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Early American self-reflexive writing: revising the tradition

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EARLY AMERICAN SELF-REFLEXIVE WRITING:
REVISING THE TRADITION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by
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Abstract

This study focuses on self-reflexivity in early American texts. This self-reflexivity demonstrates that these early American authors were attempting to define “American fiction” and were participating in a new literary tradition that was developing simultaneously with the development of the new country. After the introduction, Chapter One lays the groundwork for my study by exploring current views of these texts and what led to these views. Chapter Two explores the difficulties facing post-Revolutionary authors and their reactions to these obstacles as reflected in their prefaces and their other writings. I show the way these authors self-consciously respond to the opposition to novels in more nuanced ways and less defensively than is generally acknowledged. In the remaining chapters, I explore the self-reflexivity in the novels themselves. In Chapter Three, I consider three novels by Charles Brockden Brown – *Wieland* (1798), *Arthur Mervyn* (1799/1800), and *Edgar Huntly* (1799) – novels that explore the nature of the American novel in different ways. In Chapter Four, I analyze *The Coquette* (1797), *Charlotte Temple* (1794), and *Ormond* (1799), to show the ways Hannah Foster, Susanna Rowson, and Brockden Brown subvert the sentimental tradition in order to explore characters as a literary element, to embrace a solidarity among readers, and to focus on a theme of language and writing rather than present a didactic moral. Chapter Five analyzes Royall Tyler’s *The Algerine Captive* (1797), Tabitha Tenney’s *The Female Quixotism* (1797), and Hugh Henry Brackdenridge’s *Modern Chivalry* (1815). The authors of these novels use self-reflexivity and humor in order to satirize and mock the state of American literary culture at the time. While each chapter focuses on different works and views them from different angles, they all extend my argument that these early novelists are working self-consciously toward developing a definition of “American fiction” as they are writing. If we reconsider these works in light of their self-reflexive moments

then we begin to see that they are much more than harbingers of literature to come but worthy to be considered part of the American literary tradition in their own stead.

Introduction. Self-Reflexivity: Flexing the Boundaries

American authors who were writing during the days of the newly formed Republic were often grappling with questions of national identity and nationalism and what it meant to be an American and what it meant to be writing fiction during this time. The construction of national identity and nationalism is also Benedict Anderson's focus in his groundbreaking work, *Imagined Communities*. He argues for a cultural consideration for the rise of nationalism, and in many respects, addresses the same concerns these early American authors did. Anderson says that nationalism is less about political ideology than it is about cultural realities: "nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind" (4). One of his arguments is that nationalism can be gained through an "imagined community" that begins by a simultaneous reading of a newspaper (35-36). The focus of his analysis centers on newspapers because of the nature of the serial printing and the specific time frame in which a newspaper is generally read. Anderson suggests that this "imagined community" through this simultaneous reading has a unifying effect on the people, leading to a sense of nationalism or national identity.

Judith Sargent Murray's *The Gleaner* reveals another dimension to consider in the search for a definition of American identity or American nationalism. Like many authors during this time period, Murray is demonstrating, through the writing of *The Gleaner*, that an American identity was still under construction, and fiction was instrumental in the process of developing this sense of nationalism and identity. This nationalism included a range of multiple and flexible identities, often an identity that is not unified. Fiction, and especially self-reflexive fiction, self-consciously calls attention to this disunity. Since many of the installments of her works were initially published serially, they would appear to support Anderson's argument about "imagined" simultaneity. However, my analysis will show that Murray's work offers an alternative to the

idea of simultaneous reading as the impetus for the rise in nationalism because her work, with its different readers interpreting and reacting in different ways to that reading, demonstrates the inventedness of this identity.

Murray wrote a series of articles from the viewpoint of the Gleaner, a fictional, male narrator, and initially published them in the *Massachusetts Magazine*. This regular column ran from 1792 to 1794, and from these articles, a story about Margaretta emerged, revealing a fictional narrative about the process of becoming an American and what it means to be an American. In 1796, Murray began the work of publishing these pieces (along with additional material that she had written) in a three volume text, titled *The Gleaner*.¹ This text includes not only the essays that were published in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, but it also includes a dedication to President John Adams, a preface to the reader, historical sketches, essays, poetry, plays, and a conclusion. In this work, Murray finally divulged her identity as the author of the original pieces by attributing the work “to ‘Constantia,’ the pen name by which Murray was locally well known” (Baym, Introduction ix). As with many of the early American writers, her work lapsed into obscurity, and until recently, had “slipped from the mind of the literary nation she helped promote” (Baym, Introduction ix).

Only three fairly recent editions of Murray’s work have been published: Nina Baym wrote an introduction for a reissue of *The Gleaner* in 1992; Sharon M. Harris published *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray* in 1995; and Sheila Skemp published *Judith Sargent Murray: A Brief Biography with Documents* in 1998. As her editing practices suggest, Harris applies an inflexible definition to both “fiction” and “American” and imposes those definitions on Murray and her works. In her edition, Harris makes some assumptions and editorial decisions about Murray’s text that are not supported by Murray’s own publication. We notice this practice

especially in Harris's deletion of the self-reflexive pieces, which reveal Murray's attempts at working through the problem of defining "fiction" and "American." In other words, applying a fixed, inflexible definition of fiction to Murray's work ignores her attempts at working through these definitions. Harris publishes several of Murray's essays and letters and then lists the *Story of Margaretta* in the table of contents, referring to this story as a novella in her introduction.² Harris says that "the *Story of Margaretta* begins with the second essay in the *Massachusetts Magazine*" (xxvi), and that "[i]n volume one of *The Gleaner* the *Story of Margaretta* constitutes chapters 2, 7-8, 20-21, 28-29" (xxvin1). Unfortunately, Harris's editorial decisions in terms of which texts to include and exclude in her edition, are not clear; these decisions, however, appear to be based primarily on her determination of what constitutes the plot of the "novella." As is evident, Harris's assumptions that this work can stand alone as a novella radically veer from Murray's own publishing record.

Only through an analysis of all the essays originally published in the *Massachusetts Magazine* or Volume I of *The Gleaner* can we begin to understand how Murray self-consciously attempted to define fiction and what it meant to be an American.³ This analysis must begin with the fictional narrator. The Gleaner, who narrates the series of essays published in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, introduces himself in the first letter and then introduces us to Murray's ideas about fiction and the meaning she attaches to being an American. Like Murray, his creator (as she says in her preface to *The Gleaner*), the Gleaner has a desire to write and "an insatiable thirst for applause" (Letter I).⁴ He reports that he expends time and energy considering what he will call himself or what his pen name will be. He then details at length the nature of his writing preparation. As a gleaner, he says that he cannot be charged with plagiarism because it is his job to "collect" (Letter I). Accordingly, his writing is "ransack[ed]" from various settings and

“explore[d].” It may take “a hint from one, an idea from another,” may “aim at improvement upon a sentence from a third,” and has different “texture[s].” Together, these practices explain and justify the rationale the author has employed to write the column he is proposing to the magazine (Letter 1).

Margaretta’s story, which emerges from the Gleaner’s pieces and the attendant paratexts⁵ in Volume I of *The Gleaner*, serves as a good example of a representative American text during those developmental days of the new country because it has all of the elements of fiction, such as characters, setting, theme, and plot; it self-consciously explores the idea of being an American; and it teaches Americans how to be an American. The text clearly demonstrates, however, how fraught an attempted definition of both terms of the phrase “American fiction” must remain. Her work shows that fiction is not always discernible from its non-fictional counterparts, and being an American version of this literature blurs these lines even more. While fiction is often defined as a counterpoint to non-fiction, defining fiction closely requires more nuance than simply referring to it as not factual. Defining what an American is becomes an even more difficult endeavor.

Americans are conventionally considered to be those people who live within the geographic boundaries of the United States, but Murray’s work implies that these different groups of people do not fit together as seamlessly as the geographic boundary may imply. Murray’s text helps to show that being an American partially means recognizing porous boundaries and differences among the various people. For example, in the second published letter,⁶ the Gleaner begins his story by traveling to South Carolina. This movement first of all suggests the porous nature of the borders among the states that went from individual self-governed colonies to states that are being integrated into the United States as a whole. Even

though South Carolina is part of that United States, the Gleaner – an educated northerner – can only “[imagine] the inhabitants of South Carolina” (Harris 156) as if a person from South Carolina is a different type of person from himself. He decides to visit that state with his wife, and during his trip, he is guided by a “patriotic exiled citizen of Charleston” (Harris 156). The Gleaner uses this unnamed, but nonetheless identified guide to teach him about other people in the country and to illustrate that being an American may not require having a homogenous identity. First of all, as the Gleaner states, this guide is a patriot (albeit an exiled one for unnamed reasons). He is also a citizen of the United States of America and of the state of South Carolina, but he is particularly a citizen of the city of Charleston. Through this guide, the Gleaner raises the issue of Americanness and the multiple identities that are not mutually exclusive that come together to create this nation. In another example, in Letter IV, the Gleaner takes “a tour [...] of] a neighboring state” – again suggesting the porous boundaries but also underscoring his lack of knowledge of another state within the United States. The Gleaner suggests that his goal of learning about his fellow countrymen serves a dual purpose: to help him as an educator who teaches the ways of becoming an American and to help him as an author who writes the ways of articulating an American text.

According to the Gleaner, being an American also means having certain virtues. These virtues are first portrayed by and exemplified in President John Adams, to whom Murray dedicates *The Gleaner*. She writes this dedication to our only elected Federalist President, eleven days after his inauguration. In the dedication, Murray mentions the following virtues, which she attributes to Adams: “candour,” a “noble mind,” “philanthropic manners,” “genius, elevated by virtues and unimpeached integrity, adorned by literature, elegance and taste,” and “wisdom and magnanimity.” The Gleaner reiterates these virtues in Letter IV, published during Adams’s

tenure as the Vice-President. Another virtue that Murray identifies in the dedication is that of “guardian” – a role that the Gleaner is also entrusted with when given guardianship of Margareta. The Gleaner also implies that everyone will soon learn those virtues – presumably through reading his text and through “enlightened parents” (Letter IV) who read this work and follow its path. As guardians, both President Adams and the Gleaner represent that parent, and while Adams will look out for the good of the country, the Gleaner looks out for Margareta, other characters in the narrative, and even readers of his story.

Much of what can be “gleaned” from Murray’s work about her thoughts on American identity and fiction are most evident in those pieces that do not directly present the story of Margareta, such as the previously mentioned dedication to President Adams, the preface to the reader, and the Gleaner’s first letter.⁷ The other pieces, including those in which the Gleaner creates possibly fictional readers, depict the thematic issues of the work as a whole and demonstrate Murray’s self-conscious attempts at writing an American text. One of those readers discusses the story of Margareta as a fictional text and suggests that a novelist “[m]ight be productive of the highest utility” (Letter VI) especially since many people might ignore the essayist. However, another reader discusses the fact that the breaks between episodes about Margareta might occur because the Gleaner is afraid “of giving to his productions the air of a novel” and that everyone knows “what a frivolous point of view, the novelist, at this present, stands” (Letter VI).⁸ Similar to comments that many recent critics make about other authors of the time, Sheila L. Skemp says that Murray “shared the prevailing prejudice against most fiction” (6) and “refused even to entertain the notion that the story of Margareta was little more than a thinly disguised novel. Like many novelists, she implied that hers was a true story, not a work of

fiction” (100). However, there is no indication throughout any of the works that Murray or the Gleaner shares those views about fiction or novels in particular.

These readers, geographically speaking, are primarily American and provide a means for the Gleaner to point out the various identities in America. They also provide a way for him (and, less directly, Murray) to instruct those readers on the way to assume those identities and become an American. One of the first readers is Margaretta, who, though born English, is given to an American couple, the Gleaner and his wife. They then provide her with instruction on being an American and raise her to be one. Additional readers include a seafaring man, a pretentious but uneducated young lady, a rake, and other readers of various classes and backgrounds. The seagoing man compares his life to navigating a ship and believes that the Gleaner’s story of Margaretta provides a good example in directing him and his wife in raising their own daughter. He is upset because the story has been interrupted,⁹ and he and his wife will not read anymore unless the Gleaner resumes his narration of Margaretta’s story. The pretentious young lady is not allowed to read the Gleaner’s plays and novels, but her parents will allow her to read this serialized story. Presumably, they believe the Margaretta story has some value that the other writings do not. But, she too is disappointed in the interruptions. Another woman is anxiously awaiting new episodes because she plans to “shape her future conduct” on Margaretta’s (Letter VI). Still another reader is angry because the story has been interrupted, but she remarks that the Gleaner can make it up to him by giving him some land and allowing him to marry Margaretta. The Gleaner mentions other readers throughout the text and often includes their comments that he overhears or the letters that they write. One of the most important readers, however, is not an American, but is Margaretta’s father, who is an Englishman and reads the Gleaner’s column while in England at the house of another Englishman. During his reading, Margaretta’s father

discovers that his daughter is still alive and in need of assistance; through his intervention, he influences the conclusion of Margareta's story. These fictional readers highlight the multiple identities that can be claimed and learned, emphasizing the disunity even among people reading the same text, presumably at the same time. These readers are also characters that find their way into literature: for example, the rake, the novel-reading young girl, the parents who look toward (or decidedly away from) the literature of the time.

The letters from these fictional readers add a different element to Anderson's notions about the rise of nationalism as a result of the simultaneous reading. The Gleaner's audience is reading the serialized version and presumably could be reading the articles at the same time. However, the different readers that respond to the text, the different interpretations of the text, and the different actions taken upon reading the text reveal a disunity among these people rather than the unity that Anderson would suggest. These readers are learning what it means to be an American, yet, as is evident, they understand what that concept means by drawing different conclusions from a range of varying experiences into this definition. So while the Gleaner (and Murray) envision the text as one that readers will turn to for instruction¹⁰ about what an American is and how to become one, each reader, in reality, gains a different lesson from the text – not quite the nationalism that Anderson describes, but a nationalism nonetheless – one wrapped in multiple, flexible identities, not certain, coherent ones.

Many authors during the days of the early Republic were writing self-reflexive novels that focused on their status as artifacts and ensured that the reader remained fully aware of these works as a pieces of writing.¹¹ Like many self-reflexive novels, *The Gleaner* directly addresses the reader on multiple occasions. For example, in Letter III, the Gleaner says, “The reader will remember that at the time of this confab, the second number of the Gleaner was not written,” and

“Behold me then, gentle reader” (Harris 196). This kind of direct address creates a more intimate connection with the reader. This intimate connection is part of the focus of Jennifer Desiderio’s argument in her analysis of the serialized version. Analyzing the third letter, in which the Gleaner (who is unknown to Margaretta) and Margaretta have a conversation, Desiderio says that “[t]he conversation between parent and child stands in for that between periodical author and reader, demonstrating the intimate interaction that Murray desires with her reader” (4). While it is true, as Desiderio suggests, that in the periodical form Murray through the Gleaner desires that “intimate interaction,” I would add that the complete edition of *The Gleaner* makes exactly the same point. The conversations that Desiderio refers to are not the only means that Murray uses to create an interaction. The Gleaner also addresses the readers, not just other characters. This interaction also provides a way for the Gleaner to instruct the readers on how to become and be that American, and by targeting his readers, he helps shape the notion of what being an American means. While Murray uses *The Gleaner* to explore disunity, she also is writing this fiction as a way of constructing the very identity that she is exploring, and creating a bond with readers (whether fictional or otherwise) is one way to help construct this identity.

Another self-reflexive technique that Murray uses is to refer directly to her text, allowing her to critique her own work in her preface, in her sketches and essays, and even within the novel. For example, in the second letter, the Gleaner is attempting to answer the question of who Margaretta is, but the Gleaner says that he wants to sidetrack into a description of his trip to South Carolina. He acknowledges, however, that “were [he] not hasting to give a solution to the reader’s question” (Harris 156), he would try to provide those descriptions and thus leaves open the possibility of providing those descriptions in the future. He often acknowledges that he has written too much: “But not to dwell longer upon a subject, on which it will perhaps be thought I

have already too much enlarged” (Harris 158), and on several occasions, he mentions the fact that a periodical publication limits how much he is allowed to write. He ends most chapters with a reference to the text – either a reference to what has been written or what will be written (or both) and often in the form of a critique: “But it may be proper to refer the opening of a new, and important scene, to a separate essay; and we shall proceed to bring forward the appropriate number, with all possible dispatch” (Harris 170). This ability to self-critique makes Murray’s work an important one to study according to Harris, who says that it “allowed Murray to critique her own novel as she was writing it” (Harris xxvi).¹² These direct references to the text are another way of addressing the reader but also are a way of reminding the reader of the status of the text as a text. The most prominent self-reflexive moments in the text, however, are in the attendant essays, or paratexts, that are part of *The Gleaner*. These paratexts include the dedication, Murray’s preface, the introduction of the Gleaner, and the fictional letters from the various readers of the novella, which have all been discussed. In all these instances of self-reflexivity, we see Murray working her way through the definitional problem of writing an American fiction that also explores what it means to be an American.

While Murray’s work is difficult to label and classify, the fictional attributes of *The Gleaner* such as character, plot, setting, and theme make this an ideal text for demonstrating Murray’s exploration of the way fiction was being defined. The fact that Murray wrestles with the definitional problems of what it means to be an American at the same time that she creates and instructs those very Americans prompts me to consider the nature of this nationalism. She examines fiction and Americanness using various self-reflexive techniques that further emphasize the definitional problems in this text and help her create, critique, and revise these definitions as she writes.

Numerous other early American authors also employed the literary technique of self-reflexivity for much the same purposes as Murray. The self-reflexivity reveals a self-conscious awareness on the part of these early American authors that they were attempting to create and define American fiction and, in turn, define American identity. They discovered, like Murray, that being an American is an invented, constructed identity that cannot be defined with certainty unless that definition includes multiple and flexible facets. These authors were striving towards developing this American literature at the same time they were struggling with it. They had no name for it yet; they had no school of literary theory developed yet. They were wandering in a new wilderness, as we see it figured in one of the novels, much like what the country was doing at the same time in other fields of discourse such as the debates over the Constitution. Like Murray, some authors are self-consciously adapting traditional forms in unique ways. Some authors are actually exploring the nature and characteristics of these novels through the writing of self-reflexive novels, and some authors are using humor in order to reflect on what is happening within this new tradition. This study is different in that no one has done any full-length study of self-reflexivity in early American novels, and no one has done any extended analysis of the self-reflexive moments in specific works.

After my first chapter explains this general argument in more detail, Chapter 2 focuses on the prefaces of several early American novels to analyze these definitional issues. Prefaces are inherently self-reflexive and, according to the research discussed in this chapter, “control” the reading of the entire text. I discuss the way these authors self-consciously respond to the opposition to novels in more nuanced ways and less defensively than is generally acknowledged. I discuss the way these authors show a wide range of literary knowledge that includes an understanding of and employment of other literary elements and a familiarity with literary

standards that move beyond a focus on a verifiable event. I also discuss how these authors plead for a sympathetic understanding and, like Murray, attempt to create a bond of common identity between the character and the reader, more than they preach a didactic and judgmental moral to the reader. Lastly, I argue that the authors in my study embrace fiction in spite of much opposition to it during that time. These prefaces also reveal an awareness of writing an American text while simultaneously attempting to define what it means to be an American, as their focus is on American subjects, stories, characters. After this analysis of the prefaces, the remaining chapters explore many of these same issues in several early American novels.

In Chapter 3, I look at three novels by Charles Brockden Brown that are self-consciously about writing fiction in the new country and the opposition to fiction. Brown explores the question of whether novels are inherently bad as some critics of the time maintained, especially their contention that novels tell lies. He also explores metaphorically the unique wilderness of the emerging American novel through a focus on a literal wilderness. As discussed in Chapter 2, what we learn after analyzing these works is Brown's sense that the story he is trying to tell is undefined and requires a new form – the American novel, which is beginning to emerge in the new nation.

Chapter 4 focuses on early American novels by Hannah Foster, Susannah Rowson, and Brown that in many ways fit within the tradition of the sentimental novel. The chapter explores these same issues of writing fiction in the new country and the opposition to fiction, but the self-reflexive moments explored here reveal that while these novels in many ways fit within the sentimental novel tradition, they also challenge that tradition from within through adaptations of character, plot, and theme to explore characters as a literary element, to embrace a solidarity among readers, and to focus on a theme of language and writing rather than present a didactic

moral. I also examine the ways these authors embrace their fiction as the best form in which to tell their stories.

Chapter 5 explores the humor that is revealed by the self-reflexivity and the explicit commentary these authors are making about the state of literature as it is developing within the new country. While the authors studied in my earlier chapters are trying in different ways to work within this developing tradition to create novels that are part of the American culture, the authors in this chapter do not find these efforts to be very successful. They are making a commentary on the state of the literature and finding it lacking especially in its attempts to be an American literature – much like many of the critics of the time and later. They are not opposed to the novel form as many contemporary critics of the time were. Instead, they are poking fun at the feeble, uncertain attempts at creating and defining an American novel and using humor and satire, which is inherently self-reflexive, to make their point.

Leonard Tennenhouse has recently asked “Is There an Early American Novel?” and suggests we need to look at “the possibility that the [early American novels] may not fit any preconceived notion of what story an American must tell” (5-6). He also argues that recent studies show that the early American authors “undermine[d] ... the premise that the truth of the new United States can be told in a single, internally coherent narrative” (8). Tennenhouse’s argument is compelling when viewed in light of the authors in my study. Their works show that early American fiction does not tell a single story that incorporates a simple definition of what it means to be an American and what it means to be an American fiction, but rather these works reveal that multiple stories are being created. While only addressing Murray’s work in her analysis, Desiderio’s characterization of Murray’s column in the *Massachusetts Magazine* describes the other works in this study as well: “a type of trunk, a repository that stored her

various authorial identities, readers, and projects” (Desiderio 10). In Murray’s work, the authorial identities include the Gleaner and Constantia; the readers include an eclectic mix of people from a married couple to a young lady; and the projects include an exploration of fiction, Americanness, and writing American fiction. I would add to Desiderio’s characterization by suggesting that Murray’s work, whether in serial form or in *The Gleaner*, and the other authors’ works provide this “trunk” or “repository” because they have incorporated various genres, characters, themes, and settings in their writing, which parallel the variety of people and identities in America at the time and noted by Tennenhouse in retrospect. In a similar argument to Anderson’s, Desiderio contends that “[o]nly through the vehicle of the periodical is Murray able to foster a communal and interactive space in order to ensure that harmony and union of the new American republic” (22). While it is true that authors even through fiction are attempting to claim “a communal and interactive space,” I would suggest that what the fictions prove is that there is very little “harmony and union” in the new American Republic, especially in the sense of any single American identity. The novel, especially a self-reflexive novel, with all its strengths and weaknesses, emphasizes and explores the disunity that results from their attempts at defining fiction and American identity – definitions that prove to be elusive but definitions they keep attempting to create and identity.

End Notes

¹ The story of Margareta that emerges from *The Gleaner* primarily is contained in Volume I, although Margareta reappears a couple of times in Volume II and III.

² Even Baym, in her introduction, refers to the story about Margareta as a “lengthy, complicated narrative, a serialized sentimental novella” and then provides the same chapter numbers as Harris does (x). Skemp, on the other hand, includes fifteen pieces of Murray’s writing and labels three of the pieces as fiction in the table of contents. She does not present these pieces as a coherent work in the way that Harris does, calling them instead part of the “Margareta series” (138).

³ In addition to helping create and define Americanness, the Gleaner and *The Gleaner* bring to light the difficulties in defining and classifying fiction, a point that the work of Skemp's and Harris's editions also highlight. For example, Skemp and Harris have both classified some of the Gleaner's pieces as essays but others as fiction.

⁴ Murray addresses her ambitions in this preface by saying that she has a "*ruling passion*, a fondness to stand well in the opinion of the world" and that this passion has "operated powerfully upon [her] ambition."

