the goods they carried were not technically arriving from restricted or hostile areas (many agricultural centers were the province of either Britain or France), they were not technically bound by British or French embargoes. Republicans thought this practice was immoral (and, of course, it contributed greatly to Federalist coffers) and promoted self-sustaining agrarianism that relied on trade only as necessary to distribute the bounty of American farms over mercantile enterprises as the only system that would allow the United States to prosper, both economically and morally, without worrying about the corruption of foreign influences that frequent trade would encourage. In Jefferson's words, "a steady application to agriculture with just trade enough to take off its superfluities is our wisest course." Americans, instead, were involved in "the ocean of speculation," which prompted the country to "overtrade ourselves," "become robbers under French colors," and "to quit the pursuit of Agriculture the surest road to affluence and the best preservative of morals" (qtd. In Wood, *Empire* 625).

Neither Britain nor France were pleased with the success of the American re-export model, and each nation took steps to detain, confiscate, and, in some instances, sanction military action on foreign ships on the Atlantic that heralded from opposing nations and, eventually, the United States. The British practice of impressing American sailors, in particular, caused friction. When, in 1807, the British HMS *Leopard* fired on the American ship *Chesepeake*, killing three,

and impressing four men, Jefferson and the Republican camp decided to take action. Confident that Britain needed American trade more than Americans needed their trade with Britain, and hoping to avoid an all-out war, Jefferson signed an Embargo Act that halted all American ships departing for Britain (Wood 651). The American economy took a nosedive, and war with Britain was deferred, but not averted.

If Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* can be read as an anxious meditation on the many ways in which the ideologies of the American Revolution could fail in practice and a lament that men's constitutions may render them unable to accept and realize the full promise of democracy to create an entirely unified state, *Alonzo and Melissa* and *Kelroy* are windows into a world in which division has been accepted as the norm and in which factional politicking had solidified into well-defined party constituencies. The historical moment in which both *Alonzo* and *Kelroy* were published was a volatile one in which Americans were divided over many questions. How were the ideals of the Revolution, in Richard Buel's words, best "secured"? Was it an agrarian, land-based economy, or a mercantile, trade-centered system that best reflected republican ideals and contributed to the economic health of the nation? Could trade be made, in a word, "safe": could it make foreign markets available, without making them too influential in the American financial system? What types of relationships with foreign nations were acceptable, and, most importantly, how could America stay "American" in the face of so much debate over what this term should mean? *Alonzo and Melissa* and *Kelroy* each look for answers to these questions by peering through the prism of literary discourse's rich and varied language.

II. Alonzo, Melissa, and "a source of ever and pleasing variety"

"Independence" and the Farm

Because Isaac Mitchell's work became most popular under the name of Daniel Jackson, who pirated *Alonzo and Melissa* in 1812, Mitchell is not as well-known as he perhaps deserves to be. Like his contemporary Charles Brockden Brown, Mitchell most probably considered himself a newspaperman for the better part of his career, but, unlike Brown, whose political affiliations seem to have changed over time, Mitchell was unwaveringly dedicated to the cause of Jeffersonian Republicanism for the entirety of his involvement in American periodicals. Born in 1759 near Albany, Mitchell lived and worked in New York, publishing, for the most part, in Poughkeepsie, an important political center that had been the capital city of New York (and so had hosted the state convention in which Alexander Hamilton and John Jay voted for the ratification of the Constitution) until the capital was relocated to Albany in 1797. From 1798 until he died in 1812, Mitchell worked as a writer, editor, and publisher for a number of periodicals, most notably the *Political Barometer*, in which *Alonzo and Melissa* was first serialized in 1804.[9] While, as Cahill has described, many periodicals in the North were under the control of Federalist editors and publishers, Mitchell is an example of the tenacity of the Democratic-Republican interests that, nonetheless, did have a presence in the area. Writing in 1802 in conjunction with Jesse Buel, with whom he held a joint interest in the *Political Barometer*, to Jefferson himself, Mitchell emphasized the difficulty of maintaining a Republican newspaper in the midst of a region that was a Federalist stronghold and solicited Jefferson's support (and subscription):

> Sir,
> Among the many tributes of respect you receive from the citizens of the United States, a country News-paper will, perhaps, be of but little consequence. We have,

[9] While much of what is known about Mitchell's biography can be found in Davidson (322-3), brief listings for Mitchell also appear in the *Dictionary of American Biography* of 1934, edited by Dumas Malone, and in the 1938 version of *American Authors 1600-1900: A Biographical Dictionary of American Literature*, edited by Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft.

> however, herewith, presented Your Ecxellency with the first No. of the *Political Barometer*, the succeeding Numbers of which we shall continue to send on, unless you should signify your wish to have them discontinued.
> There are inauspicious circumstances which at present attend the establishment of a Republican paper in this part of the country. Some previous attempts have failed; but under the influence of the present general administration, we look, not only, for a more firm adherence among those of our own side, but also, for a renovation of principles, in some measure, as it respects the opposition.
>
> We are, Sir, Your Excellency's most Obdt. Servt.
> MITCHELL & BUEL[10]

Mitchell believed in his cause, and he was out for converts, as his desire for "a renovation of principles . . . as it respects the opposition" makes clear. While it is not clear whether the *Barometer* did manage to win Federalists over to the Democratic-Republican side, the two editors did gain at least one new admirer: Jefferson, two weeks after Mitchell and Buel sent their letter, became a paying subscriber.[11]

As committed as Mitchell was to perpetuating a Jeffersonian worldview as a newspaperman, there was another, related issue that certainly engaged much of his interest—the state of American literature and, more particularly, the status of the novel as an appropriate genre for American literature. While Thomas Jefferson might have been Mitchell's guiding star, other figures shown brightly for him, too—especially Charles Brockden Brown. That Mitchell was influenced and impressed by Brown is made clear by a concluding comment made at the close of one of his short stories, *Albert and Eliza*, which was serialized in the *Political Barometer* from June to July of 1802:

> It will readily be perceived that the foregoing narrative is designed only as a delineation, or hasty sketch of that which, if in the hands of some person of

[10] See "To Thomas Jefferson from Mitchell & Buel, 10 June 1802."

[11] Jefferson replied: "I become with pleasure a subscriber to your paper, the Political barometer. You will oblige me by information of the most convenient place where I can pay the subscription." See "From Thomas Jefferson to Mitchell & Buel, 22 June 1802."

> leisure and abilities, might be made an interesting history. Should BROWN, the American novelist, or some other person possessing equal powers of taste and invention, take up the subject, he might, by the introduction of a few new characters, transferment of objects, and variation of scenery, form, perhaps, as interesting a novel as any of American manufacture.

By 1811, when Mitchell had, it seems, come to think of himself as just such a "person of leisure and abilities" who could manage to expand one of his shorter works into a full-fledged novel, Brown's influence was still apparent, but Mitchell's philosophy of literature and his thinking on the role it should play in American society diverged from the literary philosophies of his Pennsylvanian counterpart. *Alonzo and Melissa* begins with a prefatory piece, "Comprising a Short Dissertation on the Novel," in which Mitchell addresses a dichotomy in thinking about the literary that Brockden Brown certainly helped to establish. On the one hand, Mitchell, characteristic of novelists of the period, warns against novels that encourage seductive aesthetic experiences. Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise* typifies this class of novels in Mitchell's mind, and in his condemnation of it, we find resonances of earlier anti-novel arguments that cautioned against the genre's ability to divert the reader's attention almost against their will, drawing him, or, more likely, her, away from performing the duties of real life appropriately:

> But of all the novels extant, none has been considered so dangerous to youthful morals and principles than Rousseau's *Nouvelle Heloise* . . . its blandishing, florid, and seductive style irresistibly interests the heart and enlists the passions and affections. Sentimentally voluptuous, and licentiously descriptive, its glowing pages fascinate the intellectual powers, and like the daemon in angel's form, charm, and allure, but to destroy. (xvii)

On the other hand, however, Mitchell critiques novelists who pay too little regard to beauty:

> There is another class of novelists, perhaps equally dangerous. These affect to follow nature, and to draw their characters from the class of real life. Thus, as a contrast to the virtuous and worthy qualifications which their principle personages are made to possess, they must also exhibit their foibles, their frailties, and their vices; and as they never fail to make the former predominate, the reader, as he becomes interested in the story, loses his aversion to the evil actions and propensities, in the splendor and brilliancy of the meritorious exploits and

> achievements, and is finally induced to venerate the hero, though 'black with murder, sacrilege, and crime.' On this point, the writer is of opinion, that real pictures of life and manners, are the province of history; of novel, to portray characters as they probably might be. (xv)

Brown is mentioned by name in Mitchell's "Dissertation on the Novel" as one of the "few novelists of any eminence" who have "appeared in this country," and, in fact, Mitchell proclaims him, "the only one who can lay much claim to originality," but we should read the above critique of the novelists who "affect . . . to draw their characters from the class of real life" as one specifically leveled against the Godwinian doctrine, one to which, as I have discussed in Chapter 3, Brown heavily subscribed, that the novel should depict the real, should expose inequities in social conditions, and should not shrink from speaking truth even when truths were difficult to admit (xix). Mtichell's proposal that "real pictures of life and manners" should be left to "history," while the novel should "portray characters as they probably might be" is a direct response to Godwin's proposal that the novel should, rather, show, as *Caleb Williams*'s subtitle declares, "Things as They Are."

The sentiment behind Mitchell's commitment to showing things "as they probably might be"—at once oppositional and conciliatory, bent on returning literature to the realms of imagination in declaring that the author should be envisioning the world in a certain aspect that it might not presently display and at the same time promising that these visions should be moderated by probability so as not to be too "voluptuous"—appears again and again in Mitchell's descriptions of his own novel. Though Mitchell concedes that critics "may censure him as loading his style with the epithets of poetry," he states that he has labored to "give [the novel] as great a variety of vivid colourings as he conceived it would bear," and concludes emphatically that "embellished with these fanciful decorations, [the] Novel is a garden of rich shrubbery and flowers; without them, it is a cheerless and dreary waste" (xxv). He also notes

that, “in the narrative department, it was intended the language should be of the middle class, neither soaring to that sublimity which dazzles the understanding by its perpetual glitter, nor sinking to dull and trite inelegance,” an approach meant to “contrast to those descriptive parts where a more florid style is admitted” (xxvi). At all costs, even if dialogue had to be rendered in plainer style, or narratives made not so “sublime” or “dazzling,” the literary qualities of literature should be returned to it: novels had, in Mitchell's view, an imperative to be beautiful once again.

Mitchell most certainly considered the aims of Jeffersonian agrarianism and the ability of literature to communicate beauty as allied with and dependent on one another. Agrarian principles advocated structuring the American economy around small, largely self-sustaining farming communities as the surest way to encourage the nation's citizens to conceive of themselves as part of an interconnected society with shared allegiances and to preserve that society's independence from the interference of foreign powers. Hence, the “descriptive parts” of *Alonzo and Melissa* in which “a more florid style is admitted” are often, for example, the same passages that describe the American landscape, the correct use of which the entire Jeffersonian program depended. But the potential Mitchell saw in literary discourse to affirm Republican principles went further than encouraging an aesthetic valuation of land. Mitchell returned to what were obviously the terms of neoclassical literary discourse because of this discourse's ability to envision a land-based economy that could be kept within the bounds of Republican ideology and because of its ability to provide the basis for meaningful connection between citizens who often did not share personal histories or national origins, even as their society championed individual autonomy. In *Alonzo and Melissa*, Mitchell reaffirms the value of beauty and its importance to the development of a national literature and then recodes the land as not just a mainstay of economic stability, but also the United States' richest source of beauty and

literary inspiration. It was only in understanding the American landscape as beautiful that citizens of the United States could properly create their environment as, in short, "an asylum for all mankind."

Alonzo and Melissa has a long and complicated plot and Mitchell's insistence on "variety" is no doubt born out in the wide array of settings and locations his characters visit and in the many twists and turns taken in the novel's story lines. While the initial 1804 version of *Alonzo and Melissa* published in the *Political Barometer* concerned only the love story between the two title characters, when Mitchell expanded the serialized version of his tale, he added nearly an entire volume and a completely new story arc. Volume I of the 1811 version of the novel was thus comprised largely of a narrative about a young woman named Selina Du Ruyter, while Volume II told of the title characters' trials and travails. A short summary will suffice to give a sense of the novel's structure.

First, we are briefly introduced to the Bloomfield family: Colonel Bloomfield is a wealthy landowner and farmer in Connecticut, and his two children, Edgar and Melissa, are affectionate siblings. Melissa is courted by Bowman, a fashionable man from a good family who Melissa likes well enough but does not love. While the couple are out for a carriage ride in the countryside one day, Bowman loses control of his horses, is thrown from the carriage, and Melissa is saved from toppling over the edge of a cliff along with the carriage by a stranger—a stranger, of course, who, we find out later, is Edgar Bloomfield's very good friend from Yale College, Alonzo Haventon. Melissa and Alonzo do not meet again for some weeks, and in the interim between their earliest meeting and their reunification, Melissa goes with her aunt, a staunch old maid named Miss Bloomfield who also owns and manages a substantial amount of land, on a short trip, during which she meets the Bergher family, who are some of her aunt's

tenants.

While on the Berghers' farm, Melissa becomes intimate with the family, and shortly before her departure, Mrs. Bergher, whose maiden name was Selina Du Ruyter, gives her a manuscript detailing her personal history. Selina grew up in Germany, the daughter of an aristocrat who wished her to marry a wealthy Count. Before she could be forced into the marriage, she ran away with Captain Bergher, the man she loved. The two moved from one European city to another, seeking refuge from Selina's father only to be found out within a matter of months in each new location in which they settled. Eventually, Selina and Captain Bergher move to America, establish a farm, and raise a happy family. Closing Mrs. Bergher's manuscript, Melissa reflects on both "to what misfortunes an opposition to parental authority must lead" and "also the dreadful effects of parental tyranny" (1: 206).

Of course, Melissa later finds herself in the position of loving a man who does not receive her father's sanction. Melissa and Alonzo reunite after her accident when the latter makes a visit to Edgar on the Bloomfield farm. Initially, Colonel Bloomfield approves of Melissa's choice, though he would have preferred Bowman as a son-in-law, but then retracts his consent when Alonzo's father meets with financial ruin at the hands of dishonest trading partners. As it becomes increasingly clear that Colonel Bloomfield and his sister, Miss Bloomfield, may force Melissa into a marriage with Bowman, Melissa and Alonzo plan to elope. Before they can do so, however, Melissa's Aunt takes her from the Bloomfield farm, travels to a castle built by one of the first Bloomfields to set foot in America, and shuts her up there. Melissa encounters a number of gothic terrors and is eventually moved again to South Carolina when the Bloomfields find that Alonzo has discovered her whereabouts. In South Carolina, Melissa fakes her own death with the help of a few benevolent family members. Alonzo, who never receives a letter

from Melissa explaining that she is still alive, joins the United States navy and is taken prisoner when a British ship accosts his own at sea, but he eventually escapes prison in England and makes his way to France. In France, Alonzo meets with Ben Franklin, who manages to restore his father's fortune, and Alonzo makes his way back to the United States. He and Melissa reunite, Melissa's father, overjoyed that she is not, in fact, dead, blesses their union, and the young couple moves to an estate they had selected for themselves in their early happy days—an estate they christen their "asylum" (2: 278).