⁵ According to Gérard Genette, paratexts are an "accompanying productions" (1). Besides prefaces, paratexts include illustrations, epigrams, and other title page information to name a few examples. For a more complete discussion of paratexts, see Chapter 2.

⁶ This letter is what Harris and Baym presume is the first chapter of the novella.

⁷ These pieces are the ones that Harris has left out when presenting her version of the story of Margareta as a stand-alone novella.

⁸ While Murray presents the letters from the readers as being real readers and real letters, her narrator refers to one of the regular correspondents as being a "fanciful correspondent" (Harris 167), which could be read as a description of either an imaginative or a fictional character.

⁹ Ironically, some of these interruptions that these readers are complaining about are caused by these very letters to the Gleaner.

¹⁰ She hopes that young readers just "entering the career of life" will turn "to a *New Book*, to an *American Author*," in order to "become useful in the destined journey of life." This note in her preface suggests that she views her text as a primer on what it takes to become an American as if becoming an American is a career.

¹¹ This self-reflexive writing is in contrast to the Puritan tradition of self-reflective writing, which maintained a spiritual focus on the author's contemplation of self and the insights gained from a self-study.

¹² While I disagree with Harris's terminology of calling Margareta's story a novel, I agree with her assessment that Murray's text about Margareta is important to study.

Chapter 1. Self- Reflexivity: What is Literary about the Early American Novel?

A cursory glance through numerous American literature reading lists reveals a proliferation of authors after the Revolutionary War, in addition to Judith Sargent Murray, such as Charles Brockden Brown, Susannah Rowson, and Hugh Henry Brackenridge, who employ self-reflexive strategies in their works. In general terms, self-reflexive fiction, or metafiction, is fiction that is about itself – that refers to its own existence within the text. Patricia Waugh defines self-reflexive texts as fiction “which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact [sic] in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (7). Similarly, Linda Hutcheon defines self-reflexive fiction, which she calls narcissistic, as “fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity” (1). According to Hutcheon, one unique aspect of self-reflexive fiction is its focus on the reader because many of the self-reflexive techniques are used in order to reach out to the reader and bring the reader into the text. With few exceptions, many readers believe that self-reflexive fiction is new – that this fiction is a phenomenon that came about in the 1950s-1960s with the arrival of such writers as Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, and others. However, if we look at the fiction of the early Republic, we discover similar self-reflexive tendencies in its fiction. Like those used by Murray, these metafictional techniques include directly addressing the reader either through prefaces or within the text of the novel, framing devices, and continual references to the text of the novel by the narrator.

While some recent critics recognize the use of these strategies in these early works, they generally do not discuss at length their function and often categorize the strategies as techniques of an immature writer. Raymond Federman is one of the exceptions. While not discussing the early use extensively, he suggests that self-reflexivity was employed in the early American novel

to “establish itself as a genre, as a respected genre, at a time when the novel was considered frivolous and even immoral” (1145), and Thomas Philbrick acknowledges that “the revolutionary era gave rise to a variety of experiments in imaginative prose” (148), but he never calls these experimental techniques self-reflexive and never discusses the experimentation in novels, focusing instead on experimentation in personal narratives. In contrast, throughout this study, I look at self-reflexivity, which I consider to be experimental, and I agree with Federman that much of the self-reflexivity reflects a desire to see the novel become a respected genre. However, while Federman only mentions the self-reflexivity in these early American novels in passing, my entire focus will be on these novels, their self-reflexivity, and these authors’ attempts to define “American fiction” and their attempts to establish the American novel as a respected part of the new tradition developing alongside the new country.

A Neglected Tradition

One of the biggest obstacles in studying these novels is in overcoming the negative views that exist about the placement of them in our literary history because critics, recent and past, hold the belief that these early American novels were not worthy of study.¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote in his journals that “[f]rom 1790 to 1820, there was not a book, a speech, a conversation, or a thought in the state” (15), and his belief has been shared by other scholars. Through the years, these novels further suffered at the hands of American literary historians. Alexander Cowie’s deprecating attack on Brown’s work in 1951 was typical of the type of criticism these authors received from earlier scholars. Cowie argues that Brown was “unable to marshal [liberal ideas] into an orderly progression”; “lacked concentration and continuity”; had “no eye for detail or design”; was “deficient in concrete detail, in imagery”; had “chaotic chronology, ill-proportioned in-set stories, unallocated incidents”; and used “the repetition of

stock devices” (101-02). Even some recent critics have perpetuated this view. For example, John Seelye believes the American novel, especially the sentimental, was inferior to the British one saying the American sentimental novel was “aesthetically unavailable” and reflected a “relatively low level of authorial talent” (170). While he mostly praises *Charlotte Temple*, he also says it “shares many of the unfortunate characteristics of early American fiction” including a lack of “complex characterization” (170). Other earlier critics suggest that these early novelists lacked a unique American language or unique American subjects for their works. For example, William Hedges says that America had no “fit subjects for great literature: everything was too new to be interesting, or too ordinary and dull – the consequence of republicanism” (189). As will be discussed, much recent scholarship, however, has been kinder to these works.

These authors also faced public censure of their novels by elite public figures of the time who openly debated the merits of fiction and the perceived evils in this type of writing. These debates influenced many critics who even today often persist in arguing that these post-Revolutionary authors defend their works in their prefaces and within their novels against these attacks on fiction while not always acknowledging what else these authors are doing. The contemporary attacks and current discussions about these post-Revolutionary works have created a body of criticism focused on the social, cultural, and political aspects of these novels often to the neglect of other areas. Ed White lists the reasons for some of this neglect: “a [critical] tradition that focuses on theme, image, and national consciousness at the expense of form; a related defensiveness about the aesthetic quality of early American letters; [... and] relative inattention to genre” (“Captaine Smith” 489). As White mentions, issues of form have not been as much of a focus as other areas, and the classification of some works into categories other than novels has also caused some works to be disregarded as imaginative literature. For example,

Letters from an American Farmer is often referred to as a travel narrative, even though the narrator is a fictional character, and some scholars are hesitant to call *Modern Chivalry* a novel. Other issues that have not been given as much consideration include the evident self-reflexivity and the authors' concern with exploring and defining "American fiction" while attempting to work within a tradition for the new Republic that is separate from the European tradition.

As a literary history examining the self-reflexive tendencies of Charles Brockden Brown, Susannah Rowson, Hannah Foster, Royall Tyler, Tabitha Tenney, and Hugh Henry Brackenridge, this study focuses on a select list of authors from 1790 to 1820 because these dates are post-Revolutionary, signaling the official beginnings of a new country and its corresponding cultural elements, including literature. During this time, authors sought to work within an evolving American literary tradition and to differentiate their works from their British counterparts. These years also predate the great popularity of Washington Irving and the publication of James Fenimore Cooper's novels, which for many early literary historians signal the true beginning of America's literary heritage. For example, Fred Lewis Pattee calls the publication of Irving's *History of New York* (1809) "the birth date of American literature" (111) and considers Cooper as having written the first American novel (134). What this study reveals is that these authors were writing about writing in the novels because novels were, well, novel. These authors were participating in something new – a new literary tradition that was developing simultaneously with the development of the new country, and they were not being defensive about it as many critics would suggest. These authors were striving towards developing this American literature at the same time they were struggling with it. They had no name for it yet; they had no school of literary theory developed yet. The novels were still new, especially in America, and the self-reflexive techniques called attention to their writing – to their "novelty" in

a time when writing and reading novels was frowned upon. They used what we generally consider sophisticated writing techniques in order to show that fiction was an acceptable form to present their story and to refute the concerns that the contemporary critics had about fiction but without the apology.

Contemporary Attacks on the Early American Novel

Many critics who write about this time period recognize that prominent figures in post-revolutionary America had a negative attitude toward fiction. Fiction was not a trusted form of prose during this time period, and according to Nancy Ruttenburg, a “general fear of fiction” (292) prevailed because fiction represented the uncontainable common person and this “popular voice was the object of such anxiety” (Ruttenburg 185). Part of the reason for this suspicion was because of its popularity, according to Watts in *Romance of Real Life* (1994):

In many ways the appearance of a new genre – the American novel – generated an even greater cultural impact. Shortly after the end of the Revolution, an increasing array of novels began to assault the reading public, with striking results. Middle- and lower-class readers, especially women, began to devour accessible, cheap editions of fiction with avid enthusiasm. The fluid and engaging prose, vivid depictions of individual characters and social settings, and sentimental moral didacticism of the novel made it enormously attractive both to an educated readership weaned on religious and political discourse and to a barely literate readership having little previous engagement at all with books. (13)

Watts’s discussion of novels as popular to all socioeconomic classes – not just to the elite – parallels Ruttenburg’s popular voice argument. During the early days of the Republic, as the new government was attempting to define and form itself, the novel was viewed as potentially dangerous to this process, especially by people in positions of power such as clergy and political leaders. These elite critics included such prominent figures as John Quincy Adams, Nathaniel Evans, and Joel Barlow who doubted that America was ready to produce a worthy literature (Nye 241-42). They objected to the form because they reasoned that novels lied notoriously, provided no instruction for virtuous living, and were not American enough.ⁱⁱ

In addition to denouncing the novel form because it promoted scandalous lies by being fiction and because it offered stories of questionable morality with no redeeming value, elite critics of the time believed the novel could lead readers – particularly susceptible females – into having unrealistic expectations of the lives they could lead: “The early American novel ideologically represented and encouraged the aspirations of its new readers – aspirations in conflict, at many points, with ideas preached from the pulpit or taught in the common schools” (Davidson, *Revolution* 72). Reviewers and critics of this era feared that female readers might expect their lives to be much like that of the heroines of their novels. Nina Baym argues that the gender argument is, in essence, an economic one as well, since the readers of these novels were often lower- and middle-class domestic help who might aspire to a higher and unreachable station in life:

[W]omen who spent time reading novels were thought of as parasites in an economy that demanded labor, self-sacrifice, and frugality from all. Not only was the reading of novels an idle activity, the content of novels saturated women’s imagination with depictions of frivolous people. Novels were thus associated with idleness, waste, and – dread word in the republican lexicon – luxury. (*American Women Writers* 17)

The ideas set forth in the novels could lead their readers to aspire to a better life and to neglect the one they were actually living and “such idle employment kept young women from contributing to the family economy” (Davidson 189). Even women who were not working outside the home were expected to fulfill domestic obligations, and reading something other than the Bible or other equally “worthy” material might hamper their ability to accomplish these duties. In other words, reading novels could lead readers away from their socially prescribed religious, socio-economic, and gender roles and could instill beliefs about those roles that were not in agreement with what was commonly held to be true by those who controlled the pulpit and the political podium – the elite of the new Republic.

Much current criticism is framed around the authors themselves and the ways in which the novelists viewed themselves especially in light of cultural reservations about the effects of the novel. According to many current critics, the novelists responded to these attacks in various ways, including creating prefaces in which they defended their works by emphasizing their reliance on real stories as the basis of their novels and denying that the criticism applied to their works. Many critics also presume an emphasis on the didactic moral and civic instructional value – not only in the authors’ prefaces but throughout the novels, which suggests additional attempts by these authors to deny that their novels present danger to the readers as contemporary critics accused. Conventional wisdom suggests that the authors used self-conscious techniques, such as these defensive prefaces, to distance themselves from their works that were being attacked and because of their own belief in its generic inferiority. For example, Michael Gilmore proposes that many authors were

[u]ncomfortable with the very fictionality of fiction [and] advertised their writings as based on ‘Fact,’ ‘Truth,’ or ‘Recent Events.’ They called their tales histories and retold narratives whose outlines were widely known from documentary sources such as newspapers. No genre was more insistent about its pretension to be an objective chronicle of actual occurrences. (623)

In addition to scholars who believe that the authors were uncomfortable writing fiction, critics such as G. Harrison Orians believe that “there were adequate signs of censure by 1790” (197) and that these attacks against fiction caused these writers to “cl[i]ng tenaciously, perhaps perforce, to an educational or utilitarian principle in the hope of avoiding censure, never daring to advance as mere entertainers” (203).ⁱⁱⁱ Orians points out that post-revolutionary novelists countered their discomfort and suspicions with a “two-ply defense of morality and truth” (204), which often took the form of apologetic, defensive prefaces.

Today's critics who focus on the widespread censure and elitist resistance to fiction also tend to accept these prefatory defenses at face value. If the author stated that the novel was "founded on fact" or a "tale of truth," then many critics read these prefaces as the author attempting to make his or her work more acceptable to those critics and readers who might be leery of its fictionality: "[V]irtually every American novel somewhere in its preface or its plot defended itself against the charge that it *was* a novel, either by defining itself differently ('Founded In *Truth*') or by redefining the genre tautologically as all those things it was presumed not to be—moral, truthful, educational, and so forth" (Davidson *Revolution* 103). Russel Blaine Nye offers a similar analysis: "In response to accusations of 'immorality' and 'falseness to life,' novelists claimed that their tales were really 'moral lessons,' usually appending a subtitle or preface to point out that their plots were 'founded on fact' and were 'truthful representations of human passions'" (252). Davidson's and Nye's comments about the popular antagonism toward fiction and the corresponding authorial answers are representative of many historians' and critics' comments about these prefaces in the post-Revolutionary era.

Interpreting these prefaces as defensive apologies on the part of these authors is not the only way to read them, as I discuss in Chapter Two. I argue that these authors are attempting to explore an American identity, in part, by trying to create characters who represent American virtues or universal truths about human nature, rather than focusing solely on a plot that is based on actual events in order to stave off the criticism that novels tell lies, as many critics suggest. I also argue that these authors are pleading for a sympathetic understanding for these characters that creates a solidarity among their readers instead of promoting the judgmental moral lesson that many readers and critics claim. Lastly, I argue that these authors are cognizant of their novels as a source of entertainment and are not distancing themselves from their fiction. Viewing

the prefaces in these additional ways allows us to consider the novels as a text that provides more than a commentary on the political and cultural aspects of post-Revolutionary America; they are a vital part of the American literary tradition that should be given more consideration for what they do accomplish rather than just derided as poor imitators of the past or feeble forerunners for the later literature.

Current Views of the Early American Novel

Prior to Davidson's *Revolution and the Word*,^{iv} many literary historians and critics, if they addressed novels written prior to 1820 at all, viewed the American novel during the days of the early Republic as a poor relation of the British version, as a weak precursor of the stronger American novels that came later, or as a way of telling us something about the time period. Typical of this earlier criticism is Henri Petter's argument: "It is undesirable—and indeed, impossible—to conceal the fact that most of the early American novels are failures; but it is possible to say in what sense and for what reason they failed" (xii). He later argues, "The three decades ending in 1820 are not considered a distinguished 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). This passage, which recalls Emerson's journal entry cited above, typifies the prevailing view of many critics prior to the 1980s toward these early American novels. This attitude continued into the 1990s, albeit with decreased frequency, with critics such as Gilmore who point out that "American tales" were "written in the shadow of an established literary tradition [... and] tended to be highly derivative, content to reproduce the situation, themes, and characters of English precursors" (625). The "shadow," I argue, is cast not by the "precursors," but rather by the long-standing habit of denigrating the efforts of these early

authors for either following the British tradition too closely or for not following it closely enough. With publication of *Revolution and the Word*, Davidson provided new ways of regarding these novels, and these post-Revolutionary novels began to garner even more attention as worthy cultural and political artifacts that could stand on their own and shed light on life during a transitional time in American history – a view that was highly contentious and original, and a view that I want to expand upon.

In this work, Davidson posits a hierarchy of the different categories of early American novels as identified by previous scholars: the sentimental, the picaresque, and the gothic. While she is not the first to use those categories, she is one of the first scholars to use these categories in a full-length study in order to challenge long-held assumptions about the value of the American novel. She does not, however, challenge the use of those categories. On the contrary, she appears to find those labels valuable. According to Davidson, novels are the “agents and products of change” – qualities that she believes epitomize a good American novel, with sentimental being the least subversive and gothic being the most.^v Other critics soon followed suit with their own hierarchy, generally classifying the works into the same categories and using the categories to make a political or cultural argument, which primarily revolved around social realism and insights into class, gender, and race. Those works that seem to defy categorization either get left out entirely or get argued into a category poorly or get written off as “bad” novels. As Keith Fudge argues, “what is important to realize is that hardly ever does a work fit into a single category simply because it was placed there by those who feel that canonical validity is threatened if one crosses the boundaries set by eminent scholars decades ago” (49). Like the definition of “American fiction,” I argue that these categories are fluid and that focusing only on them tends to narrow our interpretations of the novels. We might also omit certain novels from

our studies that might otherwise be considered. Using the categories as the primary means of examining the novels causes many of the critics to focus on the characteristics and the way the novels are similar or not, and works not easily categorized get ignored. I organize my subsequent chapters around these categories as a convenient map for surveying representative works from this time period, but I will not focus on the characteristics of the genre; instead, I look at the self-reflexive moments in each text.

Reading the Self-Reflexivity

The following chapters focus on the self-reflexivity and offer new ways of viewing these early American novels in light of these self-conscious moments. Where Davidson discusses the origins of the novel and its ability to create change within the new nation, I discuss many of these same texts and analyze the self-reflexivity and what the authors are saying about the literature and the literary tradition that is developing within that new nation. Other critics show the way in which the origins of our nation are inextricably linked to the print culture that was developing at the same time.^{vi} These critics use the literature to show the way our nation evolved and persuasively analyze the language in early American novels as a way of explaining what is happening in the new nation politically, culturally, and socially, and the way imaginative literature clarifies these issues of the day. Their discussions of self-reflexive moments, however, are generally limited or instead focus on what self-reflexivity reveals about contemporary politics and culture rather than the literary tradition. Throughout my study, I discuss not the way the nation evolved politically, but the way authors were self-consciously working within a new and emerging literary tradition, while simultaneously attempting to define that tradition, which is consistent with Davidson's argument that the novel is the perfect genre for a "country first

attempting to formulate itself” (13-14). The self-reflexive moments reveal that these authors were similarly aware that the novel was the ideal genre for this new country.

In my study, I focus on the self-reflexive moments in these texts and the way these authors attempted to define “American fiction” as literature that was separate from its British counterpart. One effect of the self-reflexivity is that it creates a bond of solidarity between the reader and author and between the reader and character that is less judgmental and more sympathetic than is often presumed. This type of solidarity presumes a reader different from the one who is properly chastised by reading the didactic moralistic novel. Michael Warner also posits new assumptions about the reading public.^{vii} For example, he argues that “it becomes possible to imagine oneself, in the act of reading, becoming part of an arena of the national people that cannot be realized except through such mediating imaginings” (xiii). Christopher Looby likewise posits an “aspiration to national solidarity” (5), and the literature he examines “represents both an aspiration to intentional unity and a recognition of the fragility, temporality, and intrinsic dissemination of the imagined nation” (5).^{viii} He then analyzes virtually the same works as Warner to argue “that in the literature of the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary period, issues of speech, language, discourse, and reason are remarkably prominent, and the discursive foundation of national legitimacy is repeatedly thematized” (15). While Warner does not use the term solidarity, his idea about nationalistic assumption is similar to the argument that Looby makes and that I make about solidarity among readers, as subsequent chapters reveal. For example, as I show in Chapter Two, both Brown and Rowson presume a non-judgmental, sympathetic solidarity among their reading audience in their prefaces. Likewise, Foster’s and Rowson’s narrators take for granted an audience solidly supporting the characters without judging them within their novels, as I demonstrate in Chapter Four.

For the new reading public, Warner argues, “the act of reading was linked closely to the performative values of civic virtue,” (xiv). Since literature was not a “desirable” form for reading, it was, therefore, not intended as a source of entertainment. Like many other critics who tend to believe post-Revolutionary authors wrote primarily didactic, morally upright novels, Warner suggests that early American authors tried to make their novels more acceptable by appealing to the “values of civic virtue,” saying that “[e]ven in the novel, American writers consistently regard their writing as belonging to the civic arena. They write novels that are answerable to the standards of virtue. And they imagine the readers of their publications as participants in public discourse rather than as private consumers of luxury goods” (15). He argues that these novels were not sold as imaginative narratives but rather were being positioned as part of the civic discourse, similar to other public documents such as the Constitution. Because of the prejudice against fiction, he argues that “Novels of the period in this way typically argue against their own generic condition, paradoxically claiming exemptions for themselves on the grounds that they teach the authority of publicity as against the private fancy of the reader” (176). Reexamining these texts with attention to their moments of self-reflexivity, however, reveals that authors actually embraced their novels as the fiction they were, while also encouraging the view that they were, at least in part, to be read for amusement and entertainment. For example, by examining the prefaces of Brown in Chapter Two, we see that he does not apologize for the fact that his novels may be read for amusement and entertainment. The other authors examined reveal these same tendencies.

Another critic who also argues that these early novels can be read for amusement is Larzer Ziff.^{ix} Similar to Warner, Ziff posits a new reader. However, he argues that this new reading public was “in search of useful knowledge and rewarding amusement [who] actively

engaged texts, presuming to judge whether they were worthwhile” (33). Brown and Brackenridge also posit similar readers, who were in search of amusement and entertainment but who were also intelligent readers, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter Two. Ziff addresses issues similar to Warner’s such as positing a literature that appeals to the lower class and the technology that made this possible. His argument about the disapproval of the genre and its effect on the authors is somewhat similar to Warner’s argument that authors attempt to keep their works aligned with “public” works. While Ziff is interested in the literary tradition of the time, he focuses more on what that tradition revealed about the political values: “Novels offer the best illustration of the diverging values of political democracy and literary culture in the early decades of the republic” (147-48). In the manner of Davidson and Warner, he is more interested in what the literature says about the time period and the way the literature reflects the changing ideas of immanence and representation than what it says about itself – its form, its use of literary elements, and its place within the emerging tradition.

Adding to the arguments explaining the rise of the novel such as those offered by Nancy Armstrong, Ian Watt, and Michael McKeon, who focus on the transformations in society that created the impetus for the novel, Grantland Rice focuses more on authorship and the changes within the profession and says that “the emergence of the novel was as much a symptom of dramatic transformation in authorship as it was an agent for profound socioeconomic changes” (150).^x These changes, according to Rice, produced readers who demanded to be entertained, but yet still needed civic instruction, and as this new author emerged, so did the new form of the novel, “but the novel as an indirect means of inculcating civic virtue and the novel as seducer of readers were at odds” (161). He argues that “writers thematized the issue of coquetry” to emphasize this tension between the two goals. He believes the authors used self-reflexive

moments in the novels and the prefaces to promise “scandals, heartless seductions, [and] squandered virtues” yet still asserted the “edifying” nature of their novels (168), in order “to frame their prose fiction as a different sort than that of their English counterparts” (169). Rice argues that the American novel “dramatiz[ed] its psychological and social effects [...]. Yet, at the same time, it sought to disassociate itself from claims that it, as a form, was responsible for engendering precisely those same effects. And while it catered to the desires of its readers, [...] it rebuked those same readers for allowing themselves to be so indulgent” (171). While I wholeheartedly agree with Rice’s assertion about the novelists breaking from English forebears and his recognition of the way that novels appealed to readers, I take exception to his notion that the authors and their novels seemed apologetic for this appeal. I argue that reexamining these texts reveals that the early American novel neither apologized for itself nor chastised its readers for enjoying its wares, but rather these authors embraced their fiction.