As even this short summary suggests, the story of Alonzo and Melissa's romance is played out on a stage that is itself constantly shifting as a result of evolving relationships between nations and cultures and because of the instability of global financial markets. Such social and economic volatility created difficulties in establishing core social relationships that could be counted on to unite American citizens under the mantle of national interest. In many ways, the novel points a finger at the Federlist-controlled mercantile system that encouraged trade, even with nations whose interests ran counter to those of the United States, as the source of the disruptions that separate the two young lovers. Though Mitchell ostensibly sets his novel a few decades before its first publication and means Mr. Haventon's financial ruin to be taken as a result of the onset of the Revolutionary War, the description of the trading ventures in which the elder Haventon participates reflects difficulties encountered in the early nineteenth century as well. Haventon relates the history of his difficulties as follows:

> For more than forty years I have toiled early and late to acquire independence and ease for myself and my family: to accomplish this I became connected with some English importing merchants and went largely into the British trade: success crowned our endeavors: on balancing our accounts two years ago we found our expectations fully answered, and that we were sufficiently wealthy to close business, which some proposed to do; it was however agreed to make one effort more, as certain favourable circumstances appeared to offer, in this we adventured very largely on a fair calculation of liberal and extensive profits; before returns

> could be made the war came on; embarrassments ensued, and by indubitable intelligence lately received we find that our property in England has been sequestered; five of our ships laden with British goods, lying in English harbours and just ready to sail for America, have been seized as lawful prizes: added to this, three vessels from the Indies freighted with island produce, have been taken on their homeward bound passage, and one lost returning from Holland. This wreck of fortune I might have survived, had I only to suspend my equal dividend of loss; but of the merchants with whom I have been concerned, not one remains to share the fate of the event; all have absconded or secreted themselves. To attempt to compound with my creditors would be of little avail; my whole fortune will not pay one fourth of the debts, so that compound or not the consequence to me is inevitable ruin. (2: 13-14)

Mitchell presents Haventon as a well-intentioned, hardworking American, a man who has "toiled early and late," but whose bids for "independence and ease" are consistently foiled by Federalist trading practices. First, the outcomes of foreign trade in a volatile global market seem inherently unpredictable: goods that have been bought and paid for can become subject to the laws of other nations, as happens with the five of Haventon's ships that are "seized as lawful prizes" by the English government and the "three vessels from the Indies freighted with island produce" that are taken on their return trip from the West Indies. While it was, for the most part, Federalists who advocated for continued trade with Britain even as political waters between France and Britain became increasingly tumultuous, thus making ships headed to either country more vulnerable to seizure, it was also a concern among Jeffersonians that Federalist traders were not interested merely in relative "independence and ease," but, more often, in becoming wealthy by taking risks in unpredictable waters (Wood, *Empire* 625). These risks in the service of amassing large financial surpluses are reflected in Haventon's admission that, while the "expectations" of his trading partnership were "fully answered," the group still attempted trade in pursuit of "liberal and extensive profits." In the end, the propagation of surplus wealth turns out not to be a sufficient basis for an ethical, unified community. With nothing other than financial hardship to share as a result of their partnership, Haventon's associates disperse, leaving him shackled with

all of their debt. A trade-based system was no system for a nation that sought its own "independence and ease," and it was not a system that would encourage citizens to develop strong ties to one another so that the political, social, and economic ill-effects of corrosive individualism could be avoided. Shared financial interests simply did not equate to shared personal or national interest.

The Bergher family's initial experience of American life is even more treacherous than the Haventon family's in the wake of their financial ruin. As Davidson has discussed, in adding the Bergher narrative to his tale when he expanded it into a novel, Mitchell added a backdrop against which both his praises and criticisms of American social norms could be illuminated all the more clearly. On the one hand, the Bergher's sentimental tale, contrasted with Melissa's Gothic narrative, exposes the increased agency afforded to American women. While Selina Du Ruyter, the archetypal European damsel in distress, "acts mostly through a well-timed series of swoons," Melissa "shows a dash and a verve that carry her successfully through a remarkable sequence of adventures" (*Revolution* 323). On the other hand, Davidson notes, Mitchell uses the juxtaposition of the Du Ruyter-Bergher story and that of Alonzo and Melissa to call attention to unsettling parallels between European and American life (*Revolution* 323). While Americans prided themselves on living in a "classless" society, and affected to afford even women an increased degree of liberty in their own choices, in reality, the United States still had its Colonel Bloomfields—men who perpetuated European-style class-based economies and who expected to use women in a network of social exchange that would maintain land holdings and capital .

The Bergher family's narrative, however, explores the failures of Federalist, as well as European principles. In addition to acting as the European foils for Alonzo and Melissa, the novel's American lovers, the Berghers also tell the tale of the emigré, the story of the foreigner

coming to the United States in search of liberty, safety, and community. Selina and Herman Bergher touch upon American ground hoping to escape the tyranny of aristocrats who have chased them across Europe as a result of Selina's refusal to marry according to her father's wishes, but the "asylum" they seek is hard won because they first attempt to achieve their own "independence and ease" through mercantile means. Hoping to increase the small portion of their savings they have left, the Berghers, upon arriving in Boston, "[hire] a small house and shop in one of the streets recommended for the purpose, and [commence] the business of purchasing and retailing goods" (1: 171-2). They soon find, however, that trade is not an egalitarian financial system that extends opportunities for advancement and prosperity, regardless of a participant's origins: "totally unacquainted with trade and the habits of people," Selina writes, "we obtained little custom" (1: 172). Trade, it seems, requires prior connections, social clout, and a very specific skill-based education, as well as a thorough knowledge of native cultural standards and behaviors—none of which the Berghers, as recent arrivals, possess. Living under the constraints of their poverty, both Selina and Herman contract terrible illnesses. Their savings are spent on doctors' bills and medical care, and they end up penniless after their first few months in Boston.

If the shop, however, is a successful space only for those who could start out with a number of advantages, an untilled plot of American land is the space of true meritocracy, one in which anyone could prosper, provided they were willing to invest time and energy (resources readily available to anyone, native or not). The Berghers escape their early hardships by turning to farming, becoming, as it were, the poster children for the Jeffersonian agrarianism that Mitchell so admired. In their travels away from Boston, Herman and Selina meet with a man who has recently purchased his own "tract of wild, but excellent land," and he encourages them

to enter into agrarian pursuits as well:

> perhaps you are new settlers: If so, and you have not already made a purchase, I know of no better part of the country than that to which I am bound. Wild lands may there be bought for half a dollar an acre, and a long credit obtained for most part of the purchase money. All you have to do is to clear a few acres, build a log hut, get in a crop of wheat, and if you can subsist the first year you soon begin to thrive and with prudence cannot fail in time to become rich. Every surplus bushel of wheat will purchase an acre of land or its equivalent, by this means you increase or stock your farm . . . the new country is the poor man's Canaan . . . He there finds not only a plentiful supply for himself, but independence and affluence for his children. (1: 176-7)

Mitchell could hardly put a finer point on his argument that here, on the American farm, lay the real model for both personal and national "independence." Financial gain depends purely on the amount of effort exerted by the farmer himself, and, in the context of this system, profits are not used, as they are in the Federalist market system, solely to cultivate more monetary wealth, but also to consistently improve land itself and increase usable goods. Growth occurs not in the abstract notion of the bank account, but in visible terms of the full larder and well-stocked barn. The Berghers, apparently receiving all of the education in land husbandry needed for their venture from this passing acquaintance, though they experience a few years in which "economy" is their foremost concern, become adept at both receiving bounty from and re-investing resources in the land.

The surpluses that this agrarian economic system enables, furthermore, lead to a more ethical system of trade, one that is primarily domestic, though Selina does mention one or two goods that can be shipped abroad. Her description of the cultivation of the sugar maple is especially relevant. The sugar maples on the Bergher's land "[yield] . . . not only the delicacies of the Indies, but [are] also a source of real profit, as scarcely a year passed but, from its sap, we [manufacture] a considerable surplus quantity of sugar, which always [finds] a ready market at the adjacent towns" (1: 180). Small and compact, this trading system stands apart deliberately

from the Federalist engagement of trade with the "Indies" and apart from the dangerous re-export business with which trade in this region was associated. Americans, in Mitchell's view, did not need to grow rich importing commodities from European colonies and then immediately exporting a large share of these imports back to Europe. They could grow rich, and supply the needs of other citizens, right at home. When European trade is sanctioned in *Alonzo and Melissa*, furthermore, it is the result of the over-fecundity of American land, not, tellingly, of American need, and trade, in any case, must be kept within a limited scope. When Americans first clear their farms in order to plant and raise livestock, Selina relates, the very act of preparing the land to be prosperous generates more material than can be readily used, and so, in order that it not be wasted, it is sold off: "no small source of profit consists of what farmers in this country call *lumber*, such as staves, shingles, boards, &c. which are purchased by shippers at the seaports, from whence they are exported to the different countries of Europe, and to the Indies" (1: 183-4).

To complete the picture of realized Jeffersonian ideals, Mitchell also emphasizes how easily the Berghers develop harmonious relationships within their small community, even though they begin their time in America without financial resources, familial connections, or claims to any property. The neighbors they find upon purchasing their first plots of land "generously lent their aid" in the arduous process of clearing their fields of trees, and they find numerous opportunities for trade, as the example of the ease they meet with in disposing of their excess sugar maple produce suggests, in the surrounding villages (1: 179). The community they become a part of is so inclusive, moreover, that it extends to the native Americans who trek across the lands in their village on a yearly basis: "Once in each winter we generally experienced the novel sight of Indians, from the different tribes in the west, passing through our settlement,

with furs and peltry, to the seaport towns, for the purposes of trade: And sometimes strolling parties of them would take their residence and erect wigwams in our neighborhood, till they could manufacture a number of splint brooms and baskets, which they exchanged with the inhabitants for provision" (1: 181-2). The oceans may have been beset by uncontrollable storms, and the cities by poverty and illness, but the removed farm was an environment filled with friendly neighbors and amicable natives in which true fellowship was sure to be found.

Alonzo's family is also redeemed through agrarianism after Mr. Haventon's financial ruin. With the little he has left after his trading partnership collapses, Haventon purchases "a small but well cultivated farm with convenient buildings," which comes, in time, to provide him and his family, once again, with the comforts they lost as a result of the seizure of his ships (2: 29). But achieving the American dream of "independence," *Alonzo* suggests, is not just, in a word, about buying the farm, but also about preserving republican ideology. While Federalist trading practices loom large over the lives of characters in Mitchell's novel, threatening to deprive families of financial stability and, as a result, of social mobility, more troubling still is the question of how to safeguard a Democratic-Republican worldview from corruption in the midst of a society that still, at times, gazes admiringly back over an ocean, looking to Europe to define its social and cultural standards. The Jeffersonian vision of a stable economy, rooted in the cultivation of arable land, the profits of which ensured prosperity both for the present and for future generations, stood, after all, at only a hair's breadth remove in many ways from European economies based on the ownership and inheritance of land by a small number of aristocratic families—systems that left little room for those not born as landholders to succeed.

Colonel Bloomfield offers just such an example of the potential problem of slippage between the theory and the practice of republican agrarianism. Under the guise of a "plain

Connecticut farmer," he replicates a system of land use that is more exploitative even, perhaps, than the estate system that governed England at the time, since English lords were, after all, expected to extend paternal care to their tenants. Bloomfield inherited class pretension as well as land, and he is introduced as "a gentleman of English extraction, whose ancestors were among the earliest settlers of this country," and who, "prided himself" on being the "descendant of an ancient and once noble family" (1: 29, 30). Unlike the Berghers, whose wealth is derived from consistent husbandry of the land, Bloomfield's fortune is derived from using land as the basis for financial transactions that take advantage of his neighbors who are in dire economic straits. Instead of expanding his own farms by selling off their produce (as the Berghers initially do with their wheat) and purchasing extra acreage with the profits, the Bloomfield estate steadily increases as a result of the Colonel's prowess in managing loans and securities: "For money loaned, he took mortgages on lands and tenements, in security, and as there frequently occurred failures in the payment, he often had opportunities of purchasing the involved premises at his own price" (1: 31). He likewise amasses money by shortchanging the men from the surrounding country who work the land, offering only "reduced wages" to "the labourer and mechanic," who, "sure of present pay" will accept less remuneration because, as Bloomfield's mechanations have made him the only farmer in the region who can offer a ready wage, they have no better alternatives (1: 31). Bloomfield's philosophy on farming, then, results from the combination of an assumed English-style aristocratic privilege and the rampant, individualist entrepreneurialism that Democratic-Republicans feared from their Federalist contemporaries because they saw it operate too freely. Unconstrained by the rules of ethics and morality, one man's bid for financial gain could subvert and subject the lives of entire communities. The Colonel's own assessment of the wide economic gap between himself and poor families who did not own land, however,

shows how easily the indignities created by what were, in Mitchell's view, so easily identified as classist ideologies could be glossed over with the rhetoric of republicanism: "While he [Bloomfield] looked upon the poorer class as an inferior kind of beings in society, he esteemed the rich as an order of nobility. 'By prudence and perseverance,' he would say, 'any man in this country may become independent. It is the idle and the dissipated, only, who are poor'" (1: 30).

The relationships held together by the aristocratic superstructure Bloomfield has managed to construct in his neighborhood of Connecticut, furthermore, are devoid of the affection and concord that characterize the tightly-knit and well-functioning Bergher neighborhood. Colonel Bloomfield's most personal ties, aside from those with his children, for whom he maintains tender attachments provided they obey his directives, are not of the type that suggest love or loyalty. He chooses his wife, when he comes to need one, "as he would a farm," an already chilling description of spousal attraction to which Mitchell adds that Bloomfield made his selection "not so much for beauty as convenience" (1: 32). Mitchell's description of Bloomfield's affiliations with other members of his neighborhood are no more promising of a harmonious future than is his description of the relationships that hold together the man's own family: "shrouded in a repulsive, but self-created dignity, [Bloomfield] commanded, among his acquaintance, a sort of invidious respect. The poor of his neighborhood knew no more why they feared, than why they could not love him; still none hated him. The number of his enemies were few; of his friends, still less" (1: 32).

What could ensure that the spirit, as well as the letter, of the laws of Jeffersonian agrarianism was maintained? That land was not perceived merely as a sterile vehicle for financial gain, its bounty just fuel for elitism and the perpetuation of European or otherwise anti-republican ideals? What could make certain that farming communities could evolve into places

in which any man could prosper and achieve "independence," without sacrificing the beneficent social connections that provoked his concern for the well-being of others as well as for his own success? This is where differences between the elder and the younger generations of Bloomfields become particularly relevant. A one-line descriptor in the lengthy, detailed account rendered of Colonel Bloomfield's financial transactions is the first signal of the disparity between the Colonel and Melissa, Edgar, and Alonzo: "[Colonel Bloomfield] knew little of literature beyond the name, having received nothing more than a common-school education; but to balance this, he was deeply skilled in the worth of a dollar" (1: 30). Colonel Bloomfield's focus on financial gain is the antithesis not only of a benevolent system of farming in which communities constantly regenerate the land, but also of the literary. True agrarianism of the type that focuses on the cultivation of land rather than the accrual of monetary wealth and literary sensibilities are, in *Alonzo and Melissa*, inextricably linked.

Land and Literature

The Bloomfield children and Alonzo are cast as eminently literary young people: they are characterized by their good taste, their sensitivity to beauty, even their poetic prowess, and descriptions of these characters often break from prose into quoted verses, demonstrating their subject's affinity for and affiliation with literary expression. Returning to Bloomfield farm after he first entered its environs as the mysterious brave stranger who rescued Melissa from Bowman's carriage, Alonzo is presented as a young man whose capability is best defined in aesthetic terms: "His genius was far superior to the ordinary class, which had been cultivated and expanded by the refinements of an excellent education" (1: 210). Mitchell also sets off his description of Alonzo with a few verses from Timothy Dwight's *Conquest of Canaan*:

> Yet far beyond the pride and pomp of power,
> He lov'd the realms of nature to explore;
> With lingering gaze Edenian spring survey'd;
> Morn's fairy splendor; night's gay curtain'd shade;
> The high hoar cliff; the grove's benighting gloom;
> The wild-rose widow'd o'er the mouldering tomb;
> The heaven-embosom'd sun; the rainbow's die,
> Where lucid forms disport to fancy's eye"
> The vernal flowers; mild autumn's purpling glow;
> The summer's thunder and the winter's snow. (1: 210) [12]

In Dwight's epic, the lines describe the warrior prince Japhia, who, though leading an army that opposes Joshua's Israelites (whom Dwight casts as the rightful victors in the battles for Canaan that he depicts), is reverenced for his poetic spirit. The lines of Dwight's that Mitchell excerpts are, in *Conquest of Canaan*, preceded by a description of the prince's ability to write and sing his own lyrical verses: "He bade soft songs awake the trembling lyre," Dwight's elegiac lines read, "With notes of magic, and with words of fire; / Such songs, as Moses, uninspir'd, might sing; / Like him, a bard, a hero, and a king" (Book XI. 681-4). Though skilled and brave in battle, Dwight's Japhia only takes up arms when necessary; his virtue is, otherwise, expressed by his literary sensibilities. Alonzo, heralded, in Mitchell's novel, by Dwight's verses on Japhia, also appears as one whose strength and honor are bound up in his sense of beauty.