The issues brought up by Davidson and these other critics become the focus of the rest of my study as I expand upon their views to include additional analysis of the self-reflexive moments in early American novels. While each chapter focuses on different works and views them from different angles, they all extend my argument that early novels are much more sophisticated literary artifacts than has generally been acknowledged. They are not the poor imitators of an earlier tradition or the immature forerunners of a later tradition. If we reconsider these works in light of their self-reflexive moments, including the prefaces, then we begin to see that they are much more than harbingers of literature to come but critical elements in the contentious, self-conscious attempt to define an American literary tradition in their own stead. No full-length study exists that focuses solely on the self-reflexive moments in early American literature and the functions they performed in these novels. My primary goal with this study is to

point out the self-reflexive moments within these texts and highlight what they indicate about these authors, these novels, and the way that may alter the current way of viewing literary history. Attending to self-reflexive moments is a means to that end. Authors in the wake of the Revolution looked back to their origins as colonists from Europe, but primarily England, and back to the literature produced there; Janus-like, they also looked forward to their new status as Americans, producing literature that was for this new country. Greg Dening argues that “[t]he quintessential feel of early America was that it was in between, always in defining rather than definition mode, always on the edge of being something different” (2). As my extended example of Murray shows, she is attempting to define “American fiction” through her works. This tendency is evident in the other authors in my study. Robert A. Lee and W. M. Verhoeven also consider American literature as an evolution of the English and that these authors suffered from an “anxiety of influence” (8). They argue that “[m]ore even than at other times in American history, [post-Revolutionary authors] reflect both the backward glance and the forward prospect. [...]. But whatever the doubts, the cavils, the hesitations, the gathering momentum of a will to literary self-voice, remains wholly unmistakable” (9). The fact that much of this literature took a fairly new form – the novel – cannot be coincidence. The nature of that “self-voice,” however, still seems to be in dispute by many critics even today, and this study clarifies what those voices did.

End Notes

ⁱ Scholars make some basic assumptions about the writers of this time, and one of those assumptions is that they had a difficult time writing and making a living from writing. The reasons for these publishing difficulties include economic forces, religious influences, social and political turmoil, prejudices favoring British and other European works, religious-based suspicions toward fiction or any imaginative literature, and copyright laws that discouraged American authorship, yet made publishing British editions cheaper than publishing American works because they were not protected by these American laws. See Cathy Davidson’s extensive

discussion of these problems in her second chapter of *Revolution and the Word* for one of the best analysis of these issues. Looking at the evidence proves that difficult or not, these authors wrote not only in the face of these obstacles, but also in several different modes or genres. I do not intend to provide a complete history of these books, but the books that I analyze in this study were mostly well received during their time – some more than others. Susannah Rowson wrote 7-10 novels (depending on the source) and 3-4 books of poetry, and her novel, *Charlotte Temple*, had a long life with numerous editions being printed before finally going out of print. Another novelist, Charles Brockden Brown, wrote four major novels, five minor (novellas), and countless essays and short stories over the years. His novels were fairly well received by the public but quickly fell out of favor, and while in print, they never sold enough copies to earn him a living based solely on his novel writing. Tabitha Tenney only wrote one novel, *Female Quixotism*, but she is actually the exception in the group.

ⁱⁱ Carl Van Doren in *The American Novel* provides a particularly witty account of additional reasons that those people in the pulpit and at the podium were opposed to fiction in general and novels in particular:

The dullest critic contended that novels were lies; the pious that they served no virtuous purpose; the strenuous, that they softened sturdy minds; the utilitarian, that they crowded out more useful books; the realistic, that they painted adventure too romantic and love too vehement; the patriotic, that dealing with European manners, they tended to confuse and dissatisfy republican youth. (3)

One critic of the time wrote, “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 as yet life, in America. [...] As yet the intrigues of a British novel, are as foreign to our manners, as the refinements of Asiatic vice” ([Dr. Rush] 212). This critic is not opposed to novels, but he believes the depictions need to express “Americanism.”

ⁱⁱⁱ This censure does not seem to have had a significant impact on readers in light of the immense popularity of many of these novels during their time.

^{iv} For the most part, our current literary history can be divided into pre and post *Revolution and the Word* (1986) by Cathy Davidson, and any discussion of the current view of American literary history requires acknowledgement of the importance of this work. Early literary historians who shaped the way we view American literature include Fred Lewis Pattee in *A History of American Literature* (1903), Alexander Cowie with *The Rise of the American Novel* (1951) and Richard Chase in *The American Novel and its Tradition* (1957). Every literary history written since 1986 either adds to or attempts to counter Davidson’s argument, but all critics – whether they agree with her analysis or not – acknowledge the importance and influence of her work: “When *Revolution and the Word* appeared in 1986, reviewers and readers immediately recognized it as a major work in the field. It was quickly established as one of the few classic works of American literary criticism, [...]. Davidson set new benchmarks in so many subfields that in the years after the book’s appearance a host of other scholars pursued the many research pathways she generated” (Elliott, Review 615). Today, in addition to Davidson, we look to critics such as

Baym, Shirley Samuels, and others who are mentioned in this study for prevailing views of our literary history.

^v In her “Introduction to the Expanded Edition,” Davidson believes the term “subversive” provided a focal point for many subsequent debates about these novels, but she believes “in retrospect” that the term may have been misused somewhat and may be too “narrow” in its use (24-25).

^{vi} While critics such as Davidson, Warner, Ziff, Looby, and Rice have each created a comprehensive view of the narrative of our literary history that focuses on language, for a more general view, Emory Elliott’s *Columbia History of the American Novel* and *Columbia Literary History of the United States* and Sacvan Bercovitch’s *Cambridge History of American Literature* are sources that provide a broader but less detailed view of the literary history of the United States.

^{vii} Michael Warner in *Letters of the Republic* analyzes the way our nation was formed and developed through print culture. He argues that printing and all its attendant requisites of reading and writing underwent a transformation that ultimately resulted in the form of government we have today. He begins his analysis by challenging the assumption that technology was solely responsible for changes to our print culture, and one way he complicates the typical analysis is by arguing that “printing and republicanism changes the identity of each” (xii) because print culture was both a product of change and a producer of the identity of the new nation.

^{viii} Like the other critics discussed in this chapter, Christopher Looby argues that language is the creator of events – or nations, but he places the primary focus on the oral culture rather than the print because of the “intimate associations between the revolutionary founding of the United States and acts of voice” (3). He does not discount the arguments that focus solely on print entirely, saying instead that no “single concept” (5) can account for the way this new nation was created. He uses much of the same literature that critics such as Warner and Ziff do to show that orality is present “in addition to, or instead of, the silence of print” (3).

^{ix} Ziff’s initial thesis is virtually identical to Warner’s: “print culture and American political culture were twins born from the same conditions and dependent on one another for their well-being” (x). While Warner argues that writing held an ideological privilege during this era that caused both the identities of the nation and the print to be changed, Ziff claims that political culture and writing were changed because of shifts in “the way reality was conceptualized” (x). He contends that both the political culture and the literature changed from “immanence to representation” (xi) because there is “no assumed real self that is being represented; rather, the representation creates the only self there is” (77).

While Ziff seems to posit this change as a positive and welcomed one, Paul Downes argues that for the people of the time, the idea of representation was frightful and not necessarily greeted optimistically: “Nevertheless, the great fear of many democrats in the postrevolutionary era was that representation might compromise the sovereign will of the people” (25) and “Both the discourse of the revolutionary era and the insights of recent political philosophy, then, suggest that representation can be registered as a threat to, as well as an opportunity for, the political subject” (26). These objections to representation parallel objections to the novel as a

form. Neither Ziff's nor Downes's position on representation contradict the way I analyze my texts, although Downes's argument provides additional insight into some of the objections to this genre.

^x Publishing less than a year after Looby, Rice acknowledges that the "American public discourse" with "an organizing principle of orality [...] and] an organizing principle of printedness [...] need to be closely interrogated" (31). He focuses, however, mostly on authors and, therefore, on print discourse because he takes Warner's general argument and conclusion and complicates them by analyzing many of the same authors to give more attention to changes in the roles of authors during this time. Rice believes Warner has not adequately accounted for the "anxiousness with which colonists greeted the rise and expansion of an indigenous commercial print culture [...] and] cursed an expanding readership too animated in its appetite for the novel and the emotional" (2-3). While Warner works more from a socio-political standpoint, Rice bases much of his argument on economic changes and the way capitalism influenced the social and political: "[I]t is important to remember that while the gradual development of the idea of literary property gave birth to the profession of authorship in America, it did so by collapsing (in social and cultural as well as in legal terms) a tradition of political and belletristic writing into the nomenclature of the market" (79). This change was enhanced by the emergence of copyright laws that helped turn writing into a commodity, moving it from the realm of political control to an economic issue. That is, while other critics credit technology and new readers for the "emergence of the modern profession of authorship" (80), Rice argues that it was actually "the separation of the economic from the political domain and the concomitant rewriting of the political legislation of censorship into the economic laws of copyright and literary property which allowed the birth of the professional writer" (79-80).

Chapter 2. Self-Reflexivity: Strategies in Prefaces and Paratexts

The brief review of literary history in the previous chapter reveals the current critical reception of novels by authors such as Charles Brockden Brown, Susannah Rowson, Hannah Foster and others writing during the early years of the new Republic. While today's historians and critics now give these early novels more credit than historians did in the past, the trend even today is to accord these novels only minimal standing as literature worthy of study. Factors that contribute to this subordinate status include the belief that the authors writing during this time period suffered from an inferiority complex and the presumption that these authors felt the need to counter the claim that all fiction was morally objectionable. Many of the original articles written in disapproval of fiction include articles with revealing titles such as "Novel Reading, A Cause of Female Depravity" (1797) and others with less illuminating titles such as "On Modern Novels, and their Effects" (1791) and "Character and Effects of Modern Novels" (1792). These essays attacked imaginative literature during this time for supposedly propagating lies, failing to enhance the morality of their readers, and not having any educational value. The resulting inferiority complex, as many critics argue, is revealed through the authors' defenses of their fiction, often taking the form of defensive, apologetic prefaces and advertisements appended to most works of this time period. These prefaces are examples of what Gérard Genette refers to as paratexts, which he defines as "accompanying productions" (1). Besides prefaces, paratexts include illustrations, epigrams, and other title page information to name a few examples. Genette argues that paratexts have "an influence on the public, an influence that [...] is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it" (2). Philippe Lejeune similarly argues that the "fringe of the printed text [...] *controls* the entire reading" (29).¹ Not only do these paratexts influence our reading and reception of these novels because they parallel these

early American novels in substantial ways, but as self-reflexive components of the text, the prefaces set up the authors' strategy for addressing the attacks on fiction – strategies that continue in the novels. In these prefaces and later in the novels, we also see authors whose objectives are writing their way toward creating a literary theory to account for this new literature and struggling to create a definition of “American fiction” as it is developing in the new country.

Many critics take the prefaces and advertisements that defend themselves against the dangers of novel reading at face value and argue that they reveal the authors' attempt to align their work with a verifiable event and promote the morality and educational value of their work over the work of others. For example, in his analysis of narrative intrusions in *Charlotte Temple*, Paul Barton argues that beginning with the preface, “Rowson effectively implemented didacticism as a defensive stratagem, and thus escaped the censure of her morally sensitive readership” (27). When we explore these paratexts, however, we realize that they present more than just defensive apologies for their fictions. These prefaces present these authors' responses to contemporary criticism of the form not by apologizing but rather by asking for acceptance of their works as imaginative literature. They reveal that the authors do not support the contention that novel reading is inherently dangerous. As will be examined, even Tabitha Tenney, who wrote only one novel that is often characterized as being about the dangers of novel reading, creates a preface that undercuts in several ways the defensiveness that critics assume. For example, Gillian Brown says that Tenney's preface (as with prefaces by other authors) allows her to make “moral claims [that] shaped most defenses of the novel, which, in order to counter charges of promulgating false ideas [...] claimed either a basis in fact or a didactic truth” (252). Prefaces, however, are not the only place in which these authors engage the attacks on fiction.

We can also look at other works, such as reviews and literary criticism that these authors wrote, which focus on the theme of writing in general, and the novel in particular, and attempted to answer some of the questions raised by the debate over the status of fiction. For example, Brown writes extensively about writing in forums other than his novels and authored numerous essays about novel reading and literature, especially American literature. These other writings must also inform our interpretations of these authors' reactions to this debate.

A more careful analysis of these prefaces and other writings reveals that these texts include an in-depth awareness of literary elements such as character, aesthetics, and genre as these elements developed in literature being created in the new Republic. We also find that these authors are focused on an exploration of character more than on plot. Many critics argue, however, that in these early American novels, characters serve plot with critics such as Henri Pettey asserting that "The characters themselves are subordinated to the events; individually they tend to remain undeveloped and static, and differentiation between them is attempted only in the moralistic opposition of good and bad characters" (397). I argue that these authors' novels reveal the exact opposite intention – that they wanted their plots to serve their characters. We see this occurring in prefaces where the authors present their characters as being representations of people and human nature, while their plots are fantastical and extraordinary – strictly a vehicle to propel the characters forward. Secondly, these authors do not emphasize the morality of their works so much as they plead for solidarity and community between their characters and their readers. These post-Revolutionary authors are moralizing in their works, but not in the didactic, judgmental way that many people presume. Rather, they reach out to the individual reader and attempt to create a sense of community through an understanding of those members of the community. This sense of community is not based on a castigation of misdeeds but rather on a

desire to understand human nature that is made possible by these authors' development of and emphasis on character. Lastly, the resulting stance provides not only a less defensive posture than is interpreted by many critics but also a more active endorsement of the novel as imaginative literature because they embrace fiction as the form best suited for these goals. For example, Gilbert Imlay in his preface to *The Emigrants* (1793), which he subtitles "History of an Expatriated Family" states that he believes "the style of a novel [...] would prove more acceptable to the generality of readers" (1). As the most obvious site for the self-reflexivity, starting this study by analyzing these prefaces will reveal that the other novelists in my study were employing similar techniques in their prefaces and advertisements, and these moves challenge the more common interpretations of what these prefaces do.

Exploration of the Literary

Brown's works provide a wealth of evidence from which to begin this analysis. In both the prefatory material to his primary novels and in his literary essays, Brown addresses the concerns that his contemporaries might have that led them to denounce the novel. Many critics believe his prefaces advocate his reach toward authenticity, morality, and educational or intellectual value, with critics such as Donald J. Greiner saying that Brown's "Advertisement has a threefold purpose: to establish Brown's reputation by urging his countrymen to read the novel, to prove that America was capable of producing a literary genius, and to parry criticism of the plot" (132). The criticism of the plot that Greiner mentions is a reference to the objection to fiction that opponents had because novels tell lies. Many of today's critics, taking the prefaces at face value, believe the authors countered these objections by focusing their comments on the events and the authenticity of the events as revealed by the plot. For example, Jane Tompkins asserts that based on the Advertisement "it is impossible [...] not to take the story seriously"

(41). Greiner provides an additional example. He acknowledges the events “appear to be miraculous and, therefore, a distortion,” but he says that Brown counters this reason for distrust “because the incidents have a basis in fact” and that Brown “adds footnotes throughout the novel in order to establish the factual basis of the events” (133). While I do not discount these objectives, I argue that Brown does more than this.

A closer look at Brown’s prefaces reveals that he is not trying to be perfectly faithful to events but that he is, in fact, more concerned with characters than with plot. Brown makes it clear in his prefaces that the events he will narrate are “extraordinary and rare” (*Wieland* 3), correspond to one “authentic case” (*Wieland* 3), are from a “calamitous period” (*Arthur Mervyn* 3), or contain a “series of adventures” (*Edgar Huntly* 3). On the other hand, his preface to *Wieland*, for example, provides a brief outline of the major characters and explains that the end of the novel will “correspond with the known principles of human nature” (3). In other words, these events are not indicative of everyday life but are rather representative of events that could happen and are used as a plot vehicle for his more obvious interest in depicting human nature accurately.² In *Arthur Mervyn*, he acknowledges that yellow fever, which becomes his plot device, will cause a “change in manners and population [. . . that] will be, in the highest degree, memorable” (3). He also argues that yellow fever and its associated calamities have “furnished new displays of the influence of human passions and motives” (3). Brown then states that he “weave[s] into an humble narrative” (3) the yellow fever epidemic and its subsequent effects on people. He states that the purpose of his story is “to deliver to posterity a brief but faithful sketch of the condition of this metropolis” (3). He then goes on to describe the people that he hopes to reach – both the ones who are able to help and the ones who are “suffering” from the disease, leading the reader to realize that the “condition,” is a reference to the condition of the people

within the city – not to the plot that propels the story. Reading the prefaces in this way does not support the criticism that Brown is only attempting to make his novels more acceptable to post-Revolutionary readers by positing them as solely based on real events.

Brown takes a slightly different approach in the prefatory material for *Ormond*. In this novel, he creates a character to “write” the preface as a letter to a named, but unknown reader. In this letter, the narrator offers the book as the complete tale requested by the reader and states that she realizes that the reader wants an “authentic, and not a fictitious, tale” (37). The narrator, whom we later learn is Sophia Courtland, discusses the generic and aesthetic differences between the tale that was “merely from invention” (37) and a biography. Lastly, she mentions that the characters in the story are no “creature[s] of fancy” (37). The irony, of course, is that a fictitious character is standing in for Brown as the author of the preface, attempting to authenticate the reality of the events being portrayed.

Like Brown in *Ormond*, Royall Tyler also uses a fictional character to defend his work. Tyler’s *Algerine Captive* is subtitled the “Life and Adventure of Updike Underhill,” and in a fashion similar to Brown’s *Ormond*, Tyler’s preface is written from the point of view of the narrator, Updike Underhill, which places an emphasis on the narrator as a character rather than on the author. He also spends a significant portion of his preface discussing the different types of reader in the new country as opposed to providing the readers with a preview of the events he will narrate. Likewise, J. Hector St. John de. Crevecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) begins with an advertisement in which he states that “the following letters are the genuine production of the American farmer whose name they bear. [. . . and] contain much authentic information” (35). The irony of course is that Crevecoeur’s narrator is a persona created out of whole cloth from the author’s imagination rather than a real American farmer. Similarly, Tenney

creates a fictional persona, generally acknowledged by the critics to be male, to narrate her text to include the preface.³ This persona and narrator calls the novel a “true picture of real life” and a “true uncoloured history of a romantic country girl” (3). Some critics over-simplify this novel by categorizing it as a picaresque that satirizes the evils of novel reading and use her preface as evidence that she is defending her work by appealing to the true story it portrays or the didactic morality that it is trying to convey. For example, Michael T. Gilmore says that it is “a novel satirizing the harmful consequences of novel reading; like many another fiction writer, she exempted her own work from the indictment of the genre and pleaded a socially useful purpose” (624). The remainder of the preface and the work itself, however, undermine the argument that she is appealing only to truth to soften the criticism of her novel. By using fictional characters to write the prefaces or Advertisements, these authors undercut the defensive preface that many critics assume is used because these authors are suffering from an inferiority complex and are attempting to disguise their fiction. Instead these authors highlight the fictionality of their works by having a fictional character “write” the preface and engage in the direct address to the readers. The fictionality of the narrators challenges the perception that these authors are relying on literal truth as a defense against the attack on fiction. At the same time, these fictional narrators that are also characters in the novels reinforce the idea that the characters are representations of human nature. All these examples support my contention that post Revolutionary authors were more concerned with capturing the realities of human nature accurately than with depicting real events and with the creation of an American literature than with conveying historically accurate depictions of events.

These authors also demonstrated an awareness of aesthetic concerns. William S. Osborne states in his 1970 introduction to *Power of Sympathy* (1789/1970) that the authors of the post-

Revolutionary time had “little time for conscious artistry in the early novel” (13). I argue, however, that they were very conscious of the aesthetic features of their works and often provided standards by which to judge their works even if these standards may not be the same as ours today. In *Arthur Mervyn*, Brown hopes that his depiction in “lively colours” (3) will potentially cause people in Philadelphia to help each other. In addition, in *Edgar Huntly*, he claims to have depicted in “vivid and faithful colours” the story he unfolds (3). Crèvecoeur and Isaac Mitchell also discuss aesthetics in their paratexts. In Crèvecoeur’s prefatory letter and in the advertisement for the work, he discusses his writing style, which is “plain and familiar, and sometime animated” but says that the reader should excuse “inaccuracies” because he is an “inexperienced writer” (35). On the other hand, Mitchell says that he intends his “narrative to be explicit and clear” (87) and his characters not to be “perplexingly, or needlessly multiplied” (88).⁴ At times this self-reflexive awareness of aesthetics leads them to acknowledge their own deficiencies but this admission provides further evidence of an attention to aesthetics that critics such as Osborne would deny they possess. For example, the narrator in *Ormond* says that the “narrative will have little of that merit which flows from unity of design” (3). All of these authors display an awareness of aesthetic standards to which they have been denied by many critics, and these examples demonstrate the advantages of giving more credit to what the authors were attempting to do from an aesthetic standpoint.

The artistry which Osborne has denied they possess is also evident as they address generic issues in these prefaces. The example earlier from *Ormond* reflects knowledge of the generic convention of “unity of design.” The narrator continues this discussion when she says that her reader wants an “authentic, and not a fictitious, tale” and that to meet that objective her tale will not have “harmonious congruity and luminous amplification” (3). Again, however, the

reader will recognize the irony of this fictional narrator trying to disguise her tale as a biography and will realize these components are not missing. Brown acknowledges the generic concerns of the new novel in the new country when he suggests that “no apology” will work for any American writer who leaves out “incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the western wilderness” (*Edgar Huntly* 3). In addition to the prefaces, these concerns can also be found in his other works. For example, in his essay, “A Receipt for a Modern Romance” (1798), he satirically provides the elements and details necessary to write a gothic romance in a fashion similar to Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). After carrying his heroine through a decrepit castle and allowing her to fall through a “trap-door” and into a “subterraneous passage,” Brown says, “Let this be repeated for some nights in succession, and after the lady has been dissolved to a jelly with her fears, let her be delivered by the man of her heart, and married” (*Literary Essays* 8).⁵ This recipe with its guidelines reveals an awareness of imaginative writing that has never fully been explored, and it reveals an awareness of genre and other literary conventions beyond what is often presumed.

As these post-Revolutionary authors discuss generic features, they also discuss past successes and potential future works based on how well their works will be received by the public. For example, in *Wieland*, Brown states that if this work earns a “favorable reception,” then he may continue to publish. He contends that the reader must be the one to decide whether the novel should be held in the negative light that so many critics would presume: “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). Additionally, in *Edgar Huntly*, Brown mentions the “flattering reception” of *Arthur Mervyn* as the reason for his continuing to write (3). Imlay has similar

comments when he refers to the “favourable reception” of his earlier work as motivation for him to write another one, and he also appeals to the reader to determine the quality of his work: “How far I have succeeded in my object, must be left to the world to determine” (1). In all these instances, the reader plays an important role in the ultimate creation of good literature – an argument also made by Cathy Davidson who says, “The novel [. . .] creates its *own* truth by involving the reader in the process of that creation” (*Revolution* 118). This appeal to the reader’s approbation and concern with genre shows a greater awareness of artistic issues than these early American authors are generally given credit for.

Any discussion of Brown and his concern with aesthetics and genre would not be complete without a discussion of his editorial titled, “The Editor’s Address to the Public,” (1803) which reads in part:

I am far from wishing, however, that my readers should judge of my exertions by my former ones. I have written much, but take much blame to myself for something which I have written, and take no praise for any thing. I should enjoy a larger share of my own respect, at the present moment, if nothing had ever flowed from my pen, the production of which could be traced to me. (*Literary Essays* 127)

Critics have argued that Brown effectively disavows all of his novels, especially since this address was published around the time that he quit writing novels and started writing essays almost exclusively.⁶ Brown goes on to say, however, that his powers have improved with age: “[T]ime can scarcely fail of enlarging and refining the powers of a man” (127), yet people are still judging him by what he had written while he was very young. This additional comment implies that he is concerned with being judged fairly based on his growth rather than demonstrating regret for what he has written in the past. He believes that his current projects should not be judged by his earlier works.