Melissa, of course, is much like her lover in this respect. Taste is listed as her foremost quality: "Melissa, now seventeen years of age, whose taste had been properly directed by a suitable education, possessed a mind adorned with those delicate graces which are the first ornaments of female excellence" (1:37). It is, however, the lines of poetry that accompany her description that best signal the differences between the vision of the American countryside that

[12] Mitchell does not provide a citation for this quote, but its first eight lines are from *The Conquest of Canaan*, Book XI, lines 685-92. The final two lines appear to be of Mitchell's own composition.

will rise with her, and the aristocratic vision that characterized her father's generation. Mitchell takes great pains to acquaint the reader with a host of qualities that indicate how well-balanced Melissa's character is. Her "pensive mildness" is, for instance, tempered by her "sprightliness and vivacity" (1:38). The prose of Mitchell's introduction to his heroine is also, however, offset with a short poetic quotation noting Melissa's serenity, but also her ability to, "Call round her laughing eyes in playful turns / The glance that lightens and the smile that burns" (1: 38). Though Mitchell, in his preface, promised that all literary works quoted in the course of his novel would indeed be "American productions," the poem from which these lines are taken, entitled *The Temple of Nature*, is British. These lines were penned, however, by an author who shared a lifelong friendship with Benjamin Franklin and fully supported both the American and French revolutions: Erasmus Darwin.[13] This Darwin had a long and varied career: he was a naturalist (this career choice seemed to run in the family—he is also the grandfather of Charles Darwin) and a poet, and he was, politically, extremely progressive. He argued in favor of providing women with education in the sciences and against slavery and the practice of slave trade. Telling in respect to his appearance as one of Mitchell's muses, Darwin also wrote in opposition to enclosure laws that would reduce peasant farmers' access to common lands and place control of those lands in the hands of aristocratic landowners.[14] *The Temple of Nature* described Erasmus Darwin's theory of human evolution across a series of four cantos (fifty years before Charles

[13] Mitchell does not cite the quote he uses from Darwin's *Temple of Nature*, but the excerpted material can be found in Canto 1, lines 99-100. For more on Darwin's friendship with Franklin, see King-Hele 38.

[14] Darwin addresses the topic of enclosure most fully in his long poetic work *Phytologia* (1800), where he warns of the dangers of enclosing farmland for the purpose of raising cattle, which were more profitable than crops. Such enclosures, although more profitable for aristocratic landowners, would rob "the people of agriculture" of their ability to perform skilled farming labor and would deprive them of food, as efforts spent on cattle yielded much less food than work put into planting and harvesting crops (*Phytologia* 468). See Priestman's *The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin* 193-215 for more on Darwin's opposition to enclosure, as well as his involvement with other political causes.

articulated his theory of evolution), but the poem begins with an extended description of "The Temple of Nature" along with the mythological figures that inhabit it. The lines that Mitchell quotes to introduce Melissa describe, in Darwin's poem, "Dione," usually the name for Venus's mother, but in *The Temple of Nature* used as another name for Venus herself, who superintends the realms of natural pleasures. Melissa appears in Mitchell's text, ushered in as a deity of the natural world and as a character fit for comparison with figures in the works of a British radical who saw profound meaning in the aesthetic pleasures afforded by the world around him.

Seen through the eyes of the novel's younger generation, land looks much different than it does to Colonel Bloomfield, a proponent of Old World estate culture, and it is in looking at land through the perspective of Edgar, Alonzo, and Melissa that Mitchell exerts most of his efforts at fanciful description. When Edgar and Melissa roam the grounds of their father's estate, what they see is an overabundance of natural activity, and, most importantly, innumerable opportunities to take pleasure in nature's charms and graces:

> Amidst these rural and solitary scenes, Melissa loved to wander. The devious recesses of the woods, the blossomed banks of plaintive streams, the fragrance of verdant fields, and the wild melody of various birds, in the green season of the year, yielded her sincerer pleasure, than the most brilliant splendors of ball-rooms and assemblies. Here, with Edgar, could she realize and retrace the innocent and happy incidents of their earliest childhood. Here had they chased the gay butterfly from flower to flower, till it soared away, leaving them perplex'd to discover why the gaudy flutterer should so assiduously shun the approach who intended it no manner of harm; there they waded the narrow brook to select the shining, transparent pebbles from its shallow bed; here they basked on the sunny hill side, or reclined beneath intermingling branches, watching the labours of the industrious bee while collecting its sweets from the blooms around. (1: 39)

Here are, also, the "great a variety of vivid colourings" and "fanciful decorations" that Mitchell promised would render his novel truly pleasing to the reader of "sentimental taste and refinement" (xxv). That the above excerpt comprises only a small part of a bevy of descriptive passages that take up the better part of four pages only serves to illustrate the importance

Mitchell places on viewing the land aesthetically, as important primarily for its literary potential—a value that, the sheer length of his passage also demonstrates, could hardly be exhausted—rather than for it financial prospects. Literariness on the part of the younger Bloomfields equates with the ability to see transcendent, richer meaning in the land than any ledger of collected and outstanding rents could show. This is not, Mitchell's implication follows, the generation that will exploit the land or take advantage of those who work it. Edgar, Melissa, and Alonzo are best prepared for rural life because they have the hearts of poets.

Ultimately, Mitchell builds upon the traditional formula of the sentimental plot in order to propose an antidote to the novel's twin villains, corrupt Federalist trading practices and the persistent regard for English social mores, both of which contribute to the continuation of a class-based society in which only a select few enjoy liberty and social mobility, and both of which proposed to draw connections between citizens only through the tenuous, sometimes callous, means of shared financial interest. Because of the many evils it hopes to address, the scene in which Alonzo admits to Melissa that he would prefer to address her as more than just a friend, the scene that most accurately defines the stakes of the young couple's relationship, is a long and detailed one. Not surprisingly, this encounter between the two lovers also represents the apex of Mitchell's descriptive fervor. The night begins with Alonzo and Melissa out for a stroll over the hills of the Bloomfield estate, continues with a trip to Melissa's favorite promontory, and crescendos, after Alonzo introduces the topic of Bowman's exclusive privilege to address Melissa, into a fantastic colorful display brought on by the unexpected appearance of an *Aurora Borealis*. Again, Mitchell's description of the event is lengthy, but a few lines will suffice to show the creative energies he pours into it and hint at the aesthetic responses his description hopes to call forth:

> As they were returning they paused to observe a brilliant display of the *Aurora Borealis*, which had been forming and increasing as twilight decayed. It was grand, beautiful, and sublime; a luminous arch extended from the two extremities of the northern horizon, from all parts of which the pyramidical pillars of apparent flame shot forth, some of them reaching to the zenith, alternately rising, brightening and fading away; the concave beneath quite to its base was clouded with a substance resembling smoke, interspersed with crimson stains and spots of inconceivable brightness . . . During the existence of the phenomenon there was distinctly heard a low rumbling sound in the region of the north, like the solemn roar of distant winds. (1: 224-5)

Melissa and Alonzo discuss various scientific theories behind the appearance of the *Aurora Borealis*—"They have never been accounted for," Alonzo relates, "on correct philosophical principles" (1:225). But treating the sights they have encountered during their trek scientifically does not provide an adequate language through which the couple can comprehend their experiences. Once they return to the Bloomfield's home, Melissa retrieves a poem for Alonzo, written by her brother Edgar, that describes the arrival of the new year (especially poignant as the two have entered into a new understanding of their relationship) and which she believes resonates well with the events of their walk. Alonzo returns home, and Melissa lets her father know that she has chosen to accept Alonzo as her sole suitor.

Many lovers that graced the pages of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels encountered parental prohibitions against marriages that did not preserve or improve estates as economic assets. This is certainly the case with Selina du Ruyter, for instance, whose example is supposed to be taken as typical of the generic European sentimental plot, and it is true in Melissa's case as well. Colonel Bloomfield, whose "expectations" that his children will "[connect] honourably" because of the "splendid fortune to be divided between them" have, until Melissa's courtship with Alonzo begins, been reasonably answered, expects his daughter to marry well in order to protect the financial profitability of his land and to "obtain eminence and distinction in society" (1: 36). In essence, Colonel Bloomfield expects Melissa, in marrying, to

maintain and perpetuate the class system that has proved so profitable for him, one that has ensured the "eminence" of a few and the poverty of many. As I discussed in Chapter 2, William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789) attempts to expose the inevitable social catastrophes (illicit relationships, incest, suicide) that result from the type of patriarchal social order that Colonel Bloomfield hopes to uphold, and Brown's novel suggests that national communities—signified on a small scale by two romantic lovers—should be drawn together, ideally, by similitude in taste and shared love for universal beauty. Economic fitness plays no part in the relationship between Myra and Worthy, Brown's perfect republican couple. What matters is that these two partners admire literature and can apply the taste and discretion they learn from thoughtful reading while evaluating other works of art, beautiful natural scenes, and, most importantly, the moral quandaries encountered as the romance between Harrington and Harriot, the novel's two sibling lovers, unfolds. Shared literary sensibility proves that Myra and Worthy are appropriate partners for one another and defines the affection between them as essential, meaningful, and lasting.

Mitchell takes this appropriation of literary discourse to both describe and reify proper republican love between romantic lovers and, by extension, members of communities and citizens of nations, yet one step further. While William Hill Brown's *Power of Sympathy* is primarily concerned with establishing the basis for strong, egalitarian social relationships that contribute to national stability, Mitchell hoped to show how strong affectionate relationships could be forged and reinforced both among citizens themselves and between citizens and an ideology of governance. Loving each other was important, but respecting the principles of an agrarian economy was also paramount. In more practical terms, this means that the love story in *Alonzo and Melissa* does not describe a straight line that connects two romantic partners, but a

love triangle that unites one partner to another and to the land that sustains them. That the natural world is meant to figure prominently in their relationship is signified by the eruption of a natural phenomenon—one that lights up the entire landscape—as Alonzo and Melissa realize their shared affections. The *Aurora Borealis*, which upon its beginning becomes the focus of their conversation, takes its own central role in this scene's lovers' dialogue. Man, woman, and surrounding land are all united here.

The literary becomes especially important in this context because it can manage and strengthen the entire constellation of relationships—Alonzo and Melissa, Melissa and the land, Alonzo and the land—that must be at play in order to work toward the social stability that Mitchell hopes to model. While the onset of the *Aurora Borealis* does denote the active role landscape plays in the couple's relationship, it also provides an event (if not to say an excuse) to display the hero and heroine's particular prowess at appreciating the land's beauties. As nature smiles on the couple's love, we are reminded that they are well-suited to recognize and value her merits because of their good taste. Like William Hill Brown, Mitchell highlights his characters' literary sensibilities in order to define their romantic inclinations as genuine, transcendent, and separate from the motives of class preservation that inspire Melissa's father's views on marriage as a social contract. Alonzo and Melissa's relationship is sealed, for instance, not through the exchange of money or assets, but through the exchange of a poem. Thus, the work that literary discourse performs in *Alonzo and Melissa* is multifaceted: it recodes both the value of land and the worth of social relationships from the economic (read as cold, self-serving, and contingent on luck) to the aesthetic (sentimental, moral, and contingent on merit). After reading this scene, depicting two lovers coming together and replete with poetic description, it is no wonder why Mitchell urged the importance of re-introducing pleasurable effects, ornament, and a focus on

beauty to the pages of American literature. Literary sensibilities, like those encouraged by Mitchell's own expansive prose, looked to offer the guaranteed success of Jeffersonian agrarianism by creating close ties between citizens and admiration for land's abundant resources.

Democratizing the Literary

Alonzo and Melissa's conclusion extends Mitchell's optimistic theory that the novel should portray characters and the world in which they live in their best possible guise, not "things as they are," but "as they probably might be," to its very limits, painting a utopian picture of resolved conflicts and widespread harmony. The war between England and the United States has ended, Colonel Bloomfield has gleefully reconciled with his daughter after finding that she is alive, and Jefferson's agrarian economic model results in financial success for all who have taken it up. Conceived in the midst of hilltops and fields, and reinforced by a communion of aesthetic sensibilities, Alonzo and Melissa's love does prove to be the strongest of all the novel's social relationships, outlasting war, separation by long distances, and even Melissa's supposed death. Sidestepping the class system that threatened, earlier in their history, to prohibit their marriage, the couple returns to the original site upon which they "had projected scenes of conjugal bliss, and planned the structure of their family edifice," and purchase the means of their independence— "the site formerly marked out," with the addition of "an adjoining farm" (2: 275-6). Melissa re-christens their property the "Asylum," and, of course, the last lines of the text celebrate its beauty:

> To our hero and heroine the native charms of their retired village were a source of ever pleasing variety. Spring, with its verdured fields, flowery meads, and vocal groves, its balmy gales, purling rills, and its evening whipperwill; summer, with its embowering shades reflected in the glassy lake, its mild showers, gay rainbow, its lightning, its thunder, and the long, pensive, yet sprightly notes of the solitary strawberry-bird; autumn with its mellow fruit, yellow foliage, falling leaf, and

> decaying verdure; winter, with its hoarse, rough blasts, icy bands, stormy skies and snowy mantle—all tended to thrill, with sensations of pleasing transition, the feeling bosoms of Alonzo and Melissa, in their early chosen, long sought, but finally happy, secluded ASYLUM. (2: 277-8)

The seeds of a loving family, the farmland required to provide for this family's needs, the sense of poetic wonder that encourages sentimental attachment to the land itself, wonder that, as the emphasis on "variety" in the novel's final passage implies, is consistently renewed—all of the elements of a stable, longstanding agrarian community, one truly capable of providing peace, independence, and "asylum" are set in place as Mitchell's novel comes to a close.

At its conclusion, however, the "ever pleasing variety" of available aesthetic experiences is the only diversity left standing. The litany of closing remarks that tell the fate of the novel's main characters, and many of its minor ones, illuminates a trend toward social leveling and toward cultural homogenization—a trend in which Mitchell hopes his readers will participate after seeing its good effects modelled in the lives of his characters. First, Alonzo and Melissa are not the only happy couple that marry and remove to the country, choosing an agrarian lifestyle over life in an urban environment, or, as would also have been a possibility, accepting a portion of the Bloomfield estate that would have been rightly allotted to Melissa in accordance with her father's earlier wish to see her well-connected by making her wealthy. Edgar Bloomfield marries Katharine Bergher, who was herself raised on an American farm that began as a plot of wooded land and grew into a prosperous, comfortable home, and this couple also takes their own place in the countryside. After their marriage, this branch of the Bloomfield family settles next to Alonzo's father's farm: "The clergyman of the village where Haventon resided having died, Edgar was called to the pastoral charge of this unsophisticated people" (2: 277). It is also made abundantly clear that Federalist interests have been defeated, their death knell sounded when the elder Haventon, though his fortune has been restored through the combined efforts of Alonzo and

Benjamin Franklin, chooses life on his farm over the prospect of taking up his business in trade once again, even though this trade might offer more lucrative opportunities: “wearied with the active and tumultuous scenes of life, he did not again enter into mercantile business, but placing his money at interest in safe hands, lived retired in the country” (2: 251).

What is more, we are given to understand that the innate superiority of self-sustaining rural economic models over easily corruptible Federalist mercantile systems will not be realized only on American soil, but on a global scale as well. The direction of influence between Europe and America, one which earlier made the United States' citizens susceptible to European, and particularly British, perceptions of class and the supremacy of wealth, looks as if it will eventually reverse. Roderick Bergher, the family's eldest son, returns to Germany with his uncle, Selina's only brother, who himself rebelled against his aristocratic father's tyranny by helping Selina make her escape from the family's estate with Captain Bergher. Selina's brother, now the present Baron Du Ruyter, hopes to make Roderick “the principle heir to his large estates” (2: 277). The novel extends the hope that, between the enlightened aristocrat and the scion of an American farming family that so values economy and moderation, Germany's system of aristocratic landholding will be reformed. Agrarianism also makes an English convert by the end of Mitchell's text—the British sailor Jack Brown who helped Alonzo to escape to France after he was impressed by a British warship and put into a London prison. Finding that Brown himself has later been taken as a prisoner of war and has landed in an American jail, Alonzo, by then armed with ready resources because of the success of his father's farm, arranges for Brown's return to his family in England and gives him a large sum. Jack, formerly an inveterate sailor, working in the service of international trade before joining the British navy, trades his participation in the uncertain economy of commerce and his house in the middle of London for a

rural inn in the country "at an interior parish in England," which he names *The Grateful American* in honor of Alonzo, and does very well serving the members of his new removed village (2: 276). "You have made us all happy," he writes Alonzo, "my dear Poll blubbered like a fresh-water sailor in a hurricane when I told her of your goodness. My wife, my children—all hands upon deck are yours. We have a good run of business, and are now under full sail for the land of prosperity" (2: 277). Jeffersonian ideology is shown, at last, to be America's most important, and perhaps one of its very few necessary, exports: life in the "land of prosperity" remembers the language of trade and the uncertainties of international commerce only in the context of cheerful argot and exuberant metaphor.

That the novel's language turns so ornate and descriptive in its final moments suggests that Mitchell also sees the genre of the novel as one that can elicit the reader's participation in the egalitarian, land-based system he has envisioned. Delineating the beauties of Alonzo and Melissa's estate and providing effusive descriptions of everything from spring's "verdured fields" to winter's "snowy mantle," Mitchell not only reflects his protagonists' perspective on their "Asylum" in these closing moments, but also makes use of deliberately and obviously poetic language so that his readers may find literary pleasure in the idea of land just as Alonzo and Melissa do. The novel, in this respect, becomes a hybrid genre in Mitchell's hands, collapsing poetry into prose in order to unite poetry's overt stylization with the accessibility and familiarity of novelistic prose. If the reader can be made to love both beauty and its source (and, for Mitchell, beauty's source is always the American landscape), Mitchell's novel comes one step closer to replicating the harmony and stability *Alonzo and Melissa* imagines in the real conditions of nineteenth-century America. *Alonzo and Melissa*'s ending offers, then, one final display of Mitchell's aesthetic sensibility and literary skill, but, as such, it extends an invitation

to the reading audience to take up Jefferson's agrarian principles so that readers, too, might experience the prosperity the novel's characters come to enjoy.

Literariness, the quality that is first presented as that which gives Alonzo and Melissa's generation the ability to "read" land differently than normative aristocratic scripts allowed, indeed to see it as the platform of transcendent meaning and innocent communion with beauty, is introduced in Mitchell's novel as a tool that distinguishes one generation from the next and draws clear boundaries between dominant patriarchal social views and the more democratic, yet far less adopted, ideals of agrarian life. By *Alonzo and Melissa*'s conclusion, however, these distinctions have been erased. Mitchell's world is now entirely populated with farmers and those who serve and support life in rural villages (Edgar, who ministers to a removed town, for example, and Jack Brown, who manages a country inn) and readers themselves have been invited to value both land and literature for the good of the American community. Alonzo and Melissa's literariness, which, as the novel's effusive final passage suggests, persists with full force, is now a trait of the dominant ideology, one that celebrates a complete social leveling, since all characters have chosen modest farming lives, sometimes, as in the elder Haventon's case, deliberately rejecting wealth that would set them apart from the common weal. In the end, the success of Jefferson's model of an egalitarian society requires that the literary be deprived of its status as a mark of distinction between people or classes. It is no surprise, therefore, that instead of declaring the virtues of select, particularly remarkable individuals (as earlier to references to Alonzo as Japhia and to Melissa as Dionne do), the last deliberately poetic expression in Mitchell's text describe only distinctions between time periods and changing seasons. Focusing on the cyclical movement of time, the novel's final moments of poetry avoid all notion of hierarchy or exceptionalism. Noticing this leveling of both the social world and poetic subjects at the end of

Mitchell's text, illuminates, then, a new role for literature and an agreeable irony behind the word "Asylum" as used in the post-Federalist, post-class context that Mitchell envisions. No retreat from tyranny or aristocratic worldviews is needed. In the realm of Democratic-Republican fantasy, Jeffersonian principles have become universal values. Literature is no longer there to safeguard them, only to render them more pleasing.

Chapter 5

Rebecca Rush's *Kelroy* (1812) and the Loss of the American Poet

Critics have already usefully read Rebecca Rush's *Kelroy* in light of feminist criticism as a work that reveals deep inconsistencies between the theory and practice of republican womanhood in the early United States.[1] The picture *Kelroy* paints is not one of a world in which women are regarded as the intellectual equals of men and the moral custodians of republican values, but one in which women must assume roles largely similar to those they inhabited in aristocratic Europe. Still at the mercy of a male-dominated market of social exchange, young women, as *Kelroy* illustrates, had to be more concerned with appearing marriageable than with improving their minds for the good of the nation. Bridgette Copeland, in a recent study of Rush's novel, has also expanded the study of *Kelroy*'s feminist critique by linking it to larger issues of international politics. The relationships that bind the Hammond women together as the central characters of Rush's text replicate an intricate network of relationships that bound the United States to Britain. The overbearing Mrs. Hammond, according to Copeland's reading, is Britain personified, while her two daughters, Lucy and Emily, each a representative of the new United States, adopt different strategies (agreement, on Lucy's part and resistance on Emily's) to respond to their mother's threatening encroachment. My analysis pushes for an even fuller recognition of the political platforms that inform *Kelroy*'s sentimental plot, focusing in particular on how Rush's novel is undergirded by the rhetoric of Federalism. Furthermore, this study works toward a more pointed examination of the relationships *Kelroy* draws between literariness

[1] See Chapter 4, 166-172 for a fuller discussion of critical trends that have dominated discussion of Rush's novel and for more information on Kelroy's publication history.

and Federalist principles. Just as Isaac Mitchell looked to the literary as a discourse that could legitimize and preserve Jefferson's Democratic-Republican platform, Rebecca Rush saw the literary as the key to Federalism's successful resurgence in America. *Kelroy*, thus, does grapple with women's issues and with the looming threat of violent altercation abroad, but it also asserts that the solution to these problems can be found in literary discourse. In her novel, Rush argues that only by regaining an appreciation for the literary will the ills of Federalist society be corrected and its interests in an increasingly globalized international network of trade be secured.

"Foreign to our manners": The Failures of Federalist Sociability

The history of the Rush family, one of the most prominent families in Philadelphia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, is intimately connected with the history of American Federalism. Benjamin Rush, Rebecca's uncle, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a prominent physician, was an early advocate of the party's policies, especially, as I will discuss, the views on the education and role of women that many Federalists espoused. Rebecca's father, Jacob Rush, held various high-ranking judicial positions in the course of his long legal career in Pennsylvania and took Federalist ideology to heart. In the words of Louis Richards, one of Rush's early twentieth-century biographers, "To him federalism and patriotism seemed synonymous" (Richards 63). Jacob Rush was known particularly for the protections he offered Federalists in his home state. Richards reports that Rush often levied heavy fines from the bench against those who spoke or acted against Federalist platforms. He actively opposed continued relations with France in the late 1790s, agreeing with other members of his party that maintaining ties with a nation in the midst of political upheaval was unwise for the United States' trading interests and damaging to the morals of Americans who might be

tempted to espouse French fashions, religion, and beliefs about government (Richards 63-4). Little is known about Rebecca Rush, though many of her father's and uncle's papers have survived intact. She was thirty-three years old when *Kelroy* was published in 1812, and, from her earliest biographers, we know that she was paid one hundred dollars by her publishers, Bradford and Inskeep, for her manuscript (Allibone 1893).

While *Alonzo and Melissa*'s geographic scope sprawls both up and down the Atlantic coast from Connecticut to the Carolinas and outward to England, France, and even Germany, *Kelroy*'s setting is, in many respects, locally bound. Though characters enter and depart its environs from afar (mostly from Europe or one of Europe's eastern trading partners), the novel takes place primarily in Philadelphia and its surrounding countryside. Rush's novel undertakes to examine far-ranging questions of national identity and the literary's role in building it through the microcosm of the drawing room, where Rush paints a complex portrait with small brush strokes, depicting social nicety, civility, and, more often, their absences as indicators of the United States' social and cultural viability.

A brief summary here, too, will aid an investigation of Rush's cultural critique. *Kelroy* opens with the news of Mr. Hammond's death. A Philadelphia trader who lived above his means, Hammond leaves behind him a wife and two daughters, Lucy and Emily. Mrs. Hammond, an enterprising woman who is unwilling to give up her opulent lifestyle, removes to the country to disguise the family's true financial circumstances, where she invests the limited supply of resources that are available to her in her daughter's education, planning to use their charms and accomplishments to attract wealthy husbands who will then provide the means for her to continue living extravagantly. After a few years have passed and the two girls have come of age, Mrs. Hammond moves with them back to Philadelphia so that they may be presented in society.

The three Hammond ladies attend many balls and smaller gatherings together, along with their family friends, the Cathcarts, whose children, Helen and Charles, form close friendships with Emily because they are, like her, well-educated, intelligent, and affable. Lucy, statuesque and cold, but capable of personability when necessary, takes to her mother's plan to attract wealthy men easily and ends up marrying a well-meaning English nobleman named Walsingham. Emily, who attempts to be as dutiful as possible but is not so enamored as her sister with her mother's decree that she should marry for money, falls in love with Kelroy, a young man with little to offer in the way of finances, but much in cultural wealth. Kelroy is a poet and a "genius," as Charles Cathcart and Walsingham describe him. Mrs. Hammond, unsurprisingly, opposes the match between Emily and Kelroy, but Walsingham, trusting fully to Kelroy's abilities to lead the couple to prosperity and happiness, pressures Mrs. Hammond into assenting to the marriage. Lucy and Walsingham depart for England a few weeks after their marriage, followed shortly by Kelroy, who departs for India, where he hopes to succeed at a trading venture that will enable him to support a wife and start a family. While Kelroy is occupied overseas, Mrs. Hammond and a co-conspirator, Mr. Marney, forge correspondences that lead Kelroy to believe that Emily no longer loves him and Emily to believe that Kelroy has connected himself with another woman while abroad. Grief-stricken, Emily is talked into a marriage with Dunlevy, a wealthy man who has fallen in love with her and who Emily regards very highly, but does not love. Mrs. Hammond's fate from this point is a story of highs and lows: the family's house in Philadelphia burns down suddenly, leaving her almost propertyless, save for a few belongings, but one of those belongings is a winning lottery ticket that enables her to recover a sizeable fortune. After these excitements, however, Mrs. Hammond falls victim to a stroke that renders her unable to speak comprehensibly for a few days before she passes away. Emily eventually discovers

evidence of her mother's agency in keeping her apart from Kelroy, after which she takes ill and dies. Soon after Emily's death, Kelroy returns to America, and Helen Cathcart apprises him of Mrs. Hammond's role in his broken romance. Distracted, Kelroy departs again on a trading venture and dies in a shipwreck before he reaches his destination.

While Mitchell's *Alonzo and Melissa* envisions the "probable" success of a Republican utopia, *Kelroy* forecasts only doom, and it is much more interested in lamenting the failures of American society and describing the likelihood of continued cultural disintegration than in celebrating any potential success of the American experiment. Though Rush's direct influences are harder to identify conclusively than Mitchell's, Charles Brockden Brown's, or even William Hill Brown's, a fact owing largely to the scarcity of biographical record of Rush's life, it is no surprise that prior critics have seen reflections of both the British novel of manners and of Brockden Brown's Americanized gothic in Rebecca Rush's work.[2] While Rush has been compared to Austen, she was probably more familiar with Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778) than with Austen's first popular novel of manners, *Sense and Sensibility*, which was published in late October of 1811, just five months before the text of *Kelroy* was submitted to the Clerk of the District of Pennsylvania for copyright purposes.[3] Some of Rush's most prominent characters

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[2] Lillie Deming Loshe refers to *Kelroy* as "a novel of social manners" (15), a characterization that Kathryn Zabelle Derounian examines at length in "Lost in the Crowd: Rebecca Rush's *Kelroy*": "Rush's only work, as far as we know," Derounian writes, "*Kelroy* is a novel of manners which not only meets but fulfills generic possibilities" (117). Arthur Hobson Quinn has viewed Rush's characterization of Mrs. Hammond as evidence that she has taken up Brown's example in constructing her villain (39). Davidson acknowledges *Kelroy*'s debt to both generic traditions, asserting that, "*Kelroy* . . . deftly [interweaves] comic and tragic scenes to ground a convincing Gothic disaster in an astutely observed novel of manners" (329).

[3] Cathy Davidson's comparison between Rush and Austen applauds Rush's ability to use her British counterpart's formula in the service of social critique: "What I find particularly intriguing in this novel is the way in which Rush, a year after the publication of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and before *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Emma* (1816), already Gothicizes the novel of social manners by turning the Austenesque plot of arranging suitable marriages for the suitable into a grim matrimonial poker game" (332).

have their antecedents in *Evelina*'s pages. Madame Duval, the young Evelina's maternal grandmother who does her best to be taken for a fashionable Frenchwoman, and who plans to remove Evelina from the influence of her English (and therefore proper) friends, certainly provided the model for Rebecca Rush's social-climbing, worldly Mrs. Hammond. One of Kelroy's earlier cousins, furthermore, can be found in the person of Mr. Macartney, *Evelina*'s melancholy Scottish poet. Along with a few character types, however, Rush, as Burney's descendant, also inherited a keen eye for the critique of polite society and its sometimes misguided morés. Burney, in showing Evelina in the midst of her "entrance into the world," as the novel's subtitle reads, enabled the use of family drawing rooms, neighborhood balls, and impromptu musical exhibitions at small gatherings for the purpose of shedding light on high society's foibles and failures, a trend that Rush continued by using this genre to illuminate the sometimes tragic flaws in American social life. Brockden Brown's influence is likewise evident in Rush's use of Gothic tropes to reveal what Davidson refers to as "the Gothic within" (328). Mrs. Hammond's ill-formed character and, later, her diseased body—sources of tragedy that emanate from within the human consciousness and the human frame—become the loci of the novel's horrors, in particular, perverted motherhood and the thwarted love of deserving young Americans. Rush borrows Brown's conceit of the disintegrating body to suggest that, in her world, instability comes out of characters' own minds, a far more terrible prospect than the horrors of the dilapidated castle or the cobwebbed family mansion that beset the heroes and heroines in European Gothic novels. Where Rush does borrow from predecessors, then, she does so in order to expose the hypocrisies and limitations of American life, especially in the lives of members of the United States' most privileged circles.

And yet, even as Rush strives to highlight the least attractive aspects of American society

in her novel, she, like Mitchell, her Democratic-Republican counterpart, also asserts the necessity of beauty and calls upon readers to remember the traditional goals of literary discourse and its place in a virtuous society. Such aims are clear from the very outset of her novel, which opens with what is best described as an unofficial preface:

> In all ages and countries, the legends of that soft passion which pervades creation have ever been cherished with particular care. The song of the poet, and the grave pen of the historian have alike been employed to perpetuate its eventful scenes; which seizing the mind with irresistible force, please without variety, and charm in despite of reason. To the youthful heart, they portray in congenial hues, the joys or sorrows of the present hour; and recall to the more advanced the memory of those sweet, early sensations which time has compelled them to abandon; and imagination turns from the cold lessons of philosophy, to contemplate with delight that semblance of impassioned feeling which adorns the narratives of love. (1)

Rebecca Rush's portrays the sentimental tale, as did Isaac Mitchell, as the type of narrative most apt to encourage aesthetic experience. Painted in "congenial hues," that is, written with attention to the beauty and style of the narrative itself, the love story can move the "youthful heart" and the more "advanced" reader. Kelroy's preface also speaks of "soft passion" and the novel's ability to "charm" in the tenderest terms, celebrating the high status of the love story as appropriate enough for poets and historians alike. Ultimately, the beauty of the love story performs the important cultural work of emphasizing shared history, therefore uniting people across national borders. The love story is not particular to any time or place, Rush asserts, but has demonstrated its appeal "in all ages and countries."