Despite giving up novel writing after *Clara Howard* (1801) and *Jane Talbot* (1801), Brown continued to write fiction to include “An Address to the Government of the United States on the Cessation of Louisiana to the French” (1803) and “Monroe's Embassy; or, The Conduct of the Government in Relation to Our Claims to the Navigation of the Mississippi” (1803). These works highlight the fear of fiction, which is denounced for telling lies, that many people had because these two works disguise themselves as history and were convincing enough for the *Philadelphia Gazette and Daily Advertiser* to publish them in early 1803. Critics generally do not acknowledge these pamphlets as part of Brown’s fictional oeuvre, and yet W. M. Verhoeven argues that “Brown regarded the generic boundaries demarcating and separating categories of the actual and the fictional, the historical and the imaginary as fluid rather than absolute” (“Radicalism” 36n49).⁷ I consider these pamphlets and his other fragmented fiction that he wrote for the magazines as evidence that he was not denouncing fiction as a form, but rather expanding his range of fictional genres with which to experiment. These extended essays and his other writings provide a way for Brown to try out ideas for his fiction, as many of these ideas in these writings eventually end up in his novels, and according to Warfel, “These essays often contained extended narration and characterization, so that the suggestion may be offered that prose fictionists learned some of their techniques from the periodical essay” (vi). In fact, in the text, “Walstein’s School of History,” (1799) we discover the outline for the novel *Arthur Mervyn*. This text is disguised as an essay of a fictional author that contains what appears to be Brown’s idea of a theory of fiction along with the plan for *Arthur Mervyn*.⁸ As with Verhoeven’s discussions of Brown’s Louisiana pamphlets, Watts has a similar critique about this text and says that Brown “defended an idealized form of fiction that combined historical fact with creative imagination” (*Romance* 76). The entire essay appears to be a defense of fiction because his

narrator believes that fiction is the best way to promote proper values: “the narration of public events, with a certain license of invention, was the most efficacious of moral instruments” because “[a] mode by which truth could be conveyed to a great number, was much to be preferred” (334) – mode being at least partly fiction and truth being a moral truth rather than only the reality of actual events.

Brown addresses these aesthetic, generic, and reader issues further in an essay entitled “Novel-Reading” (1804). In this essay, Brown’s narrator and Miss D engage in a satirical discussion about novel reading and some unnamed writer’s denunciation of all novels on the grounds that novels promote bad writing and questionable morals. Miss D defends novel reading, first by wondering out loud how the critic could ever have read one thousand novels because surely no one would “pronounce so absolute and so severe a sentence without a careful and extensive examination of the subject” (*Literary Essays* 134-35). This “examination,” of course, could only come if the critic had read enough novels to develop an accurate picture. She says, “[The novelists’] end is not only innocent but laudable, and the means they employ is to gratify that passion of enlightened minds which loves to contemplate human life in the mirror which genius holds up to it” (*Literary Essays* 135). In other words, novels are not inherently bad but actually should be praised, especially if they “contemplate human life,” which, again, shows the emphasis on character through the discussion of human nature (as I have argued that Brown does in his prefaces) rather than on plot. The narrator claims that surely Miss D is not implying that all novels are great, and she replies that novels or novel-reading as a whole should not be condemned because of one bad one.⁹ In the role as devil’s advocate, the narrator tries to assert that most novels are bad, so readers should not read any of them when “the chances of hurt, from reading them, greatly exceed the chances of benefit” (*Literary Essays* 136). She denies that most

are bad because bad novels would not be very popular and argues that “[t]he number of good novels, that is to say, novels that may be read with benefit and pleasure by persons of good morals and good taste, is very considerable” (*Literary Essays* 136). In other words, the fault lies with the reader and not the novel itself. She then argues that bad novels usually are not lacking “in the moral purpose of the work, but in the taste and genius displayed in the execution” (*Literary Essays* 136), which is an aesthetic argument. Her final defense rests on the fact that at least people are reading because they could have spent their time in worse ways. Having his narrator play the role of devil’s advocate allows Brown to show the foolishness of sweeping denunciations of all novels without considering other factors. Since this essay was written in 1806 – three years after Brown supposedly denounced his novels – we have to reevaluate the way that we interpret the address to the public that is generally viewed as depicting his regret.

Plea for Solidarity

The previous discussion demonstrates that rather than focusing only on historical accuracy or real events, these authors were more concerned with presenting accurate depictions of people that were fair representations of human nature. Additionally, they were concerned with other literary matters such as aesthetics, genre, and reader’s response. Paralleling these concerns is the view held by many critics that these authors are also only highlighting the moral and instructional value of their works. For example, Dietmer Schloss argues that

many of the early American novelists justify their telling the story of a woman’s seduction by pointing to the positive educational effects such a narrative would have on female readers. They want to induce American women to stay on the path of virtue so that they can fulfill their important function in republican life. (273)

This view appears accurate on the surface. A closer look, however, reveals that these authors are moving beyond this basic premise of a didactic morality and attempting to create a morality that is established through a community of readers – a solidarity of sorts between the novel and the

reader. The instruction that these authors were positing is also instruction based on establishing this community and solidarity. In other words, the instruction was more of an emotional instruction than a civic instruction in leading the good “republican life.”

Following the American Revolution, the new country was at a critical point and experiencing a crisis of identity similarly to that exemplified by Rip Van Winkle in Washington Irving’s later tale. The authors of my study self-consciously worked within this new tradition, partially in response to this crisis. For example, Edwin Fussell says Brown “was engaged in the creation of an American literature—[because of] his need to define and embody the typifying communal experience of that new polity, to write that nation into an existence more deeply and genuinely constitutional than the merely assertive and legalistic, to give it a character, a personality, and a soul” (171-72). One of Fussell’s key terms here is “communal.” As the people were clamoring for a rallying point – a point upon which to build an American identity and community – novelists of this time were writing works aimed in that direction, and they were calling for readers to look at their novels as a place to find this solidarity. Edward Watts provides two key points that parallel my argument: readers at the center of the authors’ focus, hence a type of community or solidarity, and an American experience as separate and different from the British. While not discussing the prefaces specifically, Watts calls many of the novels in my study “complex literary works that tell stories about writers and readers caught up in the debates over language, colonial culture, and authorship in the new nation. [...] they help their readers resist recolonization to explore ways of imagining that place the readers, not the authors, at the center of an American experience, not on the margin of British culture” (21). This call for solidarity is one of the primary functions of these prefaces, as the preface allows the author to make this appeal directly to the reader. Other critics writing about this time period also discuss

this need for community during the early days of the Republic. Michael Warner goes so far as to argue that only through reading fiction can this type of solidarity occur. Christopher Looby, on the other hand, believes the desire for solidarity was present during this time but that this desire was largely unfulfilled.

As previously mentioned, where many critics view the prefaces only as appeals to truth, morality, and instructional value only on civic virtues, I see additional appeals inviting a reader to envision himself or herself in those same situations with the instructional value geared toward encouraging a sympathetic understanding of people and toward acceptance of fiction as a viable genre. Again, Brown provides a good example. Brown does not attempt to (re)create a factual story nor to posit his work as valuable only for its moral or civic instruction. In the preface to *Arthur Mervyn*, Brown states that he found the events that he relates to be “instructive” and that it is “every one’s duty to profit by all opportunities of inculcating on mankind the lessons of justice and humanity” (3). He then uses words associated with the writing of fiction to articulate the way he creates a novel that teaches these “lessons”:

He that *depicts*, in lively colours, the evils of disease and poverty, performs an eminent service to the sufferers, by calling forth benevolence in those who are able to afford relief, and he who *pourtrays* examples of disinterestedness and intrepidity, confers on virtue the notoriety and homage that are due to it, and rouses in the spectators, the spirit of salutary emulation” (3 emphasis added).

In other words, he embraces the notion of a novel that “*depicts*, in lively colours,” “performs,” and “*pourtrays*,” and encourages a solidarity through a “spirit of salutary emulation” that generally is not perceived to exist during this time. As Michelle Burnham argues, the possibility of “salutary emulation” is what caused contemporary critics to be leery of the fiction in the first place: “novels were regularly being condemned as morally damaging, [because of] the capacity to inspire sympathetic identification in readers. Because moralists and educators assumed that

sympathy led to imitation, they believed that readers would be encouraged to repeat the transgressive adventures of the novelistic heroes and heroines with whom they identified” (Burnham 42). Similarly, in *Edgar Huntly* (1799), Brown says he hopes he provides “sources of amusement to the fancy and instruction to the heart” and believes he has the ability “of calling forth the passions and engaging the sympathy of the reader” (3) – again, an emphasis on emotional instruction and sympathy.

That writing should provide amusement along with having instructional value is a common thread in most of Brown’s works – fiction and non-fiction.¹⁰ This objective is evident in his early work “The Rhapsodist”:

I venture to intrude myself upon the public, not in the fond expectation of contributing a more than ordinary share of amusement or instruction to the common stock. My ambition has already devoted me to the service of my country, and the acquisition of true glory, but I am too well acquainted with my own deficiencies, to hope for fame in this capacity. If my continual struggles shall at length raise me to a level with mediocrity, and my readers expect not the eccentric genius of a higher sphere, I shall be perfectly satisfied.
(*Rhapsodist* 2)

In other words, he hopes his writing that he has provided over the years has proven to be both amusing and instructional, but he is concerned about his inadequacies and can only continue to try to achieve this objective. Being entertaining and instructional are not mutually exclusive and, in fact, these authors posit the idea of the necessity of having entertainment value in order to hold the reader’s attention. He mentions the idea of amusement again in the advertisement to the (now missing) novel *Skywalk*.¹¹ Brown says, “You will be good enough to inform your readers that, in a short time, their patronage will be solicited to a work in which it is endeavored to amuse the imagination and improve the heart” (*Rhapsodist* 135). Again, the teachings that he presumes to endorse, however, are not lessons for the mind, but rather for the “heart,” which include a sympathetic understanding of the plight of the characters.

Like Brown, Rowson directly addresses her reading audience in her preface. The “Preface” to *Charlotte Temple* provides the seemingly apologetic, typical defense for her work, and many critics focus on Rowson’s claims that her work is based on a real story and the novel’s very strong moral message as her way of countering the attacks on fiction. For example, Susan Harris says that “*Charlotte Temple* is a cautionary tale warning young women not to give in to sexual impulse” (41). Rowson’s “Preface” states, “The circumstances on which I have founded this novel were related to me some little time since by an old lady who had personally known Charlotte, though she concealed the real names of the characters, and likewise the place where the unfortunate scenes were acted” (5). Reading this preface only as a defense of the novel on the grounds of its being faithful to real events and delivering moral edicts to its readers does not take into account the possibility that Rowson relies not so much on those appeals as she does on a plea for communal sympathy that is borne out of mutual distress. Rowson states that she hopes her novel will help others: “this little tale [. . .] may, I flatter myself, be of service to some who are so unfortunate as to have neither friends to advise, or understanding to direct them, through the various and unexpected evils that attend a young and unprotected woman in her first entrance into life” (5). She expands on the idea of helpless women and says,

If the following tale should save one hapless fair one from the errors which ruined poor Charlotte, or rescue from impending misery the heart of one anxious parent, I shall feel a much higher gratification in reflecting on this trifling performance, than could possibly result from the applause which might attend the most elegant finished piece of literature whose tendency might deprave the heart or mislead the understanding. (6)¹²

Rowson implies that the “hapless fair one” may be saved by the novel because the novel will provide not only advice for those “so unfortunate as to have neither friends to advise” them but also the “understanding” that results from the sense of solidarity created by the book that was so often absent from real life but was just beginning to develop during this time, as critics such as

Warner have discussed. This advice and attempted solidarity bears out my claim that Rowson's "Tale of Truth" is not just a retelling of supposed real events but rather a work that also attempts to construct a communal or universal "truth" about human nature – much as in Brown's writing and in parables.

Similarly, Tenney's persona who calls himself "The Compiler" directly addresses "all Columbian Young ladies Who read Novels and Romances" and then describes the novel as telling the "whole history" of the real Dorcas and her "adventure" (3). According to the compiler, the purpose of publishing the novel was "for the advantage of the younger part of her sex" and then says that the work is "singular and extraordinary" (3). However, in order to convince the reader of the truth of this novel, the compiler suggests that a comparison to the "authentic history" (3) of *Don Quixote* will erase any "doubt" that the reader may have. We realize, just as the readers would have, that instead of the reality or truthfulness of this story, we are all prepared for satire, parody, and some humor. Cynthia Miecznikowski comments on this ironic portion of the preface by saying, "Tenney undermines her implied author's credibility in his commitment to the veracity of *Don Quixote*" (37). Many critics interpret this preface (and the novel) as showing Tenney's own negative belief about novels and novel reading. For example, Jean Nienkamp and Andrea Collins explain that

[n]ovels, it was thought, made immoral actions seem more interesting than virtuous ones. By emphasizing romance and adventure, some critics argued, novels gave young people false ideas of life and particularly made women unsuited for and unhappy with the domestic roles for which society destined them. Such are the primary arguments *Female Quixotism* explicitly offers in its criticism of novel reading. (xiv)

Stephen Carl Arch offers a similar argument when he says that Tenney "is attempting to prevent us from reading the novel as anything but a warning against novel/romance reading" (186).

Tenney's own voice, however, is not what we hear initially. Instead we hear a male persona –

who typifies the contemporary critic – denouncing the genre and espousing this novel as an antidote to all the harmful ones. By satirizing the typical critic and criticism of novels, Tenney challenges the notion that novels in general, and her novel in particular, should be read as a moral primer. Instead, she positions the novel as a source of amusement, which creates a solidarity of sorts because her novel with its exaggerated and over-the-top adventures, seems to ridicule, rather than reinforce, the notion that novel reading causes these escapades.

In addition to a plea for solidarity, these prefaces and other writings were also a way authors attempted to define uniquely American characteristics, customs, and manners within the work as distinct from the European tradition, in another effort to create a sense of community. Like many other authors, Brown champions the uniqueness of an American literature by titling his work, *Wieland*, “An American Tale.” This subtitle shows his awareness of this novel as a part of a body of literature for and about the new country. It also shows that he, too, was interested in solidifying an American readership. In the preface to *Edgar Huntly*, Brown posits a work uniquely American as distinguished from the European version. As a comparison, he states:

America has opened new views to the naturalist and politician, but has seldom furnished themes to the moral painter. That new springs of action, and new motives to curiosity should operate; that the field of investigation, opened to us by our own country, should differ essentially from those which exist in Europe, may be readily conceived. The sources of amusement to the fancy and instruction to the heart, that are peculiar to ourselves, are equally numerous and inexhaustible. It is the purpose of this work to profit by some of these sources; to exhibit a series of adventures, growing out of the condition of our country. (3)

He then outlines what typically has amused a reader in the past: “puerile superstition and exploded manners; Gothic castles and chimeras,” and declares that he will use instead “incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the western wilderness” because they are “far more suitable” to Americans in the new Republic (3). In other words, as with his other works that have been

mentioned earlier, his objective is to amuse and instruct the heart, but he realizes that the new country needs new “views,” new “themes” in its literature, and he ends with the comment that the reader will judge his success.

Brown makes similar rhetorical moves in the preface to *Skywalk*. He calls on the reader to be the judge and, at the same time, endorses the endeavor as an American work: “A tale that may rival the performances of this kind which have lately issued from the English press, will be unexampled in America. Whether the work alluded to deserve the praise the writer is, of all men, least qualified to judge” (*Rhapsodist* 135). He continues in this vein: “To the story-telling moralist the United States is a new and untrodden field. He who shall examine objects with his own eyes, who shall employ the European models merely for the improvement of his taste, and adapt his fiction to all that is genuine and peculiar in the scenes before him will be entitled at least to the praise of originality” (*Rhapsodist* 135). He is suggesting that the novel he has written does not have many examples for comparison because the country is so new and that he is not qualified to judge whether it can be favorably compared to European versions. He also believes that American authors may look to Europe for ways to improve, but their focus must be on creating a work that portrays all that is unique about the new country. In a fashion similar to Brown’s, Imlay makes a point of putting on his title page that his book was “written in America,” with no indication of an inferiority complex that was supposedly felt by these writers. Likewise, Tyler calls novels “the pictures of the times” (6) and insists upon distinctions between American novels and their European counterparts.

Like Brown in “A Receipt for a Modern Romance,” Rowson provides a recipe of sorts in *The Inquisitor* (1788), and she uses this recipe to discuss the difference between the American

and European version – or at least what those differences should be. The Inquisitor (her narrator) says that a sentimental novel should appear thus:

My heroine is beautiful, accomplished, and rich; an only child and surrounded by admirers – she contracts an attachment for a man, her inferior in point of birth and fortune; but honourable, handsome &c.—She has a female friend, to whom she relates all that passes in her breast—her hopes, fears, meetings, partings, &c.—She is treated hardly by her friends—combats innumerable difficulties in the sentimental way, but at last overcomes them all, and is made the bride of the man of her heart. (3:49-50)

The problem with this formula, which the Inquisitor notices, is that it primarily accounts for British sentimental literature and does not consider unique aspects of literature being created in the new Republic. The Inquisitor, Rowson's narrator, argues that this description of a novel will not work for the modern times of the new country and offers this new version, "Sketch of a Modern Novel":

In the first place, your heroine must fall violently in love with an all-accomplished youth at a very early age—keep her passion concealed from her parents or guardians; but bind herself in her own mind to wed no other than this dear, first conqueror of her heart—ill-natured, proud, ambitious fathers, are very necessary to be introduced—kind, affectionate, amiable mothers. The superlative beauty and accomplishments of your heroine, or perhaps the splendour of her fortune, must attract the attention of a man diametrically opposite in person and disposition to her first lover—the father must threaten—the mother entreat—and the lover be very urgent for the completion of his felicity—remember to mix a sufficient quantity of sighs, tears, swoonings, hysterics, and all the moving expressions of heart-rending woe—her filial duty must triumph over inclination; and she must be led like a victim to the altar.—

So much for the first part.

The second volume displays her angelic, her exemplary conduct in the character of a wife—the husband must be jealous, brutal, fond of gaming, keep a mistress, lavish all his fortune on sharpers and lewd women—the wife pious, gentle, obedient and resigned—Be sure you contrive a duel; and, if convenient, a suicide might not be amiss—lead your heroine through wonderful trials—let her have the fortitude of an anchorite, the patience of an angel—but in the end, send her first husband to the other world, and unite her to the first possessor of her heart—join a few other incidents; such as the history of her bosom friend, and a confidante—Manage your plot in such a manner as to have some surprising discovery made—wind up with two or three marriages, and the superlative felicity of all the *dramatis personae*. (3: 52-54)

This recipe appears to be a satiric look at the way to write a sentimental novel.¹³ It also reveals Rowson's awareness that she is writing within a new tradition – a tradition that is attempting to define itself within the framework of the larger cultural work ongoing within a new country that is also attempting to define itself. This defining process also involves an attempt to create works of literature that are separate from the European tradition to which her writing has been unfavorably compared.

Acceptance of the Novel Form

While focusing on various literary and generic issues and highlighting those that are uniquely American is a way of embracing the novel form, some authors discuss the fictional attributes of their works in ways that reveal they are not shying away from imaginative literature or trying to disguise their fiction. One such author is Rowson. In her preface, she says, “she concealed the real names of the characters” not the real names of the people – an acknowledgement of sorts that these people are fictional. She reiterates this point when she mentions the “principal characters in this little tale” – both “characters” and “tale” embodying fictional attributes. Imlay provides another telling example and embraces the efficacy of the novel, by arguing that “Perhaps [the novel] is the most effectual way of communicating moral instruction; for when the vices and follies of the world are held up to us, so connectedly with incidents which are interesting, it is most likely they will leave a more lasting impression than when given in a dull narrative” (1). Not only is Imlay promoting the novel on the strength of its instructional value, but he is also positing the entertainment value of this genre by declaring that a work with a “dull narrative” would not leave a “lasting impression.” Other authors make similar claims and appeals. In Tyler's preface to *Algerine Captive*, the character and narrator Updike Underhill mentions an increase in “books of mere amusement [that] were purchased and

perused by all ranks of his countrymen” (5). He then discusses the lack of American novels for amusement and argues that English novels promote vice, and that Americans must “write our own books of amusement, and [...] exhibit our own manners” (6). As has previously been discussed, many critics view the prefaces as an avenue for authors to defuse criticism. Underhill, however, mentions a case in which one reader particularly liked a book until she found out that it was “founded on FACT”(7), which is contrary to the belief that being based on real events was needed to entice readers to a novel or make it less objectionable.

Some authors mock the use of prefaces or advertisements as a defense mechanism, and through this mockery, provide additional ways of embracing the fictionality of their work. Rowson is one such author. In *The Inquisitor*, which Davidson characterizes as a “loosely structured picaresque novel” (Introduction *Charlotte Temple* xxxix), Rowson ridicules the need for a preface, the need to claim a true story, and the need to claim a long-lost, recently-found manuscript. She would rather be able to admit that the story “came into my hands through my brain” and that “these adventures are merely the children of fancy” (1: viii). She also mocks the need for a moral or practical reason to publish because she “will honestly confess that this work was written solely for my amusement” (1: x). Going against type, Rowson later says, “my characters are not pointed at particular persons except one or two, where gratitude involuntarily guided my pen” (1: xv) and later asserts that any resemblance to any person is a coincidence, which flies in the face of the prevailing claims in the novels of her contemporaries. After a discussion of the difference between an author and compiler, Rowson’s narrator, the Inquisitor, says, “the person who would write a book that might tend to corrupt the morals of youth, and fill their docile minds with ideas pernicious and destructive to their happiness, deserves a greater punishment than the robber who steals your purse or the murderer that takes your life” (1:103).

The bad novel being referred to is one that is “full of intrigue, wrote with levity, and tending to convey loose ideas” (1:102). The set up in this preface and her insinuation in this novel that muggers and murderers are somehow equal to each other, yet better than a novelist who propagates untruth can be read as her way of satirizing the idea of a novel being harmful. I suggest this evidence written in 1788 implies that we should look at the possibility that the preface of *Charlotte Temple* published in England in 1791 and America in 1794 should not be construed as only an apologetic defense of her fiction against the commonplace attacks.¹⁴

Hugh Henry Brackenridge also uses his introduction to his novel, *Modern Chivalry*, to satirize the use of introductions and prefaces, much the way Rowson’s narrator does in *The Inquisitor*. He proposes his novel as a tool for learning “good writing” and his novel provides a way to fix flaws within the English language. We realize the fun that he is having with his work and hence with language when he states that his work “cannot be the subject of criticism” (26). He appears to be facetious when he says that he will accept praise but that his work cannot be censured. He addresses the claims that people were making about novels of the time by suggesting that his work does exactly what the critics feared, yet he shows that these effects are positive:

Being a book without thought, or the smallest degree of sense, it will be useful to young minds, not fatiguing their understandings, and easily introducing a love of reading and study. Acquiring language at first by this means, they will afterwards gain knowledge. It will be useful especially to young men of light minds intended for the bar or pulpit. By heaping too much upon them, style and matter at once, you surfeit the stomach, and turn away the appetite from literary entertainment, to horse-racing and cockfighting. I shall consider myself, therefore, as having performed an acceptable service to all weak and visionary people, if I can give them something to read without the trouble of thinking. But these are collateral advantages of my work, the great object of which is, as I have said before, to give a model of perfect style in writing. (26-27)

Brackenridge’s novel, purportedly having no inherent instructional value, is supposed to keep young men from moral turpitude rather than encouraging a weak morality, as many critics of the

novel would claim that novels do. He posits a readership that is not very bright because they cannot appreciate beauty and content at the same time, so he aims for beauty with a total disregard for the content. He claims he has achieved this aim and suggests that a later author can come along and add the content. His whole preface sets up the idea that his book has no “thought,” “sense,” no instructional value, and no content – a mockery of prefaces and the novels they introduce.

One novel does not have a preface at all for its defense. Foster’s *The Coquette*, which is a seduction novel similar to *Charlotte Temple*, does not have any preface or advertisement, which is unusual in and of itself. Like Gilbert, however, she subtitles her novel as a “history” that is “founded on fact,” and many critics interpret the subtitle as Foster’s way of countering criticism of her work. Robert Shurter argues that *The Coquette* was deemed appropriate reading because it was based on a real story and provided moral instruction. He directs attention to the title page that states the novel is “Founded on Fact” while ignoring the fact that the word “Novel” is also on the title page and more prominent (307). By not writing an apologetic or defensive preface to her work, however, Foster does not align herself with those writers who are supposedly providing apologies for the form. She provides no such lengthy apology. Instead, Foster appears to embrace the fictionality of her work. All these examples highlight that these authors were not trying to disguise their fiction to make it more acceptable but rather were acknowledging the use of fiction to achieve their objectives.

As I have shown, the prefaces or paratexts of these authors are not as one-dimensional as they might appear. The authors do not engage in a straightforward counterattack against their contemporaries’ primary objections to fiction. Instead they offer a more nuanced approach that offers readers new ways of viewing this genre – a genre these authors are embracing, not running

away from. Their prefaces encourage readers to look beyond plot and toward characters and universal truths about human nature, even if those universal truths tend to point in different directions. These authors are also moving beyond simple didactic moral lessons and toward ways of reaching readers designed to enhance a sense of community. Lastly, these prefaces begin the process of setting up their work to challenge their earlier counterparts by highlighting their unique attributes based on American settings and themes. As will be discussed in the remaining chapters, these novels parallel these prefaces in the way these authors self-consciously experiment with function and form in new ways.

End Notes

¹ Lejeune defines the “fringe” as the “author’s name, title, subtitle, name of the collection, name of the publisher, even including the ambiguous game of prefaces” (29).

² To provide further focus on his characters within the novels, he endows them with unique characteristics, such as biloquium and sleep-walking.

³ Cynthia J. Miecznikowski says the compiler’s “persona betrays a certain masculinity” (36). Arch appears to be the only critic who makes no gender assumption, referring to the compiler as “he or she” (184).

⁴ Instead of the normal preface, Mitchell attaches a note at the end of his work, which was published in serial form, rather than at the beginning – but it serves the same purpose.

⁵ The characteristics that Brown describes have tended to define gothic writing over the years. As E. J. Clery points out in his introduction to *The Castle of Otranto* the “recipes” themselves are often published, which, ironically, creates a genre in and of itself, and he provides an example of one from *The Spirit of the Public Journals for 1797* (xvi-xvii, xviii11). Rowson also provides similar recipes in *The Inquisitor*.

⁶ Donald Ringe in *Charles Brockden Brown* (Twayne) reads Brown’s editorial, “The Editor’s Address to the Public,” as a move by him toward more “religious values” and “increasing conservatism” (114, 131n22). Dana Luciano argues that the address is a renunciation by saying the novels were “embarrassingly adolescent” (3). Emory Elliott in *American Writers* views Brown’s address as his “bitter statement indicating that he felt his years as a novelist in America had been wasted” (146). Michael Davitt Bell in *The Development of American Romance* reads Brown’s “disavowal” of all imaginative writing not just in this address but in the works themselves (43). Steven Watts in *The Romance of Real Life* says that Brown “bitterly rejected fiction altogether” and “denigrated his earlier writings” (132, 144). He reasons, however, that this rejection was more because of a failure on the part of the public to appreciate the literature

than because of Brown's rejection of fiction as a worthy literary form. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds reads the address as Brown's acknowledgment "that there was no place in an American economy for a self-supporting fabulist" (14) and that in discovering this fact, he quit publishing fiction.

⁷ The most recent treatment of these texts is Robert S. Levine's essay, "Race and Nation in Brown's Louisiana Writings of 1803." He refers to them as pamphlets but also refers to the narrator as a persona rather than author narrated (332). Levine argues for the pamphlets as an extension of Brown's earlier fiction, but rather than referring to them as fiction, calls them a "hoax" (340). He seems leery of calling them fiction because he believes they have an "explicit political purpose" (340). In *Romance*, Watts calls them "a series of political commentaries" but then also refers to them as "a clever literary ploy" (177). However, none of the critics treat these later works as fiction with a possible literary purpose but rather as nonfictional devices that carry a similar political message as his fiction.

⁸ Likewise, if we read "The Rhapsodist," "A Man at Home," or "A Series of Original Letters," we will find the outlines of several of his other novels.

⁹ Mitchell also believes that bad novels give all novels a bad name and part of his goal is to "rescue from reproach the reputation of sentimental story" (87). Brown has a similar comment in his preface to *Skywalk* but his emphasis is on what kinds of readers popular novels appeal to (*Rhapsodist* 136).

¹⁰ Rowson also believes amusement is necessary for instruction because she says, "It has even been my opinion, that when instruction is blended with amusement, the youthful mind receives and retains it almost involuntarily" (*Reuben and Rachel* 38).

¹¹ While the novel *Skywalk* is missing, the advertisement was published in the 17 Mar 1798 issue of *Weekly Magazine* and has been reprinted in *The Rhapsodist and Other Uncollected Writings*.

¹² The word "performance" in this quotation can also signify a fictional attribute since performance can be defined as representing an action, such as on stage, but again, it is a representation of action – not the action or the reality of the action itself. The reference to applause reinforces the idea of a performance on a stage.

¹³ Some critics, including Dorothy Weil, would say that even *Charlotte Temple* and its sequel *Lucy Temple* (1828) have satirical elements (113).

¹⁴ In her 1798 preface to *Reuben and Rachel*, she also laments having to write a preface and says she does so only out of obligation (38).

Chapter 3. Self-Reflexivity: Exploring the Nature of the Novel in the New Republic

Virtually every critic, especially recent ones, admits that Charles Brockden Brown changed the gothic formula for the American audience, and they acknowledge, for the most part, his success in creating a unique American version of the gothic.¹ This success, however, is relative – they believe he successfully created an American gothic but that does not equate to critical success as a novel: “Brown’s marginalization has been caused in part by a critical dismissal of the forms in which he worked, the early American novel, and more specifically the Gothic novel, both of which have been much maligned for what have been perceived to be their artistic flaws: their aesthetic fragmentation, generic impurity, two-dimensional characterization, and formulaic plots” (Chapman 11). Brown has created novels that fit in many ways the definition of gothic, but I think much analysis is misplaced by focusing on the formula, the setting, and the characteristics of the category. Marianne Noble says, “The American gothic is above all a psychological genre: it explores the nature of personal identity within the social structures unique to the United States” (170). I argue that while he may be exploring personal identity, Brockden Brown is also exploring the nature and identity of the American novel. As evidenced by his numerous essays on these topics,² Brown attempted to develop “his own narrative theory” although “he never managed to formulate a systematic literary theory” (Weber and Schäfer xvi).³ Before the theoretical debates about the origins and forms of the novel, critics, authors, readers, and even non-readers were debating the effects and desirability of reading novels and laying the groundwork for future theorists. Brown was no exception, and in addition to exploring these issues in his essays, he also explored these issues in the novels themselves.

In *Wieland*, I argue that he explores the nature of novels, and whether the novel is inherently evil, as many contemporary critics would suggest. We know, as other critics have

pointed out, that Brown focuses on the book. For example, Michael Gilmore says that “Brown’s work has few peers in its almost obsessive attention to speaking, hearing, reading, and writing” (646). He has over 130 references to terms associated with writing or fiction – words such as tale, narrative, story, and account. He even subtitles this novel, “An American Tale.” I argue that Carwin is the figure that most closely resembles the novel and allows Brown to explore the writing of a novel through this character. Mark Seltzer supports this contention, although he makes no connections to Carwin: “The dominant figure within the novel is the figure of the book” (25). Carwin stands for that figure.⁴ Analyzing Carwin as the figure that most closely characterizes the novel is not a stretch, when one carefully considers the narrator’s descriptions of him and the frequency with which Brown focuses self-reflexively on writing of some sort in his novels. *Arthur Mervyn* seems to be a further exploration of the criticism of fiction in that he tests the theory that novels should be sincere and whether it matters if they are not. *Edgar Huntly* is an metaphoric exploration of a unique American literature as a wilderness, a frontier. Noble says, “A great deal of American gothic – particularly early American gothic – responds to the anxieties raised by the new forms of social control” (176). One of the “social” issues the Republic is attempting to control is the novel, as discussed in Chapter One and Two. Brown appears to be exploring the novel both indirectly and directly in these three works. Robert Levine provides further analysis by saying that Brown “continues to focus on the possible dangers facing the new nation from mysterious strangers” (“Race and Ethnicity” 55). I argue that these mysterious strangers in the minds of some leaders within the new country could also be this new novel developing alongside the new nation.

Wieland and the Nature of the Novel

In the early chapters of *Wieland*, the reader learns the tragic history of the Wieland family – history that continues to haunt their memories, actions, and point of view. The novel focuses on two couples: Wieland and his wife Catherine and Wieland’s sister Clara, who has romantic aspirations for Catherine’s brother Pleyel. Clara is the narrator and the author of the letter, which forms the basis of this epistolary novel.⁵ As Clara is attempting to relate the story of the first time that she sees Carwin, she says, “It is with a shuddering reluctance that I enter on the province of describing him” (45). Since Clara has thus far been presented as a sympathetic, while not always reliable, narrator, her “shuddering reluctance” enables us to see immediately that the person she is describing is one with whom we will likely not have sympathy. She begins to question the means by which she can adequately accomplish this description: “O most fatal and potent of mankind, in what terms shall I describe thee? What words are adequate to the just delineation of thy character?” (46). These words, along with her “shuddering reluctance,” are similar to those used by members of the pulpit and podium when describing an object of scorn, such as the novel. For example, one contemporary reviewer stated that “Novels are a species of writing, which can scarcely be spoken of without being condemned” (“Review”).⁶ In trying to further describe Carwin, Clara wonders whether she is attempting “a task beyond [her] power to execute” (49) – a task with which theorists today have difficulty, as evidenced by the numerous ongoing debates that attempt to describe the novel.

Like many other seemingly malignant elements in life, neither Carwin nor the novel at first appear to be harmful: “There was nothing remarkable in these appearances” (46), and Clara has said earlier, “Let me, for a time, regard thee as being of no terrible attributes” (5). Even though she is unsure of Carwin, Clara cannot help but look at him and does not understand why

she pays attention to him. She even dwells on him after he is no longer in sight. She then begins to imagine his “intellectual history” (48), much as theorists debate the history of the novel. Shortly thereafter, Clara hears his voice, and “[i]t imparted to me an emotion altogether involuntary and uncontrollable” (48). One of the primary reasons for the sanctions against reading the novel is the novel’s ability to arouse emotions as suggested by Dr. Rush’s argument in “Thoughts Upon Female Education,” in which he says, “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 a whole forenoon over the criminal sorrows of a fictitious Charlotte or Werter, turning with disdain [...] from the sight of a beggar [...]” (212). And later in “Character and Effects of Modern Novels,” Rush says that novels are “more dangerous than even bad company,” and they “cannot fail in exciting desires, and leaving impure traces on the memory” (225). When Clara finally sees Carwin up close, his image “continued for hours to occupy [her] fancy, to the exclusion of almost every other image” (49). Another reason for decrying the novel is that it takes people, especially women, away from their duties. Cathy Davidson says,

For the critics of the novel, the power of fiction to preoccupy the reader was a double danger. On the public level, would not novels keep the poor from being good workers and women from being good wives? On the private level, was not the engrossed reading of the wrong text itself a kind of seduction or even a state of possession?” (*Revolution* 107)

After seeing Carwin, Clara immediately develops “an inclination of forming a sketch upon paper of this memorable visage” (49).⁷ In this case, her desire to draw his picture corresponds with some people’s desire to emulate through writing and corresponds closely to Ellen Gardiner’s idea that reading “produces a desire to write” (2). While his appearance is “unremarkable,” just

as the outward appearance of a novel is not harmful, the image is “memorable,” just as a novel is memorable once read.

As Carwin interacts with the couples, we realize that he takes several forms: the rustic, backwoods American, the Spaniard,⁸ and yet his ancestry remains obscure for the largest portion of the novel: “He afforded us no ground on which to build even a plausible conjecture” (66). This inability to form a consensus about the novel is still evident today by the ongoing debates about its origins. The reader really gains the sense that Carwin is a figure that corresponds to the novel after the two couples relate recent inexplicable events to him. In return, Carwin tells similar stories:

His narratives were constructed with so much skill, and rehearsed with so much energy [. . .]. 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. For every difficulty that was suggested, a ready and plausible solution was furnished. (68)

In other words, Carwin tells a story, a narrative, much the way a novel tells a story that contemporary critics worried about because it was telling an unbelievable but convincing story. While some critics have persuasively analyzed Carwin as standing in for the author, I believe some aspects of the novel are overlooked unless we view Carwin as serving as a figure for the novel. For example, the previously mentioned passage reveals Brown’s contradictory feelings on the subject of novels that are able to depict reality believably when “constructed with so much skill,” yet Carwin as a figure that epitomizes the novel is not described in admirable terms. Clara sees this contradiction because she cannot help “but remark that his narratives, however complex or marvellous, contained no instance sufficiently parallel to those that had befallen ourselves” (68-69). Clara sees Carwin’s attempt to replicate reality, but she also is aware of his limitations in accurately conveying real life: “Carwin’s plot owed its success to a coincidence of events

scarcely credible” (128). Clara may see Carwin’s limitations, but she does not know yet whether to view these limitations in a negative light as evidenced when she says that the four of them were “in no degree enlightened respecting his genuine character and views,” and she attests to “[t]he inscrutableness of his character, and the uncertainty whether his fellowship tended to good or evil” (70). In other words, she notices a lot that is admirable, but she is not fully convinced that he is good.

After Clara discovers that Carwin is the source of many of her problems, and she discovers him hiding in the closet, he tries to reassure her that he has not meant her any harm (84-85). Carwin hiding in her closet is significant since Clara keeps all of her books and papers there: Carwin and the novel are in Clara’s closet with the rest of her books. Carwin serves as the figure for not just any novel either – but an American novel – a new novel. Clara in describing Carwin says, “The tone that accompanied [the words ...] was wholly new [...]. I cannot pretend to communicate the impression that was made upon me by these accents [...]. They were articulated with a distinctness that was unexampled in experience. [...]. The tones were indeed such as I never heard before” (51-52). In other words, she had never seen, read, or experienced this type before – similar to what people were saying about this new novel. What is ironic is that when she saw him (before she heard him), she described him as “careless,” “rustic and awkward,” “ungainly and disproportioned,” and “ill adapted,” which she admits did not match the voice. On hearing the voice without seeing the speaker, she “had conjured up a very different image” (52). This description of Carwin at first glance without truly paying attention to him is very similar to what detractors say about the early American novel.

The problems Carwin creates arise from his ability to mimic and project the voices of others. Carwin practices biloquium, and this ability allows him to project realistic speech much

as a novel does through dialogue. The reader assumes that in many respects Carwin is instrumental in causing Wieland to kill his family. Carwin has been using biloquium to create disorder by taking other people's voices and projecting them as real, much as an author would have a character speak (dialogue) in imitation of real conversation. Wieland tries to explain that the voices he hears are religious voices, and Carwin – while admitting to the other instances of projecting his voice – denies telling Wieland to kill. The insinuation remains, though, that had Carwin not been around, Wieland would not have gone crazy and killed his family. Clara understands this and considers Carwin “the grand deceiver: the author of this black conspiracy; the intelligence that governed in this storm” and “Carwin was the enemy whose machinations had destroyed us” (174). Carwin acknowledges her blame by saying, “I intended no ill; but my folly, indirectly and remotely, may have caused it” (179). He then characterizes himself by saying that

Unfortified by principle, [. . .], stimulated by headlong passions, I made this powerful engine subservient to the supply of my wants and the gratification of my vanity. I shall not mention how diligently I cultivated this gift, which seemed capable of unlimited improvement; nor detail the various occasions on which it was successfully exerted to lead superstition, conquer avarice, or excite awe. (182)

This passage is indicative of the type of language used to describe the supposedly heretical novel, which creates contradictory effects, in that novels can “lead superstition, conquer avarice, or excite awe” as described by Carwin. Carwin continues by saying that he has a “passion for mystery” and that he is “a species of imposture” (184).⁹

Brown places Carwin opposite the two characters that correspond to more acceptable writing of the time: theology and reasoned philosophy, and Clara helps to set up this opposition: “Moral necessity, and calvinistic inspiration, were the props on which my brother thought proper to repose. Pleyel was the champion of intellectual liberty, and rejected all guidance but that of his

reason” (25). These two characters, Wieland and Pleyel, allow Brown to examine “the conflict between the two dominant intellectual currents of his time” (Elliott Introduction xvi). Wieland appears to embody theological writing, which Emory Elliott characterizes as “Christian theology’s continued dependence upon a belief in the supernatural and on the intervention of Providence and miracles into daily life” (Introduction xvi). Wieland’s theological leanings can be traced back to his father. Wieland’s father, after converting to an evangelical form of Protestantism, moves to America to convert the Indians. While he converts no Indians, he practices his own version of worship in a temple he designs himself. He eventually lapses into melancholy and predicts that his end is imminent. While his death is often described as a case of spontaneous combustion, no one in his family actually knows what occurs. While his clothes are “reduced to ashes,” he survives the initial fire, but he soon dies of his injuries (17). The death of Wieland’s father allows Brown through Clara’s narration to begin questioning the role of theology and the “Divine Ruler” (18) – questions that return when Wieland believes he hears religious voices, kills his wife and children, and attempts to kill Clara.

In opposition to Wieland’s representation of theology, Pleyel “champions” what Elliott has termed “Enlightenment philosophy’s privileging of reason, order, and science” (Introduction xvi) and by extension characterizes scientific, reasoned writing on some levels, misinterprets what he sees and hears. Pleyel believes that he sees and hears Clara declaring her love for Carwin. Because of this belief, Pleyel breaks off any hope of a relationship with Clara because he thought she “coveted pollution” (103) – Carwin, who embodies characteristics of the novel. When Clara confronts Pleyel and attempts to explain that he has been deceived, he does not believe her, but rather gives a lengthy oration describing in detail the reasons that he has placed

her on an unrealistic and demeaning pedestal by viewing her as subservient to man but simultaneously as someone with an abundance of pure, womanly virtues (112-123).¹⁰

In the early part of the novel, Clara says, “The will is the tool of the understanding, which must fashion its conclusions on the notices of sense. If the sense be depraved, it is impossible to calculate the evils that may flow from the consequent deductions of the understanding” (35). But what happens if the senses are not “depraved” but misinformed as we see in several instances? While Carwin is instrumental in causing the sensory misinformation, we see at the end of the novel that Clara does not blame Carwin. After listening to his confessions, Clara allows Carwin to disappear instead of punishing him: “His guilt was a point to which I was indifferent. Ruffian or devil, black as hell or bright as angels, thenceforth he was nothing to me” (212). What does it say that Brown allows the novel to just disappear – that bad novels should not be held liable? The moral set forth by Clara at the end of the novel tells the reader that the novel is not inherently evil but that bad novels can cause problems for people already susceptible to problems of both sensation and understanding. Clara says Carwin was successful in creating problems because of the “errors of the sufferers [...and] their own frailty” (244). Edwin Sill Fussell who argues that “Carwin clearly stands in for the American writer” (175) says,

Writing was the imaginable source of woe, yet still more writing was the only exit from woe. And so he [Brown] wrote a diatribe against writing but within that context he split the indictment in order to show an irresponsible writer wreaking havoc and wretchedness on a hapless populace while quite another kind of writer—his kind—was quietly restoring a semblance of reason and peace to such of those people as were chanced to survive. (172)

In other words, we should not blame the novel, but rather the readers themselves. I suggest that Clara, at this point, sees the evil as unintentional and feels that since it is not directed at her or her loved ones that the novel does not present a problem. She does not see the potential harm and does not picture that others can be hurt from their encounters with the novel or with Carwin.

At the end of *Wieland*, Brown attempts to unite all the strands of his plot together, including having Clara and Pleyel get married. Many critics attack the end of the novel saying that it ruins an otherwise good and even well-structured novel. For example, Alexander Cowie says the ending, which was later added by Brown, is “marred by unwise emphasis on the secondary plot” (“Historical Essay” 328). Michael D. Butler argues, however, that the ending “contributes to a sophisticated testing and justification of some ultimately optimistic ideas about social man’s limitation and capabilities” (127) and that it is “intentionally unconventional” (129). Brown seems to be aware that he was unsuccessful in his efforts to end *Wieland* satisfactorily because real life is never as tidy as he attempts to depict. Davidson argues in her reading of early American Gothic fiction such as Brown’s: “The reader may hope that the ending of the novel has put to rest those unruly elements arising seemingly from nowhere, but the clear implication is that disorder and villainy are only more or less temporarily forestalled” (*Revolution* 321), as we see over and over again in Brown’s subsequent novels.

I argue, along with many critics, that Brown uses the novel form experimentally and that among other themes, these novels are about the anxieties of language. However, using much of the same textual evidence, these critics and I interpret the text differently, and thus arrive at opposing conclusions. For instance, Nina Baym says, “Brown, in defiance (or ignorance?) of story logic, chose to bring Carwin into the novel’s center, where, for much of the action, the ventriloquist replaces Wieland as the object of narrative attention. It seems almost as if his function becomes precisely to divert the reader from the true center” (“Minority Reading” 93). Baym suggests that this problem is the fault of an “inexperienced writer” (“Minority Reading” 94). However, I argue, in his attempts to work out a narrative theory, Brown wrote in ways that will often appear inept. Bringing Carwin to the “center [. . .] of narrative attention” does not defy

“story logic” but rather puts the focus on the novel and on Carwin who serves as a figure for the novel.¹¹ As mentioned earlier, Mark Seltzer also argues that the novel is the focus. He continues this argument: “The major ‘actions’ of the novel involve reading, writing, and spoken narration, and actual events which do occur are always distanced through (written or spoken) discourse. The novel is doubly-written, in a manner which centrally emphasizes the acts of writing and speaking” (88). Again, with over 130 references to tale, story, record, account, or other similar words associated with writing and fiction, the “true center” of the work is the novel and focusing on Carwin places the spotlight exactly where it is intended.

On the other hand, two critics who argue for the primacy of Carwin as a way for Brown to discuss writing and language in his novel are Toni and Fussell who both believe that Carwin represents the author.¹² O’Shaughnessy analyzes many of the same lines of Clara’s description of Carwin to Carwin who corresponds to the author that I am to Carwin who is consistent with the novel. A fact further supported by Pleyel who describes Clara’s journal in which she presumably makes mention of Carwin (125). O’Shaughnessy also says that Clara’s mention of “plausible conjecture” (72) discussed earlier in this section is a reference to Carwin the author, “who refuses to make concessions to society and communication, who does not seem interested in the meaning his interpreters discover in his discourse, or in whether they discover any meaning there or not. He does not use his voice to communicate but to elicit an effect” (44). Yes and no. I think “plausible conjecture” is a discussion of interpretation and the inability on the part of the interpreters to make sense of what they are seeing and hearing, but it makes more sense to say that we interpret a text rather than an author. If we accept O’Shaughnessy’s argument, then we have to believe Brown’s focus and our interpretive efforts should be directed at the author rather than at the text. Fussell also views Carwin as representing an author, but he argues that Carwin

specifically represents the American author. Fussell says that to “exorcise the horrors,” Clara is “writing about [Carwin’s] writing” (177). Fussell is in essence calling Clara a literary critic. However, as literary critics, we generally write about the product – the novel – more so than the producer. Even though Clara on a couple of occasions refers to Carwin as the author as in “author of these horrors” (227), these comments do not rule out my argument that Carwin often serves as a figure for the novel and that Clara believes on some levels that the novel is the “author of her horrors.”