What is perhaps most noteworthy about this preface are the many ways in which it departs from earlier writings of Benjamin Rush. Benjamin Rush urged the necessity of a well-educated social elite that could be relied upon to govern the nation as a whole, including less educated citizens and the middle and lower classes, and that could be trusted to nurture a vibrant native cultural identity that would unite citizens under the mantle of similar values and social

practices. As part and parcel of this initiative, Benjamin Rush wrote strongly in favor of female education on the grounds that American women would be expected to raise each new successive generation of citizens. To their hands would be left the superintendence of proper education, and, until a young man approached the age at which he would be sent to school, his mother played an important role in forming his constitution and readying him for informed political participation.[4] This, of course, presumed that the young boy and the mother herself were members of a prosperous enough household that they could afford the time spent on the cultivation of young citizens' minds. In 1787, when Rebecca Rush would have been about eight years old (and therefore at a prime age to be the recipient of the type of reformed educational program that her uncle proposed), Benjamin Rush's address to The Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia detailed the appropriate elements of female education. In this address, later published as his essay, "Thoughts on Female Education," Rush delivered some scathing remarks about the dangers of the novel:

> The attention of our young ladies should be directed as soon as they are prepared for it to the reading of history, travels, poetry, and moral essays. These studies are accommodated, in a peculiar manner, to the present state of society in America, and when a relish is excited for them in early life, they subdue that passion for reading novels which so generally prevails among the fair sex. I cannot dismiss this species of writing and reading without observing that the subjects of novels are by no means accommodated to our present manners. They hold up *life*, it is true, but it is not yet *life* in America. Our passions have not as yet "overstepped the modesty of nature," nor are they "torn to tatters," to use the expressions of the poet, by extravagant love, jealousy, ambition, or revenge. As yet the intrigues of a British novel are as foreign to our manners as the refinements of Asiatic vice. Let it not be said that the tales of distress which fill modern novels have a tendency to soften the female heart into acts of humanity. The fact is the reverse of this. The abortive sympathy which is excited by the recital of imaginary distress blunts the heart to that which is real; and, hence, we sometimes see instances of young ladies who weep away a whole forenoon over the criminal sorrows of a fictitious

[4] See Savin and Abrahams 64-65, Straub, and Kerber 213, 227-231 for more on Benjamin Rush's advocacy for female education and his involvement in the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia.

> Charlotte or Werter, turning with disdain at two o'clock from the sigh of a beggar who solicits in feeble accents or signs a small portion only of the crumbs which fall from their father's tables. (11-12)

We might wonder than any scion of the Rush family ever came to write a novel in the first place. Benjamin Rush, clearly, saw the novel as working in direct opposition to the nation building his educational platforms hoped to promote. For one, the sentimental novel, in Benjamin Rush's view, encouraged a lingering adherence to a European, specifically English identity, which interfered with the cultivation of legitimate and virtuous American cultural norms. How could Americans, and particularly American women, be truly prepared for citizenship, if they in fact affected the manners and behaviors of the lords, ladies, counts, and countesses they met with in the pages of sentimental novels? Moreover, Benjamin Rush evinces a much more variegated view of aesthetic experience than is apparent in Rebecca Rush's preface. Rebecca Rush envisions a world united by the same sympathy, whereas Benjamin Rush ascribes different types of passions, some that have "overstepped the modesty of nature," for example, and others that have taken the form of "vice," to different nations and geographic areas (here, England and Asia). The elder Rush also sees apparent differences in the type of literary pleasure or "passion" felt while reading. Experiences had by the young women who could "weep away a whole forenoon over the criminal sorrows of a fictitious Charlotte or Werter" were different from the lived experience of pathos that encouraged the type of compassion and charity required to draw connections between a nation's disparate individuals.

The movement from Benjamin Rush's cautionary, restricted view of the power of literary experience to Rebecca Rush's wholehearted embrace of it is, in part, explained by Cahill's analysis of the changing rhetoric of genius at this time. The twenty-five years that intervened between Benjamin Rush's 1787 speech and Rebecca Rush's 1812 novel had seen the loss of the

Federalists' power in Congress and their loss of Presidency, and aesthetic discourse, as Cahill notes, provided a welcome realm in which Federalist authority could still be exerted. While Federalist policymakers could not succeed in the halls of government under Jefferson and Madison administrations, Federalist critics could do very well by carrying out the practice of cultural criticism in the public sphere enabled by the nation's burgeoning periodical industry. By 1812, it was safe for Rebecca Rush, member of a prominent Federalist family, to speak of sentiment, charming stories, and beauty, in part because Federalists had assumed a leading role in literary discourse of the day.

The shift in thinking about the literary, and the novel's status as a genre that could, in fact, be literary in the first place, however, is more fully described as a change in which some principles of neoclassical literary discourse were emphasized over others. Both Benjamin and Rebecca Rush's thoughts on the sentimental novel echo the terms of Charles Rollin's and Hugh Blair's prescriptions for literary study—uncle and niece merely emphasize different aspects of this discourse's principles. Benjamin Rush's condemnation of British novels on the grounds that they represent passions that have not "yet" become prevalent in America reflects, for instance, Rollin's description of how good taste in any society was prone to deteriorate into "excess and luxury," which would, in turn, lead to general social decline. It also echoes Blair's description of good taste becoming corrupted: "I admit, that accidental causes may occasionally warp the proper operations of Taste; sometimes the state of religion, sometimes the form of government, may for a while pervert it; a licentious court may introduce a Taste for false ornaments, and dissolute writings. The usage of one admired genius may procure approbation for his faults, and even render them fashionable" (Rollin 55, Blair 23). Benjamin Rush's claim that the novel was "by no means accommodated to [America's] present manners" and that the genre, instead, spoke

more of life that had already been corrupted (or had "overstepped the modesty of nature"), uses literary discourse to differentiate an American sense of identity from a British one by suggesting that the United States had not over-evolved on the scale that literary theorists envisioned. Benjamin Rush upholds neoclassical literary discourse for its ability to draw distinctions between pure good taste and corrupted bad taste, and between nations that were still in the early stages of discovering and developing the ways they would write about beauty and those that had come to confuse beauty with extravagance. Rebecca Rush's emphasis on the power of aesthetic experience, however, foregrounds the universality of good taste that both Rollin and Blair also take as a given. Rollin, we recall, argued that "good taste . . . is grounded upon immutable principles, [and] is always the same in every age," and Blair had his own version of this idea, claiming that "the general sentiments of men" established the standard for the "just and true" (22). For Rebecca Rush, this optimistic view of the literary's power extended the faint hope both of reformation and unity. If good taste was, indeed, inviolable and common, in some part, to all men, it could be trusted, as Rollin and Blair each claimed, to recall a nation from the path to cultural deterioration and to remind its citizens of deep, lasting affinities with other cultures and peoples—two functions, in Rush's view, that Americans desperately needed.

Kelroy was published, as Rush seems to have believed, in the midst of a world that was more than ripe for change, one that needed dramatic internal reordering and that needed to realize stronger, more economically and culturally viable connections with other politically and economically stable nations. Rebecca Rush's novel, in fact, supports many of the elitist ideals that Benjamin Rush advocated. *Kelroy*, as I will show, demonstrates the need for a select group of educated citizens that could act with poise and discrimination and supports the idea of a trade-based economy. Both of these principles, however, are in peril in Rush's novel. *Kelroy*, in many

ways, imagines a world in which none of Benjamin Rush's early prescriptions have taken hold and pictures a class of urban cultural elite that has failed to live up to the hopes of its earliest Federalist supporters for the very reason that they have appropriated and have continued to uphold an affected, derivative, and corrupt form of British sociability. The attention paid to the superficial trappings of polite society causes the perpetuation of Old World aristocratic systems on American shores. Rebecca Rush's Americans seek to maintain social standing above all else, prioritizing wealth for its ability to maintain appearances and risking their own daughters in a marriage market meant to ensure not just comfort, but luxury. Such practices were detrimental to the progress of American culture, Rush argues, because they did not define worth as the ability to think rightly and act judiciously, but this emphasis on mannerliness was also detrimental to American relationships abroad. The shared ability to identify a *faux pas* was not sufficient ground upon which to establish trusting relations between nations, and neither was pettishly policing civility, in Rush's eyes, a pursuit worthy of America's constant attention.

For Rebecca Rush, replacing mannerliness and fashionability with an appreciation for the literary, and using the novel as a vehicle for literary sensibility rather than condemning it outright as an unfit instrument of foreign cultural influence, was a response to the need to establish both internal cultural stability and to promote a recognition of deeper affinities between the United States and Britain that focused on universal values rather than superficial manners. Rush's emphasis on the universality and constancy of taste is, as we shall see, part of her broader argument that only by restoring literary sensibility to its rightful place as a paramount, foundational value in American society can Federalism return to its original pursuits, recover from destructive social patterns, and find a way of connecting meaningfully and usefully with other nations in order to support American economic and cultural interests. The urgency of this

recovery, in Rush's view, could not be overstated. As domestic political struggles and mounting international tensions pointed almost certainly toward war. The likelihood of the successful reform of American values, Rush suggests, was uncertain. *Kelroy*'s preface is one of the few hopeful representations of aesthetic experience to be found in the novel, which is otherwise peopled largely by ill-bred, course, and ungracious characters. The greatest failing in American life in the earliest years of the nineteenth century, *Kelroy* suggests, is not the continued triumph of tyrannical aristocratic paradigms, or even that innocent young love is torn asunder in their name, but that Americans have lost their sense of beauty and can no longer recognize literature's worth. This lack of taste indicated a profound absence of a moral and cultural center at the heart of Federalist society.

As Mitchell did with his own "narrative of love" when he deployed the conventions of the sentimental novel to support the particular American worldview of Jeffersonian agrarianism and to condemn Federalist economic policy, Rush Americanizes the novel of manners, in similar fashion, by using its formula in the service of promoting Federalist ideology. *Evelina*'s bourgeoise shopkeeping family, the Braghntons, whose constant preoccupation with the trappings of high social status belies a lack of true breeding that will forever exclude them from the realms of "real" aristocracy, are refigured in *Kelroy*'s Gurnet family, who prosper as tradespeople before moving to the countryside near Mrs. Hammond's country home. Taken up by Rush, the woefully (but entertainingly) socially inept family becomes more than just a means of critiquing *nouveau riche* class pretension. In *Kelroy*, the trope of the ill-bred, social-climbing, but inveterately working class family is used to reiterate the great need for an educated class of citizens. Not every family, Rush points out by including the Gurnet episode in her novel, has the wherewithal to conduct themselves with propriety, and the business of governing the entire

populace is often best left to those who are fitted for the task.

Like Isaac Mitchell's Bergher family, Rush's Gurnets begin their pursuit of independence and financial stability in a Federalist trade-based economic paradigm and later choose to take up the agrarian lifestyle promoted by Democratic-Republicans. Rush, however, unlike her Democratic-Republican counterpart, Mitchell, paints this move as a tragic misstep. Gurnet's early career in Philadelphia is, in fact, promising: "Mr. Job Gurnet had begun the world in the humble occupation of a pedlar; and having by unwearied frugality and perseverance, scraped together a sufficient capital, opened a sort of shop which he styled a *wholesale huckstery*" (236). This business grows to "thrive beyond his expectations," providing him with the means to keep his family in comfort (236). Job Gurnet might not be engaged directly in the heroics of seafaring international trade, but he nonetheless demonstrates the entrepreneurialism and individual initiative that Federalists saw to be the surest safegaurd of American prosperity. In his small way, before Gurnet moves to his farm, he assumes an important role in the American economy by helping to drive the wheel of American mercantile progress in the midst of an urban center. Gurnet, however, gives this lucrative lifestyle up for the whimsical reason that he "[fancies] that he should be mighty happy on a farm" when he moves his wife and daughters to the country (239). Turning his back on a course that is both profitable for his family and, as his early successes suggest, suited to his talents, Gurnet makes his first mistake when he gets taken in by Jefferson's romantic, utopian vision of life on a farm.

The Gurnets' social failures only mount in number and intensity once Rush introduces them. Emily, Helen, Charles, and Dunlevy pay a visit to the Gurnet farm that turns out to be a disaster from start to finish. Emily and her friends' experiences with the Gurnet daughters, especially, suggest that even education, in their case, cannot make up for what seems to be a

native lack of intelligence and sensibility. The Gurnet girls' innate faculties are severely lacking. Even after three years of schooling, “Miss Polly could scarcely write her own name, and Miss Katy, and Miss Nelly found a difficulty in spelling out of book words of two syllables” (237). The futility of their father’s efforts to see them educated is also manifested in their general lack of sensitivity. The Gurnet girls spend the afternoon quarreling with each other, eating too much (Mr. Gurnet, upon seeing one daughter reach for a treat at the tea table, warns her, “you've eat til I'm ashamed of you already”), and disrupting each others' musical performances. Emily and her friends are particularly taken aback by the tumult that occurs as a result of one daughter's exhibitions at the piano: “Miss Catharine continued to twist her head about, and squall with unabated vehemence . . . In the midst of the song, Miss Eleanor returned on tiptoe, with a small dog in her arms, and perceiving how matters stood, slily pinched both its ears until it sent forth such a horrible outcry as entirely overcame the little remaining self-command of the company” (246). Even this demonstration of the family's ill-fittedness for life in polite society, however, does not go far enough for Rush. The last scene Emily and her cohort witness before leaping into their carriages is the novel's most outré. While touring the farm's outer buildings with Charles Cathcart and Dunlevy, Mr. Gurnet is apprised of the fact that a negro servant boy has broken a punch bowl. The scene catapults into chaos: “old Gurnet, furious with rage, chasing Ben, who had escaped from his grasp, and taken refuge among the cows, where he dodged about, until his master in the heat of pursuit, happening to tread on the edge of a puddle, slipped and fell sprawling at full length, with his face in the mire” (251).

This image of Gurnet, enraged and lying in what Rush demurely calls “mire,” for one, casts the American farm as a far cry from the idyllic picture of self-sufficiency and ease that Jefferson claimed it would be. Thus, on the one hand, Rush uses her description of the Gurnets

to launch a critique of Democratic-Republicanism and the agrarian lifestyle it championed, but, on the other hand, Rush also tailors the Gurnet episode to reinforce key Federalists principles by using it to reiterate the need for the guiding hand of a benevolent social elite. No amount of education seems to be able to soften the rough edges of the Gurnet girls' constitutions, and, on the whole, it is clear that the family has tried to appropriate a sociability for which they are not fitted. In short, the Gurnets offer an exaggerated picture of the very sort of untutored (and unteachable) middle class that Federalists feared would be granted too much power in the context of a participatory democracy. What *Kelroy*'s Philadelphia and, of course, the nation at large, needed was a circle of poised, educated people, committed to governing the country properly and to ensuring the safety and liberty of families who could not always be trusted to look after their own security.

These are not the goals, however, that motivate *Kelroy*'s circles of urban elite. Emily, the Cathcarts, Kelroy, and even Walsingham go about to different dinner parties and gatherings to be constantly assaulted by wealthy but ill-bred gentlemen clamoring after the ladies' hands and beleaguered on all sides by the ill-conducted conversation of a variety of social climbers. From the indelicacies of Dr. Blake, an older man who, wishing to marry Helen Cathcart despite a wide separation in their ages, pursues her mercilessly through drawing room after drawing room, to Mr. Mangold, who spills coffee on a "prim old maid" and then engages with her in a yelling match, to Marney, who regales Emily and Helen with the story of his "fat quotillian," a dance he arranged at a prior ball that included all of the plumpest women he could find, *Kelroy*'s most advantaged American citizens seem little more advanced than the consummately under-educated middle class Gurnets.