Paul Witherington suggests similar ideas when he says that “Brown’s choice of narrative technique illustrates his notion that writing can be a testing out of ideas” (“Not My Tongue” 175), supporting my contention that Brown is experimenting in his fiction. This testing of ideas is also reflected in the numerous, contradictory (yet plausible) readings of Brown’s work outlined by Mary Chapman (13-16) and Donald A. Ringe (*Charles Brockden Brown* 1-3). Considering the contradictory nature of these interpretations, the fact that they are still persuasive provides further suggestion that Brown was attempting to work out theories while never realizing any strong conclusions. With *Wieland*, he was attempting to formulate a theory of the novel and in the process realizes the futility of trying to reconcile all the elements. These contradictory readings also make sense if one considers that in order to formulate a theory, one must consider complications in order to test hypotheses and generate all the necessary questions. When we realize how often Brown wrote about writing and reading and the number of references he made in this novel to writing, reading, books, manuscripts, and various other forms of writing, we have to suppose that he must be creating a sort of commentary or criticism of his own.

Arthur Mervyn and Fictional Sincerity

Arthur Mervyn is another novel that Brown uses to explore the nature of the novel. While he explores, somewhat, the issue of whether the novel is inherently good or evil, he focuses more on whether the novel is evil because it tells lies. Brown tests the theory through the character of Arthur Mervyn and by showcasing fictional elements throughout the novel. The entire plot of *Arthur Mervyn* and the way the story is perceived by the readers and even by other characters in the novel hinge on whether Arthur Mervyn is considered sincere or not. Davidson provides a good summary of the conflicting view of *Arthur Mervyn* among critics: “[T]he range of opinions on *Arthur Mervyn* is so varied that one must read *against* this body of interpretation,” and “The critical reception of *Arthur Mervyn* is as labyrinthine and contradictory as anything in a gothic novel [...]. Much of the debate centers on the character of Arthur Mervyn” (*Revolution* 339). Some critics cannot decide whether he is a sincere hero or an insincere villain and often will take both sides of the debate. However, I will argue that the character can legitimately be read both ways, and the conclusion that I draw from this ambiguity is that it does not matter whether Arthur Mervyn is sincere because the outcome is still the same.¹³ The ending is not ambiguous, as Warner B. Berthoff comments by saying that “it is unique among Brown’s major novels: it ends happily” (“Adventures” 425). Arthur Mervyn marries well; he appears to move in desirable social circles as his relationship with the Doctor is strengthened; and he is on his way toward a promising career. Since nothing is ambiguous about the ending, I draw the conclusion that whether Arthur Mervyn is sincere or not does not matter to the outcome.

Focusing on writing allows Brown to test this theory. All of Brown’s novels have a strong, self-reflexive component or theme of writing, as attested to by Michael T. Gilmore who argues that “Brown confers conspicuous visibility on acts of speech and writing. [. . .]. Brown’s

work has few peers in its almost obsessive attention to speaking, hearing, reading, and writing” (646). As he does in *Wieland*, Brown mentions books and writing many times in *Arthur Mervyn*. He uses the word writing or a form of the word 47 times. He uses words like narrative, manuscript, history over 130 times. These instances show the importance of books and writing in this novel. Fictional elements are further emphasized, as noted by Davidson and Michael Warner. Davidson, in the conclusion to her chapter on American gothic, but more specifically the section on *Arthur Mervyn*, says that Brown “wrote metafiction, fiction about the making of fictions – the writer’s, the character’s, the reader’s, and the nation’s” (*Revolution* 355). In a fashion, similar to Davidson’s argument, Warner argues that “Brown fills the novel with analogues to fiction: forgeries, look-alikes, bank notes, seductions, credit schemes, and the like” (172). Warner interprets this evidence as proof that Brown was opposed to fiction because these instances were all depicted in a negative light. I suggest, however, that as with the case of Arthur Mervyn’s sincerity, the proof is in the ending. The numerous suggestions of fictionality (whether positively or negatively depicted) do not affect the outcome – or rather do not cause negative consequences for the protagonist, as some contemporary critics of the novel would lead readers to believe. George Spangler also notes the emphasis on fictional storytelling: “[I]t is a book that reveals such an obsession with telling stories, any story, that it becomes a book about telling stories” (580), and many of the tales, such as Clavering’s, we discover to be false or fictional. Spangler continues this argument by saying that Brown’s “entire book enacts his compulsion to make fictions” (592). Adding further irony to Brown’s focus on fictionality is that Arthur Mervyn is a copyist – not a writer – but one who merely copies writing. Also, we must consider that a large portion of the supposedly forged (fictional) banknotes are concealed within the leaves of a book. Paralleling the mentions of books and writing are words related to sincerity

such as honesty and truthfulness. These words appear over 130 times. In addition, the characters mention intent, motive, and purpose over 200 times and generally in connection with a discussion of sincerity. Brown is making a connection among these elements by linking a person's motivations to his or her sincerity and intertwining these ideas with his overarching theme of fictional writing.

Brown includes other motifs and images that spotlight his theme of writing. One primary motif that he uses to focus the reader's attention to books and writing is eavesdropping. This motif begins early in the novel but is encapsulated by Arthur Mervyn's description of himself as a "greedy listener" (40). In a sense, eavesdropping is related because reading a book is a form of eavesdropping or voyeurism. Reading a novel that is self-referential is doubly so because the reader is not only eavesdropping on the characters but on the author as he refers to his writing. Also at the end of the novel, Brown provides several scenes in which Arthur Mervyn declares his devotion to his pen. These scenes may have sexual overtones as some critics suggest,¹⁴ but they are also another way of emphasizing the importance of writing and books as a theme. Even though Arthur Mervyn "abjure[s]" (446) the pen at the end, I do not believe any evidence provided in the novel or in any of Brown's writing suggests that he believes fiction writing should stop or that he should stop writing fiction. Besides, the tone with which he addresses the pen is one of fondness.

In this section, I do not claim that the protagonist is a metaphorical representation of the novel, as Carwin corresponded to the novel in *Wieland*. However, Brown is exploring the novel and in *Arthur Mervyn*, he uses the character of Arthur Mervyn to explore a particular facet of the novel that is in question. We know Brown links books to people when he has his protagonist,

Arthur Mervyn, think, “There is no book in which I read with more pleasure, than the face of a woman” (403). Later in the novel, however, Arthur Mervyn describes books as being

cold, jejune, vexatious in their sparingness of information at one time, and their impertinent loquacity at another. Besides, all they chuse to give, they give at once; they allow no questions; offer no further explanations, and bend not to the caprices of our curiosity. They talk to us behind a screen. Their tone is lifeless and monotonous. They charm not our attention by mute significances of gesture and looks; They spread no light upon their meaning by cadences and emphasis and pause. (427)

This description does not correspond with his earlier descriptions of extracting from them pleasure and remembering them as providing worthwhile instruction. By this time of the novel, however, readers will recognize the lack of sincerity in his character (or at least the possibility). The other difference of note by this point in the novel is that Arthur Mervyn is no longer the subject of Dr. Stevens’s narration but rather the narrator of his own story.

The short version of the novel is that a poor country boy goes to the city and makes good – good marriage, good friends, and good career. In this novel, Mervyn leaves the countryside, ostensibly to get away from his unhappy family situation and to make his fortune in the city. After an adventurous first night of having his belongings stolen and hiding in a stranger’s bedroom closet, he meets Welbeck, a mysterious (presumably villainous) man,¹⁵ who offers him a place to live and a job as a copyist and general errand boy. Life is going well until Welbeck is threatened by Watson and flees, supposedly dying in his attempt to escape. Mervyn returns to the country and befriends the Hadwin family. Presumably to help out one of the Hadwins, Mervyn returns to the city, where he falls into more misadventures and gets ill with the yellow fever that is raging through the city. Doctor Stevens finds him and takes him into his home where he tells the doctor his story. Volume One is almost entirely told by the doctor who retells Mervyn’s story, and ends with the doctor finding Mervyn. Volume Two continues Mervyn’s story after his initial encounter with the doctor, but Mervyn picks up most of the narrative duties. At the

beginning of Volume Two, Mervyn leaves Dr. Stevens's house, telling the doctor that he wants to check on the Hadwin family but that he will return soon. When he does not return within a few days that eventually stretch into a few weeks, Dr. Stevens begins to suspect that Wortley, his disbelieving friend, may have been right about Mervyn. When the doctor and Arthur Mervyn meet again, Mervyn tells him that he sent letters, but they must have gotten lost – a common technique in a sentimental novel, but not necessarily believable here. When Arthur Mervyn and Dr. Stevens finally have a few minutes of time alone, Mervyn tells him of his latest “perils and embarrassments” (260), which basically takes the remainder of the novel.

When questioned about inconsistencies in his story or asked to refute other people's versions of his story, Arthur Mervyn always has a “logical” answer for everything he does. Believing his version of events is possible only if we believe he is being sincere. For example, in Chapter XVII of Volume 1, Mervyn supposedly stayed in an empty house at the suggestion of Mr. Estwick to keep away the looters and because he had no place to go. When he got ready to leave the next day, he realized he did not have a key, so he locked the door from the inside and slipped out a window. Of course, this “story” only makes sense if we believe he has been totally honest in his (re)telling. If, on the other hand, we do not believe his sincerity, then we may begin to question why he was at the house and whether he was at the house with the good intentions with which he credits himself. He also gives numerous, well-intentioned reasons why he should enter the Thetford's empty house to find Wallace's stuff. Later, when he ends up at Welbeck's house (supposedly accidentally) he says that he will stay in the bathhouse because no one can see him there (181). He states that he does not feel bad breaking into the house through the open window because his “purposes were not dishonest” (182). On several occasions, Arthur Mervyn

wanders into and through people's houses uninvited, but he always excuses his actions by restating that his pure, unselfish intentions should absolve him of any guilt.

Part of the evidence critics cite to prove Arthur Mervyn's sincerity derives from Doctor Stevens's commentaries on the tale and the doctor's own seeming acceptance of the tale.

However, the doctor appears to be trying to convince himself using circular logic and even unknowingly contradicts himself. Doctor Stevens says,

Surely the youth had displayed inimitable and heroic qualities. His courage was the growth of benevolence and reason, and not the child of insensibility and the nursling of habit. He had been qualified for the encounter of gigantic dangers by no laborious education. He stepped forth upon the stage, unfurnished, by anticipation or experience, with the means of security against fraud; and yet, by the aid of pure intentions, had frustrated the wiles of an accomplished and veteran deceiver. (219)

Dr. Stevens is rationalizing using circular logic by saying that Arthur Mervyn must be sincere because his intentions were pure, yet we can only believe that his intentions are pure if we believe that he is sincere.

At the beginning of Chapter Two, Volume Two, Dr. Stevens reveals some doubt in Arthur Mervyn's tale, when he says,

Surely the youth was honest. His tale could not be the fruit of invention; and yet, what are the bounds of fraud? Nature has set no limits to the combinations of fancy. A smooth exterior, a show of virtue, and a specious tale, are, a thousand times, exhibited in human intercourse by craft and subtlety. Motives are endlessly varied, while actions continue the same; and an acute penetration may not find it hard to select and arrange motives, suited to exempt from censure any action that any human being can commit.

Had I heard Mervyn's story from another, or read it in a book, I might, perhaps, have found it possible to suspect the truth; but, as long as the impression, made by his tones, gestures and looks, remained in my memory, this suspicion was impossible. Wickedness may sometimes be ambiguous, its mask may puzzle the observer; our judgment may be made to falter and fluctuate, but the face of Mervyn is the index of an honest mind. Calm or vehement, doubting or confident, it is full of benevolence and candor. He that listens to his words may question their truth, but he that looks upon his countenance when speaking, cannot withhold his faith. (229-30)

In other words, others may “mask” evil, but Arthur Mervyn’s face “is the index of an honest mind,” and Dr. Stevens makes this contradictory statement after admitting that people may have a “smooth exterior, a show of virtue, and a specious tale” without ever attributing this possible “craft and subtlety” to Arthur Mervyn. Even Arthur Mervyn mentions the “delusiveness of appearances” (137), and his answer to all inconsistencies, all ignored common courtesies, and all questions about his sincerity is to say,

I was not, indeed, sorry for the past. My purpose was just, and the means which I selected, were the best my limited knowledge applied. My happiness should be drawn from reflection on the equity of my intentions. That these intentions were frustrated by the ignorance of others, or my own, was the consequence of human frailty. Honest purposes, though they may not bestow happiness on others, will, at least, secure it to him who fosters them. (270)

Again, Brown through the character of Arthur Mervyn provides a link between sincerity and intentions and suggests that espousing good intentions does not necessarily equate to sincerity and that sincerity can be faked.

Brown establishes early the fictionality of Arthur Mervyn as a character and never attempts to present him as a real person. We see this in the beginning of the novel when Arthur Mervyn undergoes an “instantaneous transformation” by changing into clothes that Welbeck provides (51). Elliott says, “[Arthur Mervyn] uses the opportunities of an open republican society to escape his background and fabricate a new identity” (*Revolutionary Writers* 250). While I am not attempting to make any argument about “open republican society,” I agree with Elliott that Mervyn “fabricate[s] a new identity.” We also see this in the different versions of Arthur Mervyn that he reveals through the various stories he tells and through the multiple versions of Arthur Mervyn we hear from others. Russo goes so far as to argue convincingly that Arthur Mervyn is an imposter and is really Clavering. Whether the claim is persuasive or not does not change the fact that we are presented with multiple versions of Arthur Mervyn. By the

end of the novel, Mervyn tells us that “I was always of that form she wished me to assume” (428) – in other words, no real self. These examples in the depiction of Arthur Mervyn provide Brocken Brown with another way to showcase fictional elements.

According to many critics, the novelists of this time are not putting an emphasis on their fiction, as has been discussed in earlier chapters. In fact, many critics argue that novelists attempted to downplay their novelistic tendencies or posit their novels as being based on real events because critics of the time considered novels “frivolous and usually dangerous” (Bell “Double-Tongued” 144). Michael Davitt Bell argues that the novelists of this time were fearful of imaginative literature, and he gives some examples of people who succumbed to the pitfalls of reading fiction, such as Miss Whitman who dies in *The Power of Sympathy* and Archibald who goes insane in Brown’s essay, “The Lesson on Sensibility” (*Somnambulism* 93-97). Bell argues that Brown believes such happenings were caused by “exposing the mind to unreal and delusive pictures of life” (“Double-Tongued” 146) that are found in novels. Bell argues that “What makes Brown fascinating is the self-consciousness with which he made the conventional fear of fiction a central preoccupation of *works of fiction*” (“Double-Tongued” 151). I agree. I argue this fear of fiction is what Brown is exploring, but I believe he is exploring others’ fear rather than his own. Bell and I disagree on the conclusions since he argues that Brown’s novels “express Brown’s fears about the truth and the effects of fiction” (“Double-Tongued” 151).

Bell believes that Arthur Mervyn is a “sincere protagonist” (“Double-Tongued” 154) and claims that “sincerity and virtue triumph” in the novel (“Double-Tongued” 155). By the end of the section on Arthur Mervyn, however, he leaves room for an opposing viewpoint by saying that Arthur Mervyn’s story is just that – a story – a narrative – “possibly a work of fiction,” and “[t]he very complexity of the novel’s narrative structure raises doubts about the reliability of all

narrative. And while one hardly suspects Arthur of the deliberate sort of fraud practiced by Welbeck, one cannot avoid the suspicion that he is at least deceiving himself” (“Double-Tongued” 156). Like Dr. Stevens in some ways, Bell appears to be trying to convince himself with his acknowledgement that Volume Two focuses on Arthur Mervyn’s own truthfulness and that “he has nothing to support his tale but the air of sincerity with which he tells it” (“Double-Tongued” 155). Bell even quotes the doctor who says that “If Mervyn has deceived me there is an end to my confidence in human nature” (“Double-Tongued” 156), but earlier Bell quoted Brown who says, “I think it may safely be asserted that of all the virtues mankind is most universally deficient in sincerity” (qtd in Bell, “Double-Tongued” 143). So why should we believe that Brown created or was able to create a truly sincere character? Bell says that Brown is linking “confidence in human nature with confidence in literary truth” (“Double-Tongued” 156). I am more inclined to believe that Brown’s definition of “literary truth” and Bell’s are quite different. Bell seems to suggest that literary truth is reliable and sincere and that Brown is caught up in these dichotomies. I argue that Brown understands that a work of fiction is just that – a work of fiction, but he believes that it can speak its own version of literary truth. History, he believes, is also constructed and does not have a monopoly on truth, an idea he explores in much of his writing.¹⁶ For example, in “The Difference between History and Romance” (1800), Brown explores this relationship and difference saying, “The same man is frequently both historian and romancer in the compass of the same work” (*Literary Essays* 83). He also discusses the difficulty in separating the two forms of writing or the limitations inherent in trying to write a history without any fictional elements.¹⁷ In addition, the fictional elements that abound in this novel would belie any suggestion that Brown is espousing a belief in literary truth. Bell goes on to say that “[t]he novel’s comic conclusion seems to vindicate both Arthur and the possibility of

sincerity in literature” (“Double-Tongued” 156), circling back to his original conclusion that Arthur Mervyn is a sincere character. He argues that Brown “subvert[s] authenticity [and ...] raise[s] questions about the novel’s overt sincerity” (159) and believes this subversion reinforces Brown’s “fear of fiction and imagination” (145) because “[t]he novel’s unreal and delusive picture of life unsettles the balance of the mind” (159). I argue that the sincerity of literature does not matter and that Brown is exploring that avenue.

In opposition to Bell, other critics question Arthur Mervyn’s sincerity. Patrick Brancaccio argues that “Arthur’s tale is called into question through a complex set of narratives within narratives which provide the reader with conflicting views of the same events” (19), and he calls Arthur Mervyn “neither a simple innocent nor a conscious hypocrite” (27). Norman S. Grabo sees Arthur Mervyn as “self-seeking” (“Historical Essay” 463) but believes that Brown wanted his readers to view Mervyn as sincere and bases this belief on Brocken Brown’s preface. I do not, however, see evidence of this claim in Brown’s preface. James Dawes says, “As *Arthur Mervyn* progresses, the novel trains us increasingly to suspect the integrity and honesty of its protagonist” (444). James Russo claims, “[M]any readers have come to feel that [Arthur Mervyn’s] piety is feigned, his virtue convenient, and his self-deprecation a species of calculated, phony modesty” (“Chameleon” 381). Finally, Masahi Rishima says, “Critical discourse on Arthur Mervyn has long focused on whether Mervyn, as his author asserts, is an honest young man exemplifying Republican virtue, or a self-centered materialist despite not only Brown’s but also his own claims as narrator to the contrary” (2). I do not necessarily consider that Brown is asserting Mervyn’s honesty. I believe Brown is enough of a craftsman to be able to have his character assert such a thing even if he did not believe it.

While many critics discuss the ambiguity in the novel, also noteworthy is that Arthur Mervyn, the character, discusses the ambiguity of his actions and in his own character on at least six different occasions. On his first night in town as he is hiding in a closet in a stranger's house, he says to himself, "I was deeply impressed with the ambiguousness which would necessarily rest upon my motives and the scrutiny to which they would be subjected. I shuddered at the bare possibility of being ranked with thieves" (43). In other words, he knew that hiding in a stranger's closet would create questions about the reason he was in there. The ambiguousness of this situation is suspect, and it is doubtful that anyone would ever consider a situation like his as being motivated by pure intentions. Later, he says, "My behavior, I well know, was ambiguous and hazardous, and perhaps wanting in discretion, but my motives were unquestionably pure" (322). While I do not believe either the "unquestionably" part or the "pure" part, Brown seems to invite the reader to read Arthur Mervyn as both a sincere narrator and an insincere storyteller.

Does the ambiguity of Arthur Mervyn's character matter? Does a novel have to be sincere or virtuous? The fact that we are still debating Mervyn's character is telling. Like Susannah Rowson and her appeal to readers and critics, Brown seems to be commenting on the author-reader relationship as it pivots on the interpretation of Arthur Mervyn's character. Warner says, "It would be forcing the issue to read this drama of credit as a conscious thematization of novelistic fictionality. But it *can* be read that way for the simple reason that it derives from the same anxieties about personalities and social order that made fiction so suspect in republican America" (171). I argue not only that it can be read this way but that it should be read this way and does so without "forcing the issue." Warner is hesitant to say that Brown was conscious of this effort, yet all of Brown's writing reflects this self-consciousness.

Edgar Huntly and a Unique American Literature

Many critics discuss *Edgar Huntly* as the true flowering of Brown's new version of the gothic – gothic that is uniquely American. The problem with this argument is that it sets it apart from the other novels. In many ways, this novel is distinct as has been discussed by numerous critics and will be discussed here, but considering the number of critics who argue that his novels always have a strong thematic concern with writing, an interpretation of this novel that does not explore this connection and ultimate progression of his novels is doing this novel, and his others, a disservice. Brown is emphatic in this preface that he is focusing on what is “new” and unique about America, in particular “incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the western wilderness” (3). In referring to Brown’s preface, Jared Gardner calls it “[O]ne of the most aggressive declarations of literary independence in the early American novel, staking his claim to a uniquely American writing via his portrayal of the Indians” (430). I contend this unique American writing is not just in the portrayal of the Indians, which is rather superficial, but in the more fully developed depiction of the wilderness. In the two previous sections, I argued that he was exploring various facets of novels and novelty. In this section, I argue that he is exploring the unique “wilderness” of the new American novel. As I discussed in an earlier chapter, Brown does not fear fiction or imaginative literature, but rather embraces it, and realizes the “communicative possibilities of fiction” (Elliott Introduction xii). He goes further in this novel to show that acceptance by focusing entirely on those things that “differ essentially from those which exist in Europe” (3).

Both Edgar Huntly and Gardner characterize this tale as a nightmare, and according to Gardner, the nightmare “that will be narrated is characterized as a literary crisis” (440-41). The literary crisis that comes out of this telling is the new American novel. Gardner goes on to say,

“This fundamental incompatibility between his experiences in the wilderness and traditional (that is, English) narrative structures is a dilemma importantly related to that which Brown describes in his preface” (441). In other words, Brown sees the English gothic tradition as being unable to portray this type of story. Only through the use of the wilderness as a plot device is Brown able to capture the best analogy for this new tale, this new form because in the frontier “the ‘cake of custom’ was broken, old standards were discarded, new ideals and new institutions were set up” (Tyler, *Freedom’s Ferment* 15). Michele Bottalico also views the western wilderness as the site for the beginnings of a unique American genre: “This internal westward migration of the newly arrived colonists, which inaugurated the long phase of the frontier, offered manifold contributions to the shaping of American national culture and literature after the political independence from Great Britain” (“American Frontier” 3). *Edgar Huntly* is Brown’s contribution to this foundation and “passage into new forms” (*EH* 239) – a reference to the wilderness, but equally applicable to the new American novel.¹⁸

Just as the other novels have numerous words relating to writing, this novel also refers to writing extensively. Words such as pen, narrative, word, letters, and papers appear frequently. As is the case with *Wieland* and *Ormond*, *Edgar Huntly* is structured in the form of a long letter, relating Edgar Huntly’s recent adventures.¹⁹ The introductory paragraphs of *Edgar Huntly* stress the importance of writing from the beginning. As with his other novels, Brown directly refutes without apology the critics who oppose novel reading. One charge against reading novels is that novels can cause personal and public disorder through emotional upheaval. As Edgar begins his letters, he tells his reader that “Till now, to hold a steadfast pen was impossible” but that his “emotions will not be re-awakened by [his] narrative, [that are] incompatible with order and coherence” (5). In other words, the writing of his tale will not create any distress, but he had to

gain some distance from the events prior to being able to write about them. In fact, not only will writing and novels not cause emotional trauma, but rather the opposite will happen: “In proportion as I gain power over words, shall I lose dominion over sentiments” (5). As so many narrators do, he claims that his pen is not up to the task, but then he says that his pen will help him “trace intelligent characters [...] and place in order the incidents” (6). In other words, he acknowledges that he is creating a plot with characters – two key ingredients of fiction.