The Hammond family's example provides the best evidence that this social ineptitude is

not merely a matter for ridicule and comic relief, but also presents many real dangers to the advancement of Federalist ideology. The Hammond parents have access to all the resources necessary to live as successful Federalist citizens. Mr. Hammond makes his money in trade, the family lives in the midst of an urban center, and they circulate in the best society Philadelphia has to offer. The problem is, however, that, instead of pursuing prosperity responsibly and using their resources to fit their family for republican life, the Hammonds subscribe to a bowlderized Europeanism that judges merit not on individual capabilities and education but on the appearance of wealth. Mr. Hammond can claim even closer ties to an English ancestry than Mitchell's Colonel Bloomfield, and, like Bloomfield, he sees more value in his supposed connections to English nobility than an American citizen should: "[Mr. Hammond] was and Englishman by birth and nearly related to a noble family, from whom he derived no other benefit, than a portion of their illustrious blood" (1). Mrs. Hammond provides a fitting counterpart to her husband, "[priding] herself much" on her "knowledge of the world," by which is generally implied that she has an assumed knowledge of the mores that govern fashionable society. The family lives well above Hammond's means in order to live up to the demands of this pseudo-aristocratic worldview. Hammond's "successes in trade," we are told, "led him into extravagancies which were better suited to his pretensions than his capital," and this indulgence in luxury precipitates disaster for the female Hammonds when Mr. Hammond passes (1-2).

The course of action Mrs. Hammond takes up after her husband's death, furthermore, perhaps best represents her society's failure to realize the promise of Benjamin Rush's early proclamations on the importance of education to the project of building a stable, legitimate nation. The Federalist ideal of superior education can, in fact, as Rebecca Rush uses her villain, Mrs. Hammond, to illustrate, be easily bent to conform to the needs of a European-style class-

based hierarchy. Maintaining an "unabated relish for show and dissipation" after the death of her husband, but too old to hope of remarrying herself, Mrs. Hammond turns to her daughters' "youthful attractions" as "a resource against the evil [she] most dreaded" (2). Using the last financial resources available to her, she moves with her daughters to the country in order to live more economically, without proclaiming the need to do so to her friends in town, and invests in her daughters' education, hiring the most competent governesses and inviting masters in from the city. Rush is unflagging in her criticism of the mother's motives for providing her daughters with such opportunities, motives that center on the benefits she herself will derive as a result of the increased currency that will be afforded to her daughters once introduced to the marriage market as a result of their superior education:

> Often, whilst contemplating their visible improvements, did [Mrs. Hammond's] heart expand with delight at the idea of the consequence which she should one day derive from the brilliant endowments of these lovely females. Her affection for them was founded, not on their merits, but their charms and acquirements; and had she been assured that they were unworthy of the admiration she proudly anticipated, she would soon have lessened her regards, and lamented herself as the most unfortunate of mothers. (4)

If Benjamin Rush had attempted to rescue female education from the realms of superficial "charms and acquirements" that would render women only more capable of exhibiting themselves as attractive potential wives rather than meritorious caretakers of Federalist principles, Mrs. Hammond shows just how easily Rush's rhetoric can be undervalued or even ignored. Education here becomes little more than a signifier of wealth (where, in fact, actual wealth does not exist) and is easily used to perpetuate the superficialities of the aristocratic worldview to which Mrs. Hammond subscribes, rather than to undermine the power of this aristocratic worldview in favor of the creation of a new, merit-based paradigm of social organization like the one Benjamin Rush championed.

That the Hammond daughters' marriages are bound up not only in questions about the United States' less than creditable cultural identity, but also in questions about how Americans can best establish lasting relationships abroad with suitable trading partners is evidenced by the fact that, when Mrs. Hammond's plans work out almost immediately in her daughter Lucy's case, the man caught by both the young and old woman's whiles is a visitor from England, the young Lord Walsingham. Introduced to Mrs. Hammond by the British minister at one of her parties, Walsingham descends from "an ancient, respectable family," and is "possessed of an independent fortune" (23). But Walsingham's credentials include more than claims to wealth and family. When Mrs. Hammond first learns Walsingham's name, she associates it with a prior Walsingham who achieved fame and fortune, leaving little doubt that Rush hopes her readers to understand the connection as well:

> Mrs. Hammond listened to [the British minister's] transporting narrative with a joy which she could hardly conceal; and vowed within herself not to suffer the subject of it to escape for want of exertion on her part. —His very name carried a charm with it. She remembered sir Francis Walsingham who flourished in the days of queen Elizabeth, and thought it very possible this might be a descendant of the same family; in which case, the connexion would be doubly valuable. (24)

Francis Walsingham, principal secretary to Queen Elizabeth I, had been a great supporter of explorations into the New World as a way of using England's increasing strength as a maritime power to discover and open up new markets for English trade. He himself was involved in a number of prosperous import and export businesses, and he was a supporter of efforts to find a Northwest passage and of expeditions to circumnavigate the globe.[5] *Kelroy*'s Walsingham appears on American soil, extending the promise of mutually beneficial mercantile, as well as

[5] See R.B. Wernham's *The Making of Elizabethan Foreign Policy, 1558-1603*, especially Chapter 1, "The Makers of Policy" (1-22) for more on Walsingham's involvement in Elizabeth's court as her principal secretary, and John Cooper's *The Queen's Agent: Francis Walsingham at the Court of Elizabeth I* 237-286 for a discussion of Walsingham's role in opening up the new world to English trading interests.

romantic, relationships. As Mrs. Hammond well knows, a marriage between Lucy and Walsingham would bring personal prosperity to the Hammond family, rescuing them from financial turmoil, but, in a larger sense, the marriage between the young American, Lucy, and the established Englishmen from a well-known mercantile family would represent an important step toward the establishment of lucrative connections between two nations that hoped to reap mutual benefit from a shared economic relationship.

Lucy and Walsingham marry, but their union does not bring about the lasting and far-ranging economic benefits for which Mrs. Hammond had hoped, largely because each party (Mrs. Hammond and Lucy on the one side, and Walsingham on the other) mistakes the cultural values that are important to the other. The Hammond women at fault assume that noble lineage will be a paramount concern for the British aristocrat, while Walsingham, harboring his own misconceptions of idealized American life, assumes that Lucy, as a young lady brought up in the United States, must be cut from the cloth that was earlier woven by statesmen like Benjamin Rush. A hint of the conflict between these two sets of false impressions appears at the Hammonds' earliest meeting with Walsingham. Mrs. Hammond sets out initially to describe her family's status in terms of familial descent: "[Walsingham] was obliged, in order to remain near [Lucy], to content himself with listening to the eloquence of her mother, who addressed to him the most flattering of compliments; and as a certain mean of exalting herself and her family in his estimation, contrived to let him know that her late husband had been third cousin to the duke of G--" (25). These appeals, however, carry little weight with him:

> Walsingham cared nothing about the duke of G--'s dead cousins. His own connexions had afforded him a sufficient knowledge of rank and high life, to enable him to distinguish the affectation from the reality. He willingly accorded to the sons and daughters of Columbia genius and beauty; but of all pretensions to *family*, in the general sense of the word, he considered them utterly void; and was at once amused and disgusted to observe in many of the natives of this land of

> liberty and equality, where titles are unknown, and distinction arises only from merit, a species of emulation which made them regard it as a mark of consequence to belong to the very fag end of any family that could boast of a peer for its head. (25)

Able to discern the "affectation" of aristocratic privilege from the "reality" of it, yes, but Walsingham fails to see beyond his own expectations of Lucy's "genius and beauty" to the reality of her cunning and manipulative personality until after they are married. After some weeks of living with the Hammonds after wedding Lucy, Walsingham develops a deep distrust of Mrs. Hammond's character and only reluctantly discharges debts for her while they live under the same roof. It is not long until Walsingham decides to depart for England, noticeably failing to extend an invitation to Mrs. Hammond to join the party with Lucy, and Lucy's own want of regard for her family upon leaving them finally opens his eyes to the fact that she has inherited both her mother's concern for appearances and taste for luxury, and, for all her education, had not learned any finer qualities that might temper her native callousness. Upon witnessing Lucy's quick recovery of her complete faculties after bidding her mother and sister goodbye, "Walsingham . . . could neither understand, nor tolerate such a total absence of sensibility; and for the first time began seriously to call in question the qualities of her heart" (161). Kelroy, who has accompanied his friend and his new wife to their ship, notes Walsingham's "disgust" and "disappointment" in his wife's behavior (161). Walsingham and his bride are not heard from again in *Kelroy*. After meeting with so many examples of empty affectation in America, the wealthy Englishman speeds back to England, avoiding further loss at the hands of his wife's family and taking all of his financial and trade interests with him. Mrs. Hammond's foreign policy, as it were, to unite her daughter with English nobility works in the short term, but it fails in its long term goals to make her more able to live as luxuriously as she desires. Appearances, Rush makes clear, do not lead to happy unions, between either people or nations.

The New Werther

As in Isaac Mitchell's *Alonzo and Melissa*, *Kelroy*'s answer to the problem of the American upper class's persistent aristocratic pretension is to urge the importance of aesthetic, particularly literary, experience, to remind readers that literary pleasure was not a secondary concern, and to point to the way toward reforming the Unites States' population into the type of citizenry that Benjamin Rush hoped and Walsingham expects it to be—a body politic defined by a taste for "genius and beauty." If Benjamin Rush claimed that Werther, as he appeared in the pages of Goethe's sentimental novel, spelled the disintegration of the true sympathy that America so needed to bind its citizens together in the project of nation building, Rebecca Rush takes a completely contrary position for the very reason that the Wertherian poet was a well-known literary type that could best model very obvious forms of genius and sensibility. The poet, not just on the page, but in the context of social, economic, and political life, was just what the United States needed.

Kelroy, like *Alonzo and Melissa*, also draws distinctions between its ill-intentioned and its virtuous characters in terms of their aesthetic sensibilities. Characters such as Marney, who eventually participates in the undoing of the union between Emily and Kelroy, cannot claim taste or artistic discernment. Marney's description of his "fat quotillian," is, in fact, closely followed by a scene in which he demonstrates his inability to evaluate a painting:

> [Marney] affected to examine a small Italian painting which hung near him, and turning to Kelroy, said very importantly, "I never heard, for my part, that Adam had more than *one* wife, and here they have given him *three*!"
> "Have they really?" replied Kelroy, with an involuntary smile.
> "Yes faith! – and here they stand all in a row. But where's the snake? —I don't see the snake?—"
> "Perhaps," said Helen, biting her lips, he has hid himself in the grass."
> "But how are we to be sure of that?" replied he, staring at her. "In all the pictures

> I ever saw of the garden of Eden, the snake was placed full in view; and I think it a great fault in the painter to have omitted it here."
> "I think not," said Kelroy, "for this piece is intended to represent the judgement of Paris."
> "The judgment of Paris, hey?—" replied he; "Why then I suppose this fellow with the apple in his hand, is meant for Bonaparte?" (114)

As if his penchant for fat jokes were somehow not enough to illustrate his vulgarity, Rush suggests that the last, real attestation to Marney's capacity for perfidy is his inability to critique art. Emily, on the other hand, is a particular admirer of poetry, and she finds a like-minded friend in Helen Cathcart for the very reason that "she was fond of reading, and well acquainted with literature in general; and books, and music would have constituted her chief amusements, had not her mother kept her constantly immersed in a round of engagements, which she complied with because she knew it gratified her, but had she considered herself at liberty to pursue her choice, she would have been much happier at home" (11). Together, Emily and those she befriends form a small community united by their love for aesthetic pleasures, and, especially in Kelroy's case, for poetry.

Kelroy's first appearance in the novel at a party given by a friend of the Cathcarts paints him as a melancholic Wertherian figure. The close of an especially talented singer's recital leaves him overwhelmingly moved: "[The singer's] voice . . . so powerfully affected him, that the tears sprang into his eyes, and finding it impossible in the present high wrought state of his feelings to remain a moment longer in society, he abruptly retired" (39). Incredibly sensitive to beauty, impulsive, and, ultimately reclusive, Kelroy at first seems to take closely after his German predecessor, Goethe's Werther, whose indulgence in affect led to his demise. The company's reactions to Kelroy's sudden departure, in turn, reflect a pragmatic suspicion of extreme sensitivity to aesthetic stimuli. Cries of varying degrees of exasperation—"There is something singular in it," "The man's a fool!" and even, "What an animal!"—ring out until

Kelroy becomes the entire room's topic of heated conversation (40). The general perturbation prcipitated by Kelroy's flight, what is more, only increases when the party's hostess reveals that Kelroy is not just any type of genius, but "a poet": "A poet! . . . Oh now the murder's out!" "These people of *refined understandings*, as they are called . . . are constantly in search of a romantic sort of happiness which has no existence but in their own imaginations," and "I think it a serious misfortune to possess a mind which cannot relish the common enjoyments of life" (41).

This audience's cries certainly do have historical precedent in the pages of the American novel. As I discussed in Chapter 2, William Hill Brown's 1789 novel, *The Power of Sympathy*, works to condemn the influence Werther's particular brand of over-sensibility wielded on American readers, citing it as the mark of a culture that had deteriorated to the point of collapse and not a fitting species of literature for the nascent United States. Benjamin Rush's 1787 comments on the novel, likewise, loudly condemn Werther's passions as "criminal," both because they are directed at a target unfit for his advances (Lotte, Werther's love interest, is engaged) and because they elicit and then waste the reader's sympathy when that sympathy is so clearly needed elsewhere in the practice of everyday life. These negative reading of the original Werther, however, interpret him as the product of a degenerate European society that has become too used to luxury. Goethe's novel, in both Benjamin Rush and William Hill Brown's eyes, had very limited cultural relevance. Werther's extreme emotions reflected the customs and behaviors of a particular place and time—Germany in the late eighteenth century—and, if admired and then replicated on American soil, would only put the fledgling society in peril.

This reading of Goethe's *Werther*, of course, reflects what I have previously described as Benjamin Rush's emphasis on the exclusionary aspects of eighteenth-century literary theory, those elements of the philosophy of literature codified in both Charles Rollin's and Hugh Blair's

works that highlight the differences between nations who have become overly enamored of nicety and ornamentation (in Benjamin Rush's terms, nations that have "over-stepped the bounds of nature"), and those nations that could still discriminate true virtue from excess and enjoyed a well-moderated relationship with beauty. Werther, however, looks different when rewritten into the American environment as Rebecca Rush imagines it, and her representation of the melancholic poet takes part in her efforts to emphasize the literary's capacity to appeal to mankind's general good taste. It is Walsingham, a foreigner, who introduces Kelroy to the Hammond family and serves as the narrator of Kelroy's background, providing more context for the conditions that developed Kelroy's sensibilities to such a point that he is overwhelmed beyond measure by beautiful performances by explaining how his genius has been cultivated by broad experience: "My acquaintance with him," Walsingham explains, "commenced on board the packet in which we sailed together from England, and I found in him a most entertaining and instructive companion. There is scarcely a part of Europe he has not visited: and having gratified his wishes, and increased his knowledge by exploring the curiosities, and observing the manners and customs of other countries, he was returning, as he thought, to the enjoyment of ease and affluence of his own" (50). Kelroy and Werther may share some overwhelming similarities, but, as Rush is careful to note, Kelroy's extreme emotions are not the product of a limiting, excessive indulgence in the local concerns of his own feelings, but of a deep familiarity with an expansive array of cultures and people. Kelroy's tears over the beauties of a musical performance are not evidence of any national bias, but visible proof that he can easily identify and place a high value on that which is universally beautiful.

Kelroy's “genius” does not win him an enthusiastic welcome in the circles of Philadelphia's socialites, but, if the ill-breeding that arises at each of the novel's larger gatherings

is any indication, Kelroy's reluctance to live up to the expectations of American sociability speaks only in his favor. While he does not gain the approbation of the ladies and gentlemen at the recital where he is introduced, his ability to communicate thoughtfully and in well-turned language—in other words, poetically—endears him to those with whom he meets outside of the pomp and circumstance of public parties. Kelroy's reticence and melancholy in the midst of social occasions does not belie any deep-seated problems with his own constitution (it is not, for example, that he is incapable of making the social ties that are so necessary to the solid foundation of American life), but rather exposes the lack of sympathy and generosity in the social spheres in which he circulates.