Briefly, this novel relates Edgar’s adventure in trying to find his friend, Waldegrave’s murderer. He initially suspects an Irish immigrant laborer, Clithero, as being the murderer and pursues him into the wilderness. During Edgar’s adventures in the wilderness, he encounters Indians, panthers, and other “wild” obstructions that all come close to killing him. Similar to the other novels of Brown’s, numerous embedded tales by other characters, including Clithero, add to the story, along with providing additional evidence that this novel is about writing – fiction in particular. By the end of the novel, Edgar realizes that Clithero is not Waldegrave’s murderer and believes Clithero is a victim who needs another chance. The ending of this novel is somewhat open ended because Clithero dives off the boat and disappears beneath the surface of the water. They assume he is dead but Edgar had a similar experience and he survived, and Welbeck in *Arthur Mervyn* also survived this experience. This ambiguous ending suggests Brown’s frustration with the reading public’s lack of acceptance of his novels.

As mentioned earlier in this section, Brown’s preface sets the reader up to pay attention to the wilderness in this novel. In other words, setting – another key element of fiction – will be in the foreground. As Edgar begins to search for Waldegrave’s killer, he discovers Clithero digging and sobbing at the exact spot of Waldegrave’s death. When Clithero runs away before Edgar can find out what he is doing and who he is, Edgar begins an internal debate on whether

he should continue his inquiries, and he asks himself, “Is it wise to undertake experiments by which nothing can be gained, and much may be lost?” (16). He decides that it is worth it, and ultimately this search leads him into the wilderness. If Brown’s thematic concern with writing is the primary focus of his novels as I have argued, then this question recalls Brown’s concern with writing the new American novel – the experiment of writing a novel uniquely American. This metaphor is extended by the description of his initial pursuit of Clithero through the woods immediately following this debate (18-21). This pursuit (and even later ones) appears to be symbolic as he crashes into and through things, not knowing where he is going or where he will end up, much like an author during these times. Even the telling of stories, of which Edgar’s letter is one, is depicted in terms of the wilderness: “When I awoke in the morning, I hied, in fancy, to the wilderness. I saw nothing but the figure of the wanderer before me. I traced his footsteps anew, retold my narrative, and pondered on his gestures and words,” and his description of this wilderness is not depicted negatively (33). Since I am arguing that Edgar’s journey into the wilderness is paralleling Brown’s forays into the new American novel, these descriptions in many respects are reflective of novel writing. Further evidence that the wilderness and the novel parallel is that Clithero and Edgar must go into the wilderness for Clithero to tell his story (34).

As Clithero tells his story, he says that he has to forget the past in order to tell his tale and that “[his] efforts have been thus far successful. [He has] hitherto been able to deliver a coherent narrative” (57). This idea of forgetting the past to tell a new story is akin to these authors’ efforts at forgetting the English tradition or old European tradition, as will be addressed further in this section. Clithero also refers numerous times to the word “word” and “words,” and his attempts to find the right words and ensure that the words are the most appropriate and that they are actually

saying what he intends. Both Edgar and Clithero refer to the inability of words to adequately describe whatever situation they find themselves in.²⁰ Even while asserting that his words are inadequate, Edgar expects others to readily believe his words: “I must trust to the speed with which my voice and my words should disclose my true character” (236-37). While Clithero admits that his words are inadequate, they have been, by his own admission, fairly coherent throughout, yet “his last words were incoherent” (209). Since this comment is made at the end of the novel, it suggests the passing of the torch to the American novel from the European one. After Edgar hears Clithero’s tale, he searches his memory bank of past reading in romances and histories and finds nothing that can compare: “My reading had furnished me with no instance, in any degree, parallel to this,” and “My mind was full of the images unavoidably suggested by this tale, but they existed in a kind of chaos, and not otherwise, than gradually, was I able to reduce them to distinct particulars, and subject them to a deliberate and methodical inspection.” (91) – hence the need for the novel, and the American novel in particular because a new tale needs new form.

A few days after Clithero tells his story, the parallels between the wilderness and the tale are reiterated because as Edgar is reflecting on Clithero, his tale, and disappearance, “the idea of the wilderness occurred” (94) to him. His reflections on Clithero at various points are similar to his reflections on the wilderness – Clithero is to be studied and written about in much the same way that the wilderness is. They are new – they are novel. Edgar’s introduction years ago to the wilderness by his teacher, Sarsefield, was through “moralizing narratives” and “synthetical reasonings” (97) – terms associated with writing and storytelling rather than outdoor survival. Then he said “[t]hese excursions had familiarized me with its outlines and most accessible parts” (97). If we carry the wilderness and writing metaphor into these words, then “moralizing

narratives” and “synthetical reasonings” correspond to types of writing common during this time, with which he would have been “familiar,” but they did not complete the whole piece for him. Huntly gives a minute account of going through the cave with all his hesitations, stops, restarts, and his awareness that he cannot go back. Several “arduous task[s]” (101), including the task of writing in a fairly new form of a new country, can be placed in lieu of going through a cave, and his account would still make sense. He also acknowledges treading on ground that no one else ever has: “Since the birth of this continent, I was probably the first who had deviated thus remotely from the customary paths of men” (103) – a comment that also makes sense if referring to writing the new America novel.

Brown employs another motif common in his novels that is analogous to the wilderness that places special emphasis on writing. Both Edgar and Clithero keep “secret” manuscripts locked in a special box,²¹ and both characters unknowingly “bury” these manuscripts while asleep. He describes Clithero’s box that has the manuscript much the way he depicts the wilderness, in terms of the unknown and unfamiliar. As with the wilderness, the box may hold clues to the story, and Edgar has an uncontrollable desire to explore it. When he digs up the box, he takes it with the intent to explore the manuscript that Clithero had alluded to in his story. At this point, Edgar again says that he “had hitherto known no parallel” (121). Like his foray into the cave, his subsequent explorations in the wilderness cause him to encounter numerous obstacles that never fully stop him, such as a storm and a panther. However, he also faces and kills several Indians and almost gets killed by his friends. These obstacles are analogous to the obstacles faced by American novelists of this time.

After one of his explorations, he remembers his promise to transcribe all of Waldegrave’s letters. Transcribing letters in this case probably indicates making a copy since they are

presumably not in a foreign language. The significance of this passage reminds the reader that letters and writing play a prominent role in this narrative. The adventures he had with Clithero in the wilderness were keeping him from accomplishing that task, and of course, we know about these adventures because he is writing a letter to Waldegrave's sister, which brings the theme of writing full circle. At this point of his remembrance (130-31), he decides he can do both tasks: pursue Clithero and continue the tale and transcribe the letters. He also tells us the story of the letters and the importance of writing and letters to him and Waldegrave. These stories within the main story, especially a story about writing, further reinforces Brown's theme of writing and the self-consciousness with which he wrote about writing in his novels. Another instance of a story within the story that focuses on writing is Weymouth's. Weymouth tells Edgar his story and the way it relates to Waldegrave, and Weymouth's story is replete with references to various types of writing and written instruments, such as "will," "bankbook," "memorandum of letter," "testamentary direction, or some papers," "vouchers and papers" (143, 144, 150). Like many works during this time, a major plot device turns on letters not being received or in this case, not being found.

After the Weymouth tale, Edgar spends several pages bringing the reader(s) back to his main narrative: "Meanwhile I will return to my narrative" and "I have delayed this narrative, longer than my duty to my friend enjoined. Now that I am able to hold a pen, I will hasten to terminate that uncertainty with regard to my fate" (157, 158). He then expresses the same sentiment that he has mentioned before: "The following incidents are of a kind to which the most ardent invention has never conceived a parallel" (158). After his comment, he discusses whether he has the ability to work in this new form:

I am not certain, however, that I shall relate them in an intelligible manner. One image runs into another, sensations succeed in so rapid a train, that I fear, I shall be unable to

distribute and express them with sufficient perspicuity. [...]. I am conscious to a kind of complex sentiment of distress and forlornness that cannot be perfectly portrayed by words [...] no eloquence that I possess would do justice to the tale. (159)

Again, he calls attention to the newness of this form as distinct from any prior tradition or experience, and the doubts that accompany new experiments.

Unlike his other novels that focus on plots that are purportedly based on true stories, or are otherwise believable, *Brocken Brown* mentions that this novel has an unbelievable plot, but it is a new genre written in a new country, so the wilderness is not only an American setting but also as a metaphor for this new genre, it has no analogy. Edgar says, “The magnitude of this exploit made me question its reality” (193), indicating that even he has doubts of some of his exploits in the wilderness. These exploits include waking up in a cave, climbing out of a deep pit, killing a panther, and finding food before he starves to death (159-170). Just when he believes he has cleared all obstacles, he discovers Indians at his point of exit: “No spectacle was more adapted than this to excite wonder and alarm. Had some mysterious power [...] cast me [...] into the heart of the wilderness?” (171), and, of course, they have a female captive (175) that he must save. At this point, Edgar provides a long, drawn out description of past and present misadventures because of these “savages” before killing them.²² He escapes with the woman and ends up at Deb’s house where he appears to be on the verge of rescue, but rather than telling them his story, he faints. The rescuers assume he is dead and leave him there. When he wakes up, he must endure more wilderness and more obstacles, including being shot at by friends, to find his way back home: “The path was more obscure, and the wilderness more rugged” (204). This metaphor reflects on the difficulty of writing this novel, which is more difficult than he anticipated – even his friends are more hurtful than helpful or encouraging.

When he finally gets back to civilization, the first thing he encounters is “a traveling escrutoire, open, with pens and ink-stand” (238) and his missing manuscript and letters (239). After a short period of waiting, Edgar discovers the owner of the writing case to be Sarsefield, his teacher who taught him about the wilderness (240). Sarsefield is also intimately acquainted with Clithero’s story through his wife, and he was one of the “friends” who attempted to kill Edgar during Edgar’s adventures in the wilderness. Edgar tells Sarsefield about his adventures, and Sarsefield says, “Your tale, Huntly, is true, yet, did I not see you [and...] had not my own experience, during the last three days, confirmed every incident, I should question its truth” (246) – another measure of doubt, but qualified this time by experience. When questioned about the manuscripts and letters, Sarsefield tells Edgar that he found the manuscripts – probably hidden by Edgar when he was sleepwalking. When Sarsefield realizes that Edgar knows Clithero, he is horrorstruck. Edgar tries to mollify him by saying, “He has told a tale, that had all the appearances of truth—” (262). The fact that this story only has the “appearance of truth” rather than being true is significant. Sarsefield says, “The truth! Truth would prove him to be unnatural; devilish; a thing for which no language has yet provided a name!” (262). Sarsefield believes that Edgar is being gullible and naïve for believing that Clithero is worthy of saving after he tried to kill his patroness, Sarsefield’s wife, but Edgar tells Sarsefield the whole story: “I requested all but my friend to leave my chamber, and then, soliciting a patient hearing, began the narrative [...]; I then repeated, without variation or addition, the tale which was then told (273). In other words, he tells Sarsefield everything he has been telling us in the novel, and Sarsefield says, “It is true. A tale like this could never be the fruit of invention or be invented to deceive” (274). An ironic statement, since Brown worked hard to produce a fictional tale not based on real events, and further evidence that the general reading public at that time needed the grounding in

“real life” to accept the fiction – a point noticed by Bottalico: “While the English Gothic novel was conceived in reaction to and as a rejection of eighteenth century narrative realism, in *Edgar Huntly* Charles Brockden Brown tries to bring reality back into the novel” (“American Frontier” 11). Bringing reality into the new American gothic form is not the same as defending the novel because it is based on “real” events, but rather Brown attempting to avail himself of the “sources” provided by the new country (3). He wants to emphasize the uniqueness of the tale along with the uniqueness of the form that it takes.

While Edgar has never heard a tale such as Clithero’s before and acknowledges that the tale needs new form, he undertakes a rescue mission (physical and psychological) of Clithero himself. Edgar believes telling Clithero the full truth will cure him, but when Edgar tells him, Edgar discovers that Sarsefield is right – Clithero is a maniac and cannot be cured. While we have determined that Clithero’s tale (on its own) is not appropriate for the new country, Clithero and Edgar resemble each other in numerous ways, as several critics have pointed out.²³ In this “Edgar/Clithero opposition [... the] two characters represent the two souls of America and portray the contrast between American purity and European corruption” (Bottalico, “American Frontier” 13), much as Royall Tyler dramatizes this contrast in *The Contrast*. Because of this paralleling or doubling, Edgar subsumes Clithero’s tale into his own works and reinforces the evidence that this novel reflects on the notion of the wilderness of the new American novel. While they have similarities, “[w]hat differentiates the two characters is that Clithero is plagued by his past while Edgar is obsessed with his future or, rather by what he will discover in his search” (Bottalico, “American Frontier” 5). Evidently, regardless of veracity or sincerity, Clithero – as an Irish immigrant – is the wrong type of “novel” for this new country. Clithero

represents the past, to include the past literary traditions, and Edgar represents the present and future literary tradition of America:

It is by maturity alone that the models of the past may be discarded.

[...] Brown strives to reach that maturity by pooling from diverse literary genres of the European and American traditions (such as autobiography, the Gothic tale, the sentimental novel, the adventure novel, the *Bildungsroman*, and the captivity tale), adapting them to the myths generated by the American experience. He is successful to the extent that *Edgar Huntly*, probably more so than any other novel written by Brown, actually offers one of the embryonic models of the 'American' novel and prefigures some of the characteristic themes of future American writing. (Bottalico, "American Frontier" 12-13)

While we may disagree, Edgar claims maturity and success when he basically ends the novel by saying, "Thus have I fulfilled my promise to compose a minute relation of my sufferings" (281).

Charles Brockden Brown and Theorizing Fiction

Brown's career takes a turn following the publication of his four best-known novels. He focuses much of his writing efforts on his literary magazines. He does not, however, stop writing fiction, as many critics suggest. Instead, he publishes two novels, primarily labeled as sentimental – *Jane Talbot* and *Clara Howard*²⁴ – and shorter pieces of fiction in his literary magazine that masquerade as political and historical pieces. Some of these pieces include "An Address to the Government of the United States on the Cessation of Louisiana to the French" and "Monroe's Embassy; or, The Conduct of the Government in Relation to Our Claims to the Navigation of the Mississippi," which were discussed in Chapter Two, and other sketches that are not as widely available. In many of these sketches, including the essays he had written earlier, we see his exploration of the different issues involved with writing fiction as opposed to writing history. For example, the narrator in "Walstein's School of History" says, "Walstein was conscious of the uncertainty of history. Actions and motives cannot be truly described. We can only make approaches to the truth. The more attentively we observe mankind, and study

ourselves, the greater will this uncertainty appear, and the farther shall we find ourselves from truth” (331). Since history according to Walstein can only “imperfectly” (331) tell stories, then other vehicles such as using “imaginary history” (332) must be considered. Throughout the essay, which also outlines *Arthur Mervyn*, as mentioned in Chapter Two, he describes the aesthetic concerns that an “imaginary history” must have that parallel those aesthetic concerns that his own prefaces mention. The narrator also describes the benefits of a narrative of this type, and this discussion reflects Brown’s concern with novels as a source of instruction and amusement that also convey truths about human nature. While “Walstein” may have contained an outline for *Arthur Mervyn*, we see many of the issues that he addresses about truth, history, and fiction begin played out in *Edgar Huntly*.

While Brown may have had strong feelings about the nature and effects of his fiction, the fact that he was attempting to theorize this mode of writing suggests that some questions still remained for Brown about the nature and theory of the novel in particular and American literature in general. Bell characterizes Brown’s efforts at theorizing about fiction as Brown’s “[s]kepticism about theoretical ideals, including his own ideals of the power and purpose of fiction,” and these “thought[s] and feelings [. . .] were already implicit in the plots and narrative strategies of his four best novels” (*Development* 43). Further links between Brown’s novels and the theories that he was attempting to espouse are provided by Grabo’s argument:

All four [of Brown’s novels] exist in a rhetoric that seems to constitute a special conceptual place, a world that [. . .] designates fictional worth. And each novel is structured so as to collapse, to self-destruct somewhere along the telling—usually nearer the end than elsewhere. All four thus introduce narrative elements that undercut their apparently artless beginnings, undermining the reliability of their narrators, until we are made to realize the stories are as much about the telling as the told. (Introduction xi)

As I demonstrated in this chapter, in his novels, Brown is “undercut[ting],” “undermining,” and “telling” the story of a novel. By looking carefully at *Wieland*, *Arthur Mervyn*, and *Edgar Huntly*, we begin to see the ways in which Brown attempts to theorize through his fiction.

By analyzing the way Brown theorizes the nature of fiction, we can begin a new or different conversation not only about the place his novels hold in our literary history but also about literary theory during this time. While discussion of these novels is fairly commonplace but often disparaging, discussions of these novelists self-consciously theorizing about the literature are virtually nonexistent. Many theoretical discussions of this time period, such as those by Davidson and Warner show the way literature serves theory rather than the other way around. Although I have focused on Brown in this chapter, creating a different placement for him and his novels and beginning a new theoretical conversation about this time period serves other novels within this time period that also employ metafictional, self-reflexive techniques because they have many of the same concerns.

Once we establish this new placement what we discover is that novels are not the problem as proposed by the contemporary critics – the problems (if they exist as suggested by Brown’s novels) – reside with the reader and critic – a notion that was also discussed in Chapter Two. We also realize that Brown and other authors were criticized for a lack of coherence in their novels and for having no theoretical basis for their writing. Today’s novel theorists, however, are still engaging in this type of debate. While Brown believes in the possibilities of the novel form, and is attempting to define and create one that is uniquely American, his exploration of the novel ultimately leads him to realize that readers and critics alike were not necessarily ready for either the form or the messages that the new American novel intended to convey. Like all novelists within my study, Brown displays an awareness of writing and language that is only

recently being given serious consideration in academic conversations. The part that has not been studied in depth is the form of the early American novel in relationship to the self-consciousness with which these novelists explored this form. While he never clearly comes to a conclusion, I argue that Brown not only does not end his exploration with *Edgar Huntly*, but he also does not depict this exploration negatively or have an overall negative view of writing – especially in fictional form. Similar to my argument in the next chapters, the negativity displayed by Brown is toward the heavy-handed influence of the British but is also toward readers and critics who create problems for all authors attempting to get published.

While Chapter Two focused on the way authors revealed their attitudes toward fiction in their prefaces and other paratexts, the works in this chapter explore the self-reflexive nature of the new American novel, as exemplified by Brown's novels. Other novels also explore the nature of fiction and American fiction in particular as the next chapter will reveal. Much as Brown does in *Edgar Huntly*, the works in the next chapter explore the way American novelists attempted to set their works apart from their European counterparts as an attempt to create and define this new American tradition.

End Notes

¹ Gothic is generally associated with emphasis on setting. In the English tradition, the setting would include a ghostly, mysterious castle, exhibiting supernatural tendencies, with multiple dark passageways and unexplained noises, surrounded by a gloomy forest. The American tradition has tended to move away from the castle-like setting and often moved into the American wilderness.

²Many of Brown's essays are collected in *Literary Essays and Reviews*. I have taken many of my ideas about Brown's theories from this collection, and they are useful for the study of Brown's literary career and his novels. I, therefore, have to strenuously disagree with Ringe's assertion that "from the point of view of American literary history, only the novels have any real importance. Only they command the attention of the serious student of American literature" (*Charles Brockden Brown* 1). Ringe later admits these essays "contribute something to an understanding of Brown and to an appreciation of his literary talent, [though], only a few are of much interest today" (*Charles Brockden Brown* 107).

³ Steven Watts appears to disagree with the argument made by Alfred Weber and Wolfgang Schäfer, as he believes that Brown's "thoughts and speculations about fiction writing [. . .] achieved coherence" (*Romance* 75) both in his fiction and his essays, and judging by the amount of attention Watts devotes to Brown's essays, he, too, would disagree with Ringe's assertion (see note 1). I suggest that if Brown was unable to create a "systematic literary theory," he was unable to do so because he could not reconcile the contradictions inherent in these debates about the novel.

⁴ Few, if any, critics disagree with the contention that writing (especially fiction) and language is a primary concern of *Wieland*. Several critics such as Fussell and O'Shaughnessy posit Carwin as a metaphor for the author. While their arguments are somewhat persuasive, my analysis of the evidence from *Wieland* indicates that the novel makes more sense if we view Carwin as resembling the product, the novel, rather than the creator or author.

⁵ The fact that the narrator is a woman is the subject for another essay and has been addressed, if only briefly, by many critics.

⁶ In all fairness, the reviewer continued with a favorable review of one novel, but assured the readers that this favored novel was unique. This type of review that condemned novels as a whole but supported a particular work was fairly common.

⁷ O'Shaughnessy interprets the scene of Clara drawing, as Clara's attempts to draw a picture of Carwin the author (43-44).

⁸ These various disguises of Carwin's could be some sort of acknowledgment by Brown about the type of writing Americans had been producing to date and the type of novel that had heretofore been praised as the epitome or the beginning of the novel: *Don Quixote*.

⁹ We also learn at this time that he has been having relations with Clara's servant. These additional descriptions recall the disapproval of bad novels that is discussed in the essay "Novel-Reading" (1804) discussed in Chapter Two. It also appears to be an acknowledgment of the new reading public, who includes the lower classes, especially female domestics. For a thorough discussion of this new reading public and the relationship between class and the development of the novel see Ian Watt's *Rise of the Novel*.

¹⁰ Brown (who was an admirer of both William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft) uses this scene to underscore the insidious nature of viewing women in this way as opposed to his own seemingly enlightened views. The scene reflects one of Brown's own belief that much good writing of his time was created by women and that they were not given enough credit for their creations. In addition to corresponding to the scientific, logical side, Pleyel also stands for the public, the audience, or the reviewer who is not giving the female novel and novelist enough credit for being worthy.

¹¹ Baym also reads Carwin as being totally innocent, with no culpability in the events of the story, which I find unsupported by the text.

¹² As mentioned previously, Fussell argues that Carwin “stands for” the American author – the generation of writers who came before Brown – “the polemical patriots” (172). O’Shaughnessy, on the other hand, equates Carwin with authors “who engage in willful abuse of representation and manipulate readers’ customary interpretive strategies for purposes of community and communication but for purposes of power” (42).

¹³ I believe a more interesting reading is to interpret Arthur Mervyn as not being a sincere character and that his lack of sincerity helps explain many of the so-called coincidences that many critics attribute to bad writing rather than an insincere character’s attempts to explain his actions.

¹⁴ Patrick Brancaccio is one critic who argues that the pen has sexual symbolism for Arthur Mervyn.

¹⁵ An interesting note is that the villains in the novel are foreigners or depicted in such a way as to cast a foreignness about them. For example, Welbeck is described as coming from a “foreign mould” (52), which could be construed as Brown’s comment on foreign influence on the American novel, if we read this novel as an exploration of the novel as I have suggested.

¹⁶ Mark L. Kamrath explores Brown’s understanding of the differences and links between history and fiction in “Brockden Brown and Historical Understanding,” and he says that Brown displayed a “theoretical awareness of the fictive nature of history – of how boundaries between history writing and romance sometimes blur or overlap” (245). Norman S. Grabo suggests that Brown “argues that fiction is a perfected form of history” (Introduction xiii).

¹⁷ Weber and Schäfer suggest that this essay “continues Brown’s reflections on prose theory and the theory of historical writing as developed in ‘Walstein’s School of History’” (229-230n68).

¹⁸ Like Gardner and Bottalico, Paul Witherington in “Image and Idea” also focuses on the wilderness in *Edgar Huntly*, but his criticism tends to view the wilderness in a more negative light. He believes that Brown intended “to fuse a state of mental conflict with imagery of the wilderness” (22) and that the wilderness represents a “nightmare,” and that in Brown’s “very formation of his most impressive fiction lies his dissatisfaction, his ultimate denial of art itself” (26). I suggest, however, that he is depicting other people’s perception of that art, for example, Sarsefield’s rejection of what Edgar has done. The nightmarish qualities and conflicts that propel the *Edgar Huntly* plot forward are part of Brown’s effort to show that America provides “themes,” “field[s] of investigation,” and “sources of amusement” for the writer and reader of the new country (3).

¹⁹ While I do not make any gender arguments in this analysis, I must mention that unlike other Brown novels in this study, *Edgar Huntly* is narrated by a male.

²⁰ Ironically, the one who uses words best and in a way that is always understood is Deb, the most developed Native American character in the novel, when she speaks to her dogs: “The readiness with which they understood, and the docility with which they obeyed her movements

and words, were truly wonderful” (208). Deb being the most developed Native American character is especially ironic since she is not literally in the novel, but rather referred to and described.

²¹ Similar to other Brown works where books are kept in a closet, Edgar’s books and papers are kept in a cabinet with the key to the cabinet being kept in a locked closet and the letters are “bound” and “in a parchment case, and placed in a secret drawer” (134).

²² These descriptions of the “savages” and the adventures that Edgar has because of them allow Brown to fulfill his promise of offering a tale more “suitable” (3) for America and American readers.

²³ Several different ways of depicting this parallel are used by critics. Several critics use the term “double”: (Bottalico 5; Toles 138, 151; Krause, “*Edgar Huntly*” 295; Gardner 450). Dieter Schulz and Witherington use “alter ego” (Schulz 328; Witherington, “Image and Idea” 25), but Witherington also uses the term “parallel.”

²⁴ While I am not pursuing this idea and I am not sure what to make of it, another interesting side note is that each of his four earlier novels is named for a male and with one exception is narrated by a female. His two sentimental novels are in the more traditional, pure epistolary format and both are named after their female protagonist. *Clara Howard*, however, is introduced by one of the male characters.

Chapter 4. Self-Reflexivity: Challenges to the Sentimental Tradition

Early American novelists engaged the criticism of fiction in much more sophisticated ways than has generally been acknowledged, as evidenced by a closer look at the self-reflexive moments in their prefaces and their other works that address the act of writing. As discussed in Chapter Two, the prefaces were focused on character more than plot, as these authors attempted to work with a fairly new genre within a new tradition of this developing country. They were also pleading for a readership that had sympathy with those characters, in an attempt to build a community of readers. At the same time, they were seeking to define and incorporate American values and elements into their works. In all these endeavors, they were embracing a form that was embattled in debates about the effects of reading novels. We can also look at the novels themselves to see the ways they are attempting these same objectives. Chapter Three looks at the way Brown explores these issues in novels generally labeled as gothic. Numerous critics mention the self-consciousness evident in these early American works. These critics, however, mostly believe these techniques were used to allow these early authors a way of distancing themselves from their novels and making their fiction more acceptable to the critics who believed novels were not worthy literature. These critics do not view this self-consciousness on the part of these authors as a self-conscious understanding of their art and experimentation in form.¹ The inferiority complex supposedly stems from post-Revolutionary authors' awareness that their novels were not as good as their British counterparts and from the direct criticism levied against the genre by various prominent citizens.

Authors such as Hannah Foster, Susannah Rowson, and Charles Brockden Brown embraced the fictionality of novels and attempted to define and create a unique American literary tradition that includes the other works within this study. While they may not have been able to

create a unified definition of “American fiction,” they did put a unique stamp on their works, much as Washington Irving appropriated European folktales in order to create unique pieces of American literature. These authors took this traditional sentimental form² and revised it with a new flavor since “[t]he first generation of American novelists did not wholeheartedly embrace the British sentimental tradition, as critics have claimed” (Schloss 285). In similar fashion, Richard Slotkin argues that “[j]ust as American writers diverged from Europeans in their portrayal of exemplary American heroes and values, they went their separate ways in literary forms and values” (321). American authors writing in the sentimental tradition self-consciously refigured the sentimental novel by adapting the very characteristics that cause the sentimental label to be attached to these novels. This tradition was dominated largely by English writers such as Samuel Richardson, author of such works as *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747-48). Other works in the sentimental tradition include *Evelina* by Fanny Burney (1778) and *Love in Excess* by Eliza Haywood (1719). These adaptations in these American novels function similarly to parodies in that they provide “a new model” (Hutcheon 5) – a model that may not have a unified definition but a model nonetheless. Since the hallmark of any genre is to change and challenge assumptions about itself, I argue that the self-conscious challenges that these authors employed in these novels combined with their desire to see that America had its own literature reveal that these authors were creating and attempting to define this American novel and this tradition, much as Brown was in the novels discussed in Chapter Three.

These American texts are read by many critics as social and political commentary on the times rather than as self-conscious experiments within a new American literary tradition, even though many of these critics notice the adaptations. As will be evidenced in my reading, however, many critics read these changes as furthering their socio-political reading rather than as

a challenge to the sentimental category by which these novels are labeled; in other words, they still read these texts within the tradition, but with messages about or applicability to the condition of the new Republic rather than as these authors trying to work within a new tradition. On the other hand, some scholars are acknowledging this new tradition – albeit while focused on different issues than those in this study. One such scholar is Ed White, who says, “Was colonization simply a reconstruction or remixing of European forms, genres, and modes of thought? Yes and no: I want to suggest that New World situations accelerated the breakdown of European conventions and forced the reconstitution of Old World patterns” (“Captaine Smith 500). While he focuses on the contact with Native Americans as necessitating these changes, I suggest that not just contact with Native Americans but all the “newness” encountered – all the “New World situations” that White describes – led to these “breakdown[s]” and “reconstitution[s].” He also suggests that “there is undoubtedly a clear generic development in early American writing that recent scholarship has only begun to discern (“Colonial Studies” 753). I want to take White’s argument and carry it further at the same time that I narrow its focus. I focus attention in this chapter on those novels that fit in many ways within the sentimental tradition, but then I demonstrate the ways those novels self-consciously adapt and challenge that original tradition in order to create and define what “American fiction” should be as this tradition is taking root within the new Republic.³

My initial thesis suggests that these authors adapted aspects of their novels from many of the sentimental predecessors in several ways. One adaptation is with the characters. The protagonist does not necessarily die; neither does she reform the rake. When the female heroine dies in the American novel, the reader realizes that her death is not meant to reflect her need for punishment but rather serves to punish the unreformed rake. In one example to be discussed, the

female character kills the rake rather than allowing herself to be seduced. In another example, Clara kills Wieland with a penknife.⁴ Also, by self-consciously revising the plot elements of the tradition, these authors place the emphasis of their novels on character. These authors also self-consciously rework the expected morality of these novels into a thematic message that focuses on solidarity and writing, both of which lead the authors to embrace their fiction rather than distance themselves from it as is normally supposed. In order to subvert a tradition, much like creating a parody, an author must self-consciously work within that tradition, but they must “free themselves from the background text enough to create a new and autonomous form” (Hutcheon 35).⁵ While I am not arguing that these authors have started a new genre or form, as Linda Hutcheon suggests, I argue that these works are part of a new tradition begun in this new country – a tradition of writing that should be studied as a separate entity from its European counterparts and not just as inferior precursors to the American literature that comes later. I argue that these authors are using their novels to experiment within this new tradition and challenge the older, sentimental tradition, especially those represented by British by adapting some of the characteristics that readers came to expect.

Hannah Foster’s *The Coquette*

The first novel to serve as our exemplar is Hannah Foster’s *The Coquette*, which is an early American novel that displays numerous self-reflexive tendencies. When *The Coquette* begins, we discover that Eliza Wharton’s fiancé has recently passed away. Her friends are encouraging her to accept Rev. Boyer as a suitor, but she is much more interested in Peter Sanford. We know from the very beginning that Eliza, while not tainted, is labeled a coquette, but she is not young. Eliza allows Sanford, a rake but an accepted and financially broke member of their social circle, to pursue her. While Sanford indicates that Eliza appeals to him, he is not

willing to marry her because she has no money. Instead he marries a woman who is wealthy, and he and Eliza continue their affair. In typical seduction novels, the seducer drops the fallen woman once he gets what he wants. In this novel, however, Sanford attempts to hold onto Eliza as long and hard as he can. She eventually gets pregnant and dies in childbirth, being forgiven by everyone in her life.

Many of today's critics classify this novel as a seduction novel within the sentimental tradition, and it is widely regarded as one of America's better attempts at imitating the British tradition. For example, critics such as Jeffrey Richards point out that Foster's novels have a "thematic richness and a complexity of text" (238). Part of the positive reaction to this novel by recent critics is that they identify political undertones in this novel—primarily they view the novel as some type of allegory, focusing on the limits of personal freedom, the instability of the new nation, or republican virtue. For example, Walter Wenska views the novel as being a "sentimental novel with marked political implications" (245). He argues that the novel is a way for Foster to explore freedom by attempting to define "its meaning and its limit" and by raising "the spectre of private and public disorder in America" (244). He later says that Eliza's "act of rebellion may be primarily social, but like Huck Finn's it has obvious political and moral implications as well" (249). Cathy Davidson says that *The Coquette* is a "cry for female equality, a cry faintly but subversively heard" (*Revolution* 215). Richards, on the other hand, sees Foster's message as focusing on the potential pitfalls of nation building, saying that "the threatened seduction of a woman mirrors the vulnerability of a new nation" (240). They posit these arguments because the early days of the new nation were marked by instability, as evidenced by events such as Shay's Rebellion, and unsettled questions about the form and nature of the government. They argue that these concerns made the people within the new Republic feel

vulnerable, especially to outside forces, which were symbolized by the seducer in the novels. While these readings might be persuasive, they do not account for the self-conscious challenges to the sentimental tradition. *The Coquette* moves beyond these political metaphors to test the limits of the sentimental novel, and my focus will be on the literary elements and what Foster is saying about literature rather than the politics of the new nation. We can see right away in *The Coquette* that Foster is self-consciously challenging the traditional sentimental novel and that this novel is more than a political version of that type of novel, as many critics would have us believe. Foster challenges the expectations of the sentimental seduction novel by focusing on characters rather than on plot; by replacing the expected moral message with a plea for solidarity; and by embracing the novel form with a major thematic focus of writing.

Focus on Character

This novel not only challenges the expected presentation of characters, but these characters are also the focus of these novels rather than plot. The character of Eliza provides a telling example. According to the inscription on her tombstone, “Her departure was on the 20th Day of July, A.D.; in the 37th year of her age” (169), making her considerably older than the typical sentimental heroine, so casting Eliza, a non-traditional heroine, as the object of lust and seduction is one way Foster challenges the sentimental tradition. Unlike other seduction novels in which the heroine unwittingly allows herself to be seduced, Eliza knowingly gets involved with Sanford and willingly continues the liaison without any regard for the consequences. Commonly, in the sentimental tradition, if the seduced heroine does not reform the rake and marry him, then she must die, and only through her death is she afforded forgiveness, if at all. While Eliza dies, she gets her forgiveness early: her mother says that Eliza has done nothing that needs forgiveness,⁶ and for Julia, her friend, Eliza’s “penitential tears” (149) are enough to

garner Julia's forgiveness. The other character who is presented in ways that the reader is not expecting is that of the rake, especially after Eliza's death. Following discovery of his role in Eliza's downfall and death, Sanford gets punished in ways that the readers would generally not expect because he loses his wife, gets shunned by the community, and forfeits all his property. Unlike Eliza, Sanford never receives any forgiveness, which forces him to leave: "I am to bid you a long, perhaps, a last farewell. [. . .]. By the virtuous part of the community, I am shunned as the pest and bane of social enjoyment" (166). This rewriting of the seduction narrative by punishing the rake and forcing him to flee the country is similar in nature to life in prison without parole, in which the punishment is worse than death. These character presentations move this novel further away from the sentimental tradition.

The other adaptation of the sentimental tradition that places significant focus on character is what Fleischman calls the "doubling of coquette and rake" (320). In *The Coquette*, Foster provides textual evidence of their similar nature, which invites the reader to view Sanford and Eliza as one and the same in many respects. In the sentimental tradition, comparing the seduced, innocent young woman to the worldly, morally defective man would have been unthinkable. To ensure that the reader interprets her message of doubling correctly, Foster has Eliza tell Mrs. Richman that she may want to settle down "when [she has] sowed all [her] wild oats" (68), a cliché generally reserved for men's behavior. In *The Coquette*, both Sanford and Eliza are rakes. Eliza refers indirectly to Sanford as a rake in letter XXVI when she asks whether the adage that "a reformed rake makes the best husband" (53) is true, and Selby refers to her indirectly as a rake in letter XXVII when he quotes Alexander Pope in a letter to Boyer by saying, "Every woman is, at heart, a rake" (53). Eliza's self-description and the description of her that Sanford provides are similar, with words such as cheerful and volatile (7, 18). They both agree that a

conversation they had with each other about the “pleasures of society” was to Eliza’s “taste” (21, 23). While their motives are different, they both desire to avoid marriage and the loss of freedom marriage entails (13, 23), and later, Eliza acknowledges the similarities between their views of marriage in one of her letters (87). Further, both Sanford and Eliza characterize Miss Laurence as having no soul. While a minor detail, it still points to the similarities between the two characters. Eliza uses similar language when describing her upcoming date with Mr. Emmons and says that she needs to “adorn for a new conquest” (62) – a term she used earlier when introduced to Reverend Boyer (8). However, the most obvious evidence of their doubling is in their reaction to their shared downfall: they both say, “I am undone” (105, 164) – a clear indication that Foster wants us to see the parallels between the two characters and their fates.

Moral Message versus Plea for Solidarity

I argue that Foster changes the anticipated message of her narrator by not focusing on the didactic moral despite many critics’ position that *The Coquette* is a traditional sentimental novel that fulfills the expectations of those looking for a moral: Davidson says that “Eliza Wharton sins and dies. Her death can convey the conservative didactic ‘lesson-learned’ morality that many critics of the time demanded” (“Introduction” xx). This moral message is generally acknowledged as being delivered by the republican chorus, which consists of her three friends, Mrs. Richman, Lucy Freeman Summer, and Julia Granby,⁷ who all attempt to prevent Eliza from getting involved with Sanford. While they forgive Eliza and consider Sanford a villain, they echo what most people during that time would maintain, by saying that she “erred” (167) and that she should have held onto her virtue with more “fortitude” (167). Foster, however, “distributes the blame for Eliza’s death more widely than does the judgmental republican chorus” (Finseth 126), which modifies the typical moral message of a sentimental novel. While these women appear to

represent republican virtue, as suggested by several critics,⁸ this novel raises many questions about things not being what they appear, with words such as appear, tokens, alleging, and pretending occurring throughout the text. Many critics discuss Republican virtue as being a part of the crucial message delivered by post-Revolutionary authors. Virtue is not rewarded, however, as is evidenced in several instances in the novel, so the novel is obviously doing something more than proposing a moral. The seducer villain, Peter Sanford, marries a woman for her money. Mrs. Sanford later gives birth to a stillborn child, and after her husband's sins become known, she leaves Peter and returns to her parents, with little of her money left. Mrs. Richman's child dies – not the type of reward reserved for the epitome of Republican virtue. Reverend Boyer is Eliza's suitor who has the approval of her friends because of his stable position and his family connections. Eliza's friends say that they want to see her "suitably and agreeably connected" (13) and that "[h]is situation in life is, perhaps, as elevated as you have a right to claim" (27). Even with these endorsements and his position, Boyer is depicted in a negative light, and he does not get to marry his first choice. By rejecting Boyer, Eliza does not submit to the authority of her married friends, allowing Foster to moderate the moral claim of this novel.

Another way that Foster stretches the boundaries of the typical sentimental seduction novel is to posit the moral of her story in softer terms than the didactic sermon-type moral and replace it with the aim of garnering sympathy for the protagonist. Claire Pettingill argues that "Foster complicates the didactic formula" (135) and lays out three issues with the novel that modify the message. She says that Eliza has an "unsympathetic suitor," "resists pat condemnation," and is not rejected by friends (135). In the portrayal of Boyer, we see the first of these characteristics. At the end of the novel, we see the lack of a severe, judgmental attitude toward Eliza and the easy forgiveness (albeit too late) extended toward her. One lesson this novel

posits is for the young women in the new nation to join together as a community of women. At one point in the novel, Mrs. Richman says,

We [women, Eliza and Mrs. Richman in particular] think ourselves interested in the welfare and prosperity of our country; and, consequently, claim the right of inquiring into those affairs, which may conduce to, or interfere with the common weal. We shall not be called to the senate or the field to assert its privileges, and defend its rights, but we shall feel for the honor and safety of our friends and connections, who are thus employed. If the community flourish and enjoy health and freedom, shall we not share in the happy effects? if it be oppressed and disturbed, shall we not endure our proportion of the evil? Why then should the love of our country be a masculine passion only? Why should government, which involves the peace and order of the society, of which we are a part, be wholly excluded from our observation? (Foster 44)

While this comment may be read politically, as Wenska does, Mrs. Richman's comment also embraces the idea of a community – an equality of sorts among people who have a stake within that community. Evoking this type of solidarity includes a concern for the public as well as the private and domestic. Some critics have noted the sense of community that Foster is attempting to invoke:

[S]eeking to replace the traditional view of a women's community that works to support and perpetuate patriarchal ideals, Foster ends with an image that suggests a potentially different future. Foster suggests through this final image of community, through Julia's 'exertions of friendship' (L74, 169), that the rectification of 'errata' could become possible for young women. (Harris "Hannah Webster Foster" 18)

In other words, by the end of the novel, the men have been sidelined, and this new, stronger community of women have bonded together to support each other and share the acknowledgement that Eliza, the fallen woman, is forgiven, while the seducer with his "base arts" (163) and "detestable arts" (167) is not. Without calling it community or a commitment to solidarity, Davidson's view of *The Coquette* is similar: "Foster provided her early readers with an opportunity to see, privileged in print, women very much like themselves" (Davidson,

Revolution 225). Asking the reader to have sympathy for this supposed fallen protagonist is a way for Foster to set her novel apart from those works that focus on judging that character.

One way Foster creates this feeling of a common bond with her female readers is through her critique of marriage. As the novel opens, Eliza obviously does not want a marriage that is not to her taste, and she appears to be relieved that the fiancé chosen by her parents has passed away, allowing her to look forward to “mixing in the busy scenes and active pleasures in life” (7).

Three different marriages are depicted in this novel, and none of them appear to be ideal. Mr. and Mrs. Richman appear on the surface to have the prototypical marriage to which all young women of the new Republic should aspire. However, Mrs. Richman refers to life before marriage as being “gay, volatile,” but now she is “thoroughly domesticated,” as if being happy and being married are antithetical (97), and their child dies – not a ringing endorsement of their marriage as a positive model. So while many critics posit the Richman marriage as being one to which Republican daughters should aspire, the picture painted by Foster would suggest otherwise.⁹ We already know about the Sanfords’ marriage. He marries for money; she gives birth to a stillborn boy; and she leaves him with very little of her money left. Lucy Freeman marries and gives up her symbolic name, and after her marriage, her letters to Eliza begin to take on a more lecturing tone, similar to that of Mrs. Richman’s letter.¹⁰ While Lucy, Mrs. Richman, and Eliza are all probably close in age, Eliza never agrees with Mrs. Richman, as evidenced not only by her words but also by her tone, yet she seeks out Lucy’s advice and opinion, at least until Lucy is married. Eliza seems not to respect the institution of marriage enough to respect the opinion of a woman trapped in it.¹¹

Embracing Fiction

Foster also challenges the expectations of the early American novel by not engaging directly in the debate about the perils of fiction. Foster promotes her fiction as the best means of telling the story she wanted to tell, in the way she wanted to tell it. Foster appears to not put much emphasis on whether the novel is “founded on fact,” and her moral message gets subverted by not rewarding virtue but by emphasizing solidarity and by focusing on writing. Robert L. Shurter argues that Foster’s book “is of interest to the literary student because in it are revealed the three major influences acting on the early American novelist: the sentimentality of Samuel Richardson, the ‘*sensibility*’ of Laurence Sterne, and the widespread opposition to the novel, which forced novelists to adopt such devices as pointing out morals and founding their works on facts” (308). I will grant, for the sake of argument, that Richardson’s and Sterne’s writing could have influenced Foster, but I do not see any evidence to suggest that she actively engaged with the attacks on fiction by downplaying her novel as imaginative literature. I argue that she assiduously avoids this debate by having no defensive preface. Davidson argues, “In *The Coquette*, fiction is valorized” (*Revolution* 223). In fact, novels are not depicted as bad, and in the narrative itself, other characters send novels and plays to Eliza without any expected lecture on reading this type of literature. In one letter, Eliza requests, “Send me some new books; Not such, however, as will require much attention. Let them be plays or novels, or anything else, that will amuse and extort a smile” (109). Lucy sends the books and in describing the books, she says, “They are of the lighter kind of reading; yet perfectly chaste; and if I mistake not, well adapted to your taste” (112). These comments do not suggest much fear of fiction or insecurity about the effects of novel reading. On the contrary, novels as a source of amusement appear to be wholeheartedly accepted. Nowhere in the novel is Eliza’s seduction and subsequent death

blamed on her novel reading, standing in stark contrast to the treatment of the novel in *Power of Sympathy* by William Hill Brown.¹² Characters within the novel also show an awareness of novel(ity) when Mrs. Richman compares Eliza to Clarissa, a reference to Richardson's hero in the novel of the same name.

Writing as Focus

The major thematic presence in this novel is about communication and writing in particular rather than the heavy-handed moralizing that many critics suggest is typical of the sentimental seduction novel. *The Coquette* provides many lessons that are based on this theme: as Fleischman says, "What 'lessons' there are in the end, have to do with writing and reading, with author and reader functions, and with the contested role of fiction in an incipient national culture struggling with its own promises of democratization and de-hierarchization" (334). Coming during a time immediately following the nation's attempt to create its identity and form of government through what eventually became the Constitution, *The Coquette* extends the idea of the power of language:

Since the cultural power of republicanism owed so much to the normative force of language in a time of disorienting change, a novel exploring the limits and the abuses of language should be considered a significant document not only for what it says about one individual's plight, but for what it says about the status of words in a nation self-consciously defined by its words. (Finseth 127-28)

As has been pointed out in an earlier chapter, several critics such as Michael Warner, Larzer Ziff, and Christopher Looby have discussed the power of language as the impetus for our nation's beginnings. This novel reiterates that emphasis.

One way that Foster emphasizes the act of writing in her novel is through a metaphor that associates characters with certain kinds of writing, similar to what we see at work in Brown's novel *Wieland*. The two suitors, Boyer and Sanford, can be interpreted as representing different types

of writing. Boyer, as a pastor, seemingly represents virtuous writing, and Sanford appears to represent imaginative writing. Foster is not making an argument that either man is inherently bad, but neither man is suitable for Eliza for a variety of reasons. Boyer does not appeal to Eliza's "fancy" – a term Eliza uses quite often, and Sanford, while acceptable in the best homes, is not in a financial position to ever marry her. When Rev. Boyer asks why Eliza is associating with someone of Sanford's questionable morals, he is told that Sanford is accepted, because "[t]he rank and fortune of Major Sanford [...] procure him respect" (16), regardless of the warnings against him. Later, Mrs. Richman says that Sanford is "deficient in one of the great essentials of the character, and that is, *virtue*" (20) – ironic in that that her former comment seems to be the carry more weight since he is always invited to the gatherings within the community until his downfall at the end. Further irony is created by Eliza's use of the term fancy. Sanford meets her expectations of fancy and as such is associated with fanciful, imaginative writing. Davidson argues that "Eliza's fall lies at least as much in the virtues of Boyer as in the vices of Sanford" (Introduction xvii), so the religious writing, which is normally associated with virtue, and the fanciful, imaginative writing can be equally dangerous if not "read" correctly.

Another prominent way that Foster