When Emily first spends an afternoon with Kelroy, she is left, “struck with the elegance of his language, and the similarity of his feelings and sentiments to her own," and her respect for him as Walsingham's friend and as a discerning conversationalist and companion blossoms into romantic admiration when Walsingham gives her an example of his poetry to read ("She then returned him the paper, with sensations of stronger interest towards it author than she chose to express. She was passionately fond of poetry, and the enthusiasm of her disposition led her to believe that those who possess the talent of composing it, were a superior order of beings") (54). Cathcart's esteem for Kelroy, likewise, stems from admiration of the judiciousness and uncommon rectitude he perceives after engaging with him for only a short time. When Helen asks why Charles has “espoused the cause of [Kelroy's] fraternity” so earnestly after meeting him only once, Charles explains that he and Kelroy “had spent several hours [at Walsingham's] together, and he was greatly pleased with [his] manners, and conversation” (47). Kelroy, too, has “manners,” the signs of breeding with which the same people who rail against his behavior and poetic ambitions after his departure from the recital are so concerned, but his “manner” is united

with a love of beauty that manifests itself in “elegant” speech and conversation.

In these easily-recognized but deeply felt connections lies to key to the question of how Kelroy's poetic genius might remake Federalist society into the united, well-educated, well-spoken community that early Federalists hoped it could be. Kelroy's genius is a source of legitimate cultural wealth—Walsingham describes this most accurately when he calls Kelroy's conversation both “entertaining and instructive”—and, at the same time, it enables him to communicate and share this cultural wealth with others in a particularly enjoyable, relatable way. Not merely interested in the show of cultural superiority, Kelroy gathers a group of friends united by a “similarity of feelings and sentiments” who enjoy and gain much from each other's society—this new Werther and his cohorts form a society of which even Benjamin Rush would approve.

Emily and Kelroy's relationship is certainly an example in which Kelroy's poetic genius helps him to forge an important social bond. The two young lovers are bound together by their shared taste and a shared understanding of the importance of aesthetic pleasure. The first expression of Kelroy and Emily's love for one another, like Alonzo and Melissa's, is set against the backdrop of aesthetic experience. Kelroy happens upon Emily by herself, having just commenced a "pathetic air" on her harp (71). Their union would carry with it the promise of the perpetuation of an ideal form of the Federalist family: the father, learned and articulate, and the mother, whose education had been united with an eye for beauty, would superintend a family perfectly capable of participating in a democratic system of governance. But his relationship with Emily is not the only strong affective relationship Kelroy forms. In *Alonzo and Melissa* it is the romantic relationship that best models how literariness can save America's prospects for independent prosperity. Finely-tuned aesthetic sensibilities gained from familiarity and

engagement with literature help citizens appreciate the land for its beauty instead of for its profitability, which leads to moral uses of land and its resources. Shared literary taste also supports strong bonds between citizens themselves, as was true with Alonzo and Melissa's relationship, and so taste contributes to the establishment of tightly-knit, affectionate communities. But, in Kelroy's case, his relationships with other men best demonstrate the advantages "genius" and aesthetic sensibility would bring to a Federalist society. This difference is best explained as a further critique of Mrs. Hammond's assumption that feminine "charms and accomplishments" offer the surest roads to social success. In his the relationships with Charles and Walsingham, Kelroy best demonstrate how genius could not only reform Federalist sociability, but also help that society participate meaningfully in a global economic and cultural system.

Kelroy's genius is not only formed and cultivated by his exposure to other nations and other cultures, it is, itself, a quality that has universal currency. The foil to the failed relationship between Walsingham, the ambassador of British trade interests, and Lucy, the American woman outfitted in all possible superficial charms, in other words, is not Kelroy and Emily's romance, but Kelroy and Walsingham's friendship. It is Walsingham who first introduces Kelroy to the Hammonds, and who most effectively advocates on Kelroy's behalf when Mrs. Hammond withholds her consent to Kelroy and Emily's marriage because of Kelroy's straightened economic circumstances (85-6, 137). Walsingham's esteem for Kelroy's "entertaining and instructive address" and his admiration of his poetry is accompanied by a thorough certainty that the same genius that inspires Kelroy's poetry also animates his business acumen. Kelroy's father, like Alonzo Haventon's father in *Alonzo and Melissa*, was ruined when his partners in a wildly speculative trading venture took advantage of him, but Walsingham urges the point that Kelroy's

own exertions have already, in part, remedied this state of affairs, and that the young poet's own natural abilities portend further successes:

> Walsingham spoke with great candour; and after giving [Mrs. Hammond} a minute account of Kelroy from their earliest acquaintance, painted in strong colours his singular perseverance and address in wresting a small part of property from the iniquitous grasp of the persons who had so deplorably misled his father; and urged the improbability that such a man would long remain unpossessed of competence at least, if not independence. (85)

Kelroy's genius has succeeded where Mrs. Hammond's aristocratic pretensions could not—his fast friendship with the novel's most influential foreigner only grows over time, while Mrs. Hammond steadily sinks in Walsingham's favor. Loving poetry, it seems, both enables and presumes a knowledge of the world that is far more productive of social and economic success than Mrs. Hammond's "worldliness."

Walsingham's confidence in the multifaceted capabilities of Kelroy's genius is born out, and in such terms that suggest not only Kelroy's ability to save his family's property, but also, in a broader sense, to reform and fortify the United States' Federalist-driven mercantile system that required relationships among a number of nations in an Atlantic trade system to remain strong. The friendship of a British nobleman, one who bore the name of the country's most famous supporter of the expansion of British trading interests, would have signified a great advantage and a solution to many problems that plagued American Federalist mercantile economy, problems that *Kelroy* certainly gestures toward. The behavior of Federalists traders themselves was not above criticism. Mr. Hammond, as we have noted, is the novel's preeminent example of a trader whose priorities are out of order with the goal of promoting the stability of an American trading economy. He lives above his means and drives his family into debt merely for the sake of an affluent lifestyle. Kelroy's own father, as Walsingham's narrative explains, also meets with his ruin because of speculative trading ventures and because he seems to have fallen in with

unethical trading partners, a situation which recalls the ruin of Alonzo Haventon's father in *Alonzo and Melissa*. The United States' mercantile economy is, then, threatened from within in *Kelroy*, but it also faces external challenges that would have made international trade risky.

Federalist trade interests, as previously discussed, were affected by conflicts in Europe, especially the war between England and France. England was hostile to any country that could still maintain trade with France, and to foreign ships bringing goods into England that would then compete with the goods of British traders. The United States' professed neutrality, in part, insulated them from some of this aggression, but the ability of American ships to turn technicalities to their advantage in order to carry on a lucrative re-export business wore on British patience. American ships could visit enemy territories, land in neutral territories like Denmark, and then visit London, where they would not be subject to embargoes against trade with hostile nations. American ships also had rights to all the same ports that British companies could claim rights to as a result of the 1795 Jay Treaty between the United States and England, so American traders could visit British ports established in foreign nations and colonies distant from English shores, and then bring goods to compete with other traders in Britain. The trade network that connected The United States, Great Britain, and colonies and protectorates in the areas that produced both raw materials and much-needed goods, like the West and East Indies, was a volatile one, and, as has already been discussed, hostilities between England and the United States had mounted because of this competition for control of Atlantic ports and markets. Kelroy, resolving to go to India, as both Charles Cathcart and Walsingham mention at various points in their defenses of Kelroy, is, quite literally, sailing into the midst of this storm. India was a trading market in which Americans did particularly well in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and they did so by disseminating its goods, predominantly cotton and

cotton goods, across an expansive array of geographical regions. Indian cotton and textiles made from it were brought back to the United States for domestic sale, worked into colorful fabrics for trade in Africa (at which point it was often exchanged for slaves), and woven into textiles for sale in Europe.[6] The one letter that does manage to make its way into Emily's hands before it is snatched up and rewritten by Mrs. Hammond and her accomplice, Mr. Marney, reports that Kelroy expects to return earlier than he originally planned because his ventures had succeeded so well: "He spoke of his prospects as favourable in the extreme, and anticipated with rapture the season of his return, which, as his business was now nearly concluded, he believed would be sooner than he had dared hope, and bade her expect him early the ensuing spring" (255). Despite the myriad difficulties of the task he undertakes, Kelroy succeeds on the global market—a result that is completely unsurprising because of his cosmopolitan worldview, his talents that seem so easily recognized by all but American socialites, and because of the ease with which he finds commonality even with Walsingham, a man with both hereditary and national interests in fending off threats to his own country's interests abroad. Temperamental? Yes. Prone to melancholy? Yes. But, in short, as Rush suggests, to be truly successful, the trader also had to be a poet.

"And shalt to heaven return": The Novel and the Fate of American Genius

As *Kelroy* begs us to understand, poetry had much to offer the United States. Rebecca Rush's definition of genius, drawn from prevailing terms of neoclassical literary criticism, cast it as a source of poetic inspiration that was both supported and cultivated by far-ranging experience

[6] For more on the United States' re-export trade and its trade relationships with India in the eighteenth century, see Furber, Bean 44, and Fichter 82-110 and 173-204.

with the cultures of many nations, and as a talent that was, in turn, admired by citizens of nations far and wide. The poet could both improve the society that drew around him in his native land, and demonstrate this society's worth on a world stage, a capability that could win him the acclaim of foreign peers, but could also ensure his economic prosperity and the stability of his home nation's mercantile interests. In Rush's world, continually wracked by the onslaught of war, if not on her native soil, then on the foreign shores of its trading partners, the merit of such a vision of poetic genius would seem not to need explanation. In the end, however, *Kelroy* communicates only a faint hope that genius will ever regain the respect and recognition it deserved in the United States.

Kelroy's friendship with Walsingham best illustrates the benefits of genius—genius, for example, can highlight affinities between the bearer and powerful international allies who may recognize it—but it is left to Charles Cathcart to explain how highly-attuned poetic sensibility and economic success depend on each other to an American audience. "Espousing the cause of [Kelroy's] fraternity," as Helen Cathcart phrases it, after the recital that so affects Kelroy, Charles spars with one of the young poet's most verbal detractors. The debate turns fairly quickly to the critique of the poet on the basis that his pursuits have no practical, financial merit. Charles begins, and is answered by the unnamed opponent:

> "But surely you will not contend that misery and imprudence are the necessary concomitants of genius."
> "Aye will I, and add poverty into the bargain; shew me one of these bright headed chaps that is rich if you can?"
> "These bright-headed chaps, as you term them, are so scarce, that I cannot show you any at present either rich or poor; but your own recollection will inform you that there have existed several whose portion of wealth was far from contemptible. —For instance, Swift, Johnson, Pope, Congreve, and many more whose names are equally familiar to you."
> "Yes, I will put Shenstone on the list:—a fellow who cut up a handsome estate into a garden, and spent his time in planting flowers, and making rhymes while he suffered his house to go to ruin over his head, and luckily died just in time to

escape jail." (43)

Ultimately, Cathcart urges his point that Kelory does not "belong to that despicable class" his interlocutor has described, "who trust to their genius for support," or, in other words, who hope to rely only on their poetry and writings for their subsistence, "but is preparing I have understood, for a voyage to the East Indies" (46). Despite Cathcart's claims that literary genius, for one, can lead to comfortable circumstances, and, furthermore, that genius's power does not extend only to words on the page, but also extends into the realms of business and economic policy—in other words, despite Chathcart's claim that the line drawn between genius and pragmatism does not, in fact, exist—his audience is not interested in reexamining their own opinion that anything more than a "common" understanding of beauty is dangerous and leads to misery (43). The debate ends with the announcement of a card game, and Cathcart's interlocutor departs, eager to gamble. Entrenched views against the valuation of poetic, literary expression held in the United States' most privileged circles do not render these circles conducive places for the genius that could save them.

Kelroy's poetry itself has, for the entirety of the novel, focused on its own fragility and ineffability. The poem that Walsingham first shows to Emily, and the one that first wins her esteem for her lover, is addressed to "poetry" itself and views the gift of poetic genius as a comforting one: "Thou, who art hopeless sorrow's friend, / And pensive love's delight, / And with affliction's gloom canst blend, / Visions serenely bright." Poetry is, nonetheless, according to these lines, a gift that should not be taken for granted, since it can always be revoked. Kelroy's verses portend that only his own death can "quench [poetry's] beaming ray" within his own breast, which would seem a hopeful prospect, but his poem's final verse suggests not that his genius will live on beyond him in the pages of cultural memory, but that its promises may be

rescinded by their initial source: "Yet soon, within its native sphere / Thy lamp again shall burn; / For thou from heaven wert banish'd here, / And shalt to heaven return" (54). Of course, Kelroy does die, abruptly, and directly after a final reminder from Rush that the stakes of his death are very high. Kelroy, in his last poem, strives to find some redemption in Emily's death by acknowledging that her memory will always live on with him: "Yet, thou shalt live within my breast, / As an angel, bright and fair, / In youth's sweet early beauties drest, / Enshrin'd and worshipp'd there" (301). For a moment, we can envision a world in which virtues and beauty of the kind that were so present while Emily lived could still be acknowledged, praised, and emulated. But this moment turns suddenly, when followed directly by a short, clipped paragraph—the novel's last, and perhaps most poignant: "Three weeks after the vessel in which he [Kelroy] had embarked, perished, together with all on board of her, in a storm; and Kelroy and his sorrows were hushed to rest in the depths of the ocean" (301). Kelroy is lost, and Emily lost again. What Kelroy's untimely death makes abundantly clear is that the literariness that is so needed to ensure the legitimacy of Federalist culture and the success of American sociability at large is on the verge of extinction. Kelroy's genius may very well have "returned to heaven," leaving far too few—certainly not Charles Cathcart's interlocutor, or the many that agreed with his harangues—to regret its absence.

The faint hope Rush does extend for the reclamation of literary sensibility in the United States is clarified only when the novel's final moments are compared to its earliest: *Kelroy*'s ending serves, at one and the same time, as the realization of potential tragedy and as the only means through which that tragedy may be avoided. Rush's preface celebrates the ability of the "love story" to "please without variety," to engender pleasurable, if melancholic aesthetic experiences "in all ages and nations." Relying on the formula of the sentimental novel in her

novel's closing pages, Rush highlights the obvious pathos of her hero's death, creating the conditions for the type of feeling, emotional reaction to her literary text that she sees as so necessary for the reformation of Federalist social practices. If Americans were loath to indulge in the pleasures of poetry, the novel's ability to pull at the reader's heartstrings—the very capability that Benjamin Rush, twenty five years before the publication of *Kelroy* had so feared—would serve to elicit their participation in the legitimate social order that Rush envisioned. Just as Isaac Mitchell's *Alonzo and Melissa* ends with a symphony of poetic description, rendered in prose to make his highly-wrought poesy seem more normative and accessible to the reader, and just as Mitchell deployed literariness in this way in order to enable the reader's participation in the constellation of relationships between citizens, land, and literature that he saw as so necessary to the success of Jeffersonian agrarianism, Rush brings her novel to a close by pointing to its gravity, but also by pointing to its literariness. If readers can sympathize not only with the pain of lovers kept apart by calculated tyranny, but also with the plight of the poet, unappreciated in his own time, then all is not lost.

Kelroy's adherence to the formula of the novel of manners, where it does adhere to this form (the genre's normally happy ending is derailed by the death of both the novel's hero and its heroine), may seem to have dark implications for the American social sphere. Just as in *Evelina*, a novel that points out the poor manners of ill-bred people in order to exalt the true claims to social power wielded by a well-born elite (Evelina marries the aristocratic Lord Orville, whose protection shields her from the shockingly poor behavior of the Braghntons and of her maternal grandmother, Madame Duval), *Kelroy* appears to condemn the failures of an ill-mannered social elite, only to prove the superiority of another form of elitism defined by highly refined taste and the capacity for appreciating aesthetic experiences. Emily, Kelroy, Helen, Charles, and

occasionally Walsingham and Dunlevy, do seem to stand apart in their appreciation of finer arts like literary texts, and they are often unsparing in their exertions to highlight the inability of other character—Marney, Mr. Mangold, Dr. Blake, and the Gurnets—to discern meaning and beauty. Cahill's analysis might again be brought to bear here, as this recreation, instead of deconstruction, of a circle of cultural elites seems to fit in with the shifting perception of genius among Federalist thinkers that he has described. While the admiration espoused for genius in Federalist newspapers was, in many ways, inclusive, assuming the ability of every man to understand or appreciate the marks of genius, it was also exclusive. Federalist discourse on genius reminded readers that not everyone could be a genius themselves, nor could everyone fully understand the merits of genius. Federalists, who from their party's very beginnings had championed the idea of a leading circle of well-educated elite, would probably not have looked askance at *Kelroy* for constructing one such circle on its own terms.

It is important to note, however, that Rebecca Rush, in turning to the novel to bring "genius" to her readers, tilts the balance Cahill describes between exclusivity and inclusivity in favor of the latter. Constructing readers as subjects who, like others in "all ages and nations" are capable of experiencing literary pleasures by relating to universally relatable "tales of love," Rush does not make distinctions: *any* reader could be capable of admiring beauty and, therefore, of taking part in a cultural practice that would improve social ties in America and bring the United States into closer harmony with partner nations around the globe. This choice to highlight the novel's accessibility may very well have been one of necessity. As *Kelroy* suggests, it was far better that too many people be brought into the project of valuing literary sensibility than too few. What Rebecca Rush recognized, then, that her contemporaries missed was how even a very well educated elite could not succeed in isolation and with very little popular

support. Rush never, in fact, entirely gives up on the idea that an educated class was crucial to the United States' growth and prosperity, but her novel perpetuates this idea only in theory. In practice, it tends only to make elitism more accessible. Any reader who laughed at the Gurnets was not, the implication reads, one of their class, and any reader who could understand Marney's or Dr. Mangold's *faux pas* was likewise more savvy than Rush's comedic suitors. *Kelroy* bears much in common with *Alonzo and Melissa*, though the two novels attempt to argue for opposite political perspectives. In the end, Rush's novel must admit that its purposes are best accomplished by defining a discriminating, sensible citizenry and then by encouraging every reader to take up his or her own place within it.

Epilogue

Novel and Nation: The Political Work of the Literary in America

What, then, did it mean to be literary in the early republican United States? And why did so many American authors and readers see, in the novel, a genre well-suited to the project of encouraging the new nation's literariness? I have argued that better answers to these questions than those that currently dominate the field of American literary studies emerge when we begin our inquiries by looking to literary-theoretical texts authored in the eighteenth century. I have also argued that two specific literary-theoretical texts, Charles Rollin's *Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres* (1732) and Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and the Belles Lettres* (1783), deserve special notice because of their popularity in eighteenth-century America, because of their thorough discursive considerations of literature's social and cultural relevance, and because they have volumes to tell twenty-first century critics about how and why literature was taken up as a matter of serious national interest in the post-Revolutionary American republic. It is in these texts that we find recorded the emergent lexicon of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American literary discourse, where salient terms such as "sensibility," "eloquence," "genius," "beauty," and "taste" were interrogated, defined, and united to a vocabulary of nation building and socio-political stabilization. In the portrayals of literariness encountered in *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), *Wieland* (1798), *Alonzo and Melissa* (1811), and *Kelroy* (1812) we find that many principles outlined in Rollin's and Blair's texts, and, indeed, the very terms Rollin and Blair use, are taken up with remarkable consistency, even over the course of a nearly twenty-five-year period of dynamism, experimentation, and growth. The same terms listed above appear with astonishing regularity in the novels studied here, and they retain the overwhelmingly

favorable connotations that they were afforded in Rollin's and Blair's texts. The literary, in the republican period, was always coded as positive. Literariness denoted morality, authenticity, naturalness, and legitimacy—a network of ideals with unimpeachable integrity.

The authors of these novels saw literary discourse, as Rollin and Blair did before them, not as an apolitical language, pleasantly detached from historical concerns and socio-political issues and useful largely as a source of entertainment, but as the structuring rationale behind an entire social order. Literary discourse mapped out a system of moderation and governance that, like republicanism at large, granted power not to a monarch but to a people. Every reading citizen, Rollin and Blair taught, could work to perfect his or her taste, and, therefore, every reading citizen could envision him or herself as a contributor to the nation's glory and to its continual forward progress. As these four novels testify, the first Americans saw deep historical, cultural, and political relevance in polite literature. The literary was a discourse that drew direct connections between the general love of beauty and the vitality and stability of the nation-state, and, because it was a discourse that emphasized the universality of aesthetic sensibility and maintained that all men and women were capable of loving beauty and therefore of acting morally, it was a discourse that seemed to predict the long-term success of societies in which laws were authorized by the combined voices of the citizens who would be governed by them. Literary discourse promised the future prosperity of the new United States would be secure if its people recognized the value of aesthetic pleasure. Citizens, in other words, could reaffirm the strength of the republic through the simple act of enjoying words on a page. To be literary was also therefore to be open to pleasures, to be moral, and, most importantly, to be a civic-minded supporter of democratic principles.

William Hill Brown, Charles Brockden Brown, Isaac Mitchell, and Rebecca Rush turn to

the genre of the novel for similar reasons. The subject matter of the sentimental novel was, of course, an important aspect of the genre's appeal. The conceit of the romantic love story that appeared so often in the pages of European sentimental novels published before the United States declared its independence could be, as the four novels studied here prove, easily modified to picture couples drawn together not by shared passion but by shared taste. The novel, already designed to tug at heartstrings by showing young people in love, was easily refashioned into a genre that promoted a love for beauty at large by portraying aesthetic engagement as just as compelling and viscerally captivating as romantic intimacy. These four authors, however, also turned to the novel for its formal attributes. The novel told stories of relatable, human characters in familiar environments and everyday settings, and it relied on the manageable and accessible medium of prose rather than overly stylized poetic verse. The novel could stand apart from the beauties and pleasures it described, moderating any too-close engagement with aesthetic pleasures by appearing, always, in the end, "real." Thus, William Hill Brown's Worthy could meditate on his friend Harrington's effusive poetic outbursts with measured commentary, Charles Brockden Brown could paint his heroine, Clara, as a flawed but believable woman instead of a paragon of transcendent virtue, and Isaac Mitchell and Rebecca Rush could each assume the novel to be a safe vehicle through which to draw readers into communities governed by taste and genius.

By and large, then, *The Power of Sympathy*, *Wieland*, *Alonzo and Melissa*, and *Kelroy* share a number of unifying similarities. There are, nonetheless, also certain subtle differences in how the literary is approached in each novel that must be attended to. One set of differences is perhaps most apparent when comparing the works of William Hill Brown and Charles Brockden Brown. The former was an unhesitating champion of neoclassical literary discourse and believed

unwaveringly in its ability to provide the nascent republic with socio-political stability and cultural identity. The latter, unafraid to play devil's advocate even against the beliefs he most cherished, examined the position that neoclassical literariness was just another carryover from aristocratic Europe and that literary study could not, in fact, support the aims of a democratic society. Charles Brockden Brown adopts the tenets of neoclassical discourse and reintroduces its terms in *Wieland*'s pages only after subjecting these tenets to extreme scrutiny. Taken together, however, there is an apparent restlessness in both *The Power of Sympathy* and in *Wieland*. These novels took up the project of forging linkages connecting the concepts of beauty, taste, and national development and testing these linkages for weakness. They also worked to provide readers with an illustration of how literariness could relate to their lives as American citizens and participants in a political experiment then taking place on an unprecedented scale in the 1790s. Both William Hill Brown and Charles Brockden Brown wrote sentimental plots with underlying arguments in favor of promoting literariness as a core American value. It was their task, in other words, to prove the merits of the literary in a republican context and to bring into being several works that would start an American literary canon, but it was also left to them to establish that literature was, in short, American.

Literariness had achieved a slightly different status, however, by the time Isaac Mitchell and Rebecca Rush penned their novels just as the first decade of the nineteenth century had come to a close. In both *Alonzo and Melissa* and *Kelroy*, the connections that bound literary discourse to the project of building an American nation had solidified. One result of this solidification was that the language of literary discourse had come to serve almost as a shorthand for claims to political legitimacy. Taste was equated automatically not just with moral virtue, but also with a superior capacity to wield political authority. Authors no longer had to make a case for the

literary, to assert that, if Americans could accept the worth of literary study, the safety and longevity of the republic would follow as a matter of course. Rather, by 1811, literariness had become an immediate signifier of authenticity and virtuous intent, a discourse whose merit was automatically assumed. Mitchell and Rush were left not to justify the literary, but, rather, to justify how and why their respective political platforms were indeed more literary than other political ideologies. The surest way to promote either Democratic-Republicanism or Federalism was to reveal how well either the one party or the other's principles matched up with the tenets of neoclassical literary theory. Thus, Democratic-Republicans and Federalists both laid claim to taste and portrayed themselves as lovers of beauty and of polite literature. As the United States had embarked on its third decade, literature had become not just nationalized, but politicized as well.

A second result of the consolidation of the ties between literary and political discourse that took place in the nearly two and a half decades between the publication of *The Power of Sympathy*, in 1789, and the appearance of *Alonzo and Melissa* and *Kelroy* just before the start of the War of 1812 was that it became possible to see literariness as an agent of reform. Mitchell, for his part, displays every confidence that literary sensibility can ensure that Jeffersonian agrarianism will not only be adopted in name, by entrepreneurial men who aim to get rich while still maintaining, as Colonel Bloomfield does, the guise of the "plain Connecticut farmer," but also in spirit, by a generation of Americans who appreciate the land for its beauty as well as for the economic stability it provides. Rebecca Rush, likewise, finds in literary sensibility that which can correct the ascendant flaws in Federalist society, arguing that, were Americans more appreciative of poetry as a legitimate, meaningful cultural enterprise, they would not be so interested in recreating the superficialities and ornament of European societies.

Both Mitchell and Rush also view the literary as a discourse that can address the longstanding and increasingly alarming concerns about the United States' relationships with other nations that wielded great power over the state of global trade. On the eve of the War of 1812, as hostilities among nations mounted and the United States realized that it could not disentangle itself from the complicated network of allegiances that governed the Atlantic world, Mitchell and Rush each brought forward literariness as the key to remaking relations with European powers. The perception of aesthetic pleasure's universal, inviolable appeal allowed both Mitchell and Rush to present this pleasure as a touchstone that could wear away political differences between the United States and the European nations with which it shared Atlantic trade interests. The aim of both author's works is not only to identify and expose the shortcomings and inadequacies of the current state of cultural and economic affairs in the United States, but also to show how literature and a deep respect for literary taste can, in fact, correct the problems America faced. Reform and response had become literature's goals by the time the United States was plunged into the War of 1812, a stark departure, especially, from Brockden Brown's philosophy that literature needed only to "illustrate the moral constitution of man" in order to be considered meaningful.

Given that the literary was assumed to perform the same type of work in both *Alonzo and Melissa* and *Kelroy*, it is not surprising that the genre of the novel also assumes a similar function in both Mitchell's and Rush's hands. For each, the sentimental novel becomes the interpreter of high aesthetic experience. The novel could make "genius" available to everyone, thereby granting every reader the opportunity to participate in reclaiming America's original republican ideals and in constructing a culture that could take part in a broader global community. William Hill Brown first proposed that the sentimental novel might be the next step in the evolution of

the epic poem and that the novel communicated the same pathos and heroism ancient epics did. Mitchell and Rush call upon the sentimental novel's ability to produce pathos and to create the conditions for aesthetic experiences, but they also emphasize the novel's ability to speak to every reader, regardless of, in Rush's terms, "age or nation." By 1811, the novel did not just create beauty, it modeled how that beauty could be incorporated into everyday domestic life, the practice of which comprises most of the action in *Kelroy* and *Alonzo and Melissa*. Characters make visits, sit in conversation, reflect on the day's occurrences in the comfort of their own homes, and make decisions about life events, like marriage and profession, but are not shown charging through battlefields, engaged in hand to hand combat, or accomplishing grandiose military feats as they would in the classical epics that were usually looked to for examples of virtue and heroism. The novel promoted the importance of poetic ornament and aesthetic pleasure, but it also rendered these qualities in the accessible medium of prose and used the commonplace formula of the love story to elicit the important literary reactions that it saw as so valuable to the United States' cultural life.

Alonzo and Melissa and *Kelroy*, then, did set the stage for Emerson's definition of genius as a simultaneously inclusive and exclusive capacity, one that all men could access, but also one that not many men did, in fact, recognize within themselves.[1] Like Emerson, both Mitchell and Rush argue, implicitly, that one of man's most pressing problems was that he would not realize his own genius to the extent to which he was capable. But, in assuming the novel's purview to be that of constructing a national identity, and in their deliberate use of the sentimental novel not only for national, but overtly political, party-oriented ends, *Alonzo and Melissa* and *Kelroy* both

[1] See Chapter 4, 168-9 for my earlier discussion of the linkages Cahill has posited between Federalist criticism and Emerson's aesthetic theory.

also set the stage for Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the novel that typified the type of social activist platform that Emerson could never comfortably and explicitly adopt. Jane Tompkins, Eric Sundquist, Elizabeth Ammons and many others have successfully asserted *Uncle Tom*'s right to be studied in the American canon, arguing that Stowe's use of sentimentalism and reliance on the sentimental novel—a genre Stowe herself was prone to dismiss as "light" literature[2]—demonstrates a brilliance that rivals that of Emerson, Hawthorne, and Melville in the way that it mobilizes familiar, feminine tropes to further the cause of abolitionism in the 1850s and 1860s.[3] The guiding assumption of Stowe's *Uncle Tom*, that literature's first object was the moral health of the nation, is certainly derived from eighteenth-century literary discourse. For Stowe to believe that the novel could practicably be expected to wield sentiment as a political tool in the fight against slavery, she had to subscribe to Charles Rollin's and Hugh Blair's axiom that literary sensibility was directly related to the political, economic, and cultural health of any society.

Several essential steps, however, were effected between Rollin and Blair on the one side and Stowe on the other to make the lineage between neoclassical literary theory and the

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[2] Barbara Hochman discusses how Stowe used “scenes of reading” in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* both to promote black literacy and to “disarm a resistance to fiction” that she, herself, understood because she had also been one to warn about the dangers of “light” reading (78).

[3] As I have discussed elsewhere, Jane Tompkins led the charge to introduce *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to the critical conversation of the American Renaissance in *Sensational Designs* (1985). Eric Sundquist has advanced our study of *Uncle Tom* in editing *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1985), in which he argues that the novel's feminist scholarship, which enthusiastically celebrates Stowe's achievement, should be complemented with some consideration for the stereotyping that affected the representation of Stowe's black characters and was, in turn, perpetuated by the novel's popularity: “Any reformation of the canon of American literature that sets out to give *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the place it deserves,” writes Sundquist, “cannot afford to take lightly, much less ignore altogether, such problems in the book itself or in the cultural images it has engendered” (4). Elizabeth Ammons, who has also authored many scholarly works on Stowe's texts, edited, with Susan Belasco, the collection *Approaches to Teaching Stowe's* Uncle Tom's Cabin (2000), which provides an array of methods through which Stowe's work and the work of modern scholars can be brought into the classroom most effectively.

nineteenth-century American political novel possible. William Hill Brown and Charles Brockden Brown knew the United States needed literature to survive as a definable culture, but Isaac Mitchell and Rebecca Rush understood, further even than this, that literary pleasure was also political—it could not only illuminate and describe, but also intervene in questions of domestic and economic policy. Emerson and Harriet Beecher Stowe are, still, accorded similar status for different reasons. Even Jane Tompkins is quick to assert that "the work of sentimental writers is complex and significant in ways other than those that characterize the established masterpieces," and that elevating Stowe's reputation need not come at the cost of the reputations of the traditional canonical authors of the American Renaissance (Tompkins 127). Yet, Emerson, his fellow New England authors, Stowe, and her fellow sentimentalists all owe a debt to *The Power of Sympathy* and to *Wieland* for establishing the currency of literariness as a national ideal and to *Alonzo and Melissa* and *Kelroy* for promoting literature as, at one and the same time, the province of genius and an agent of change.

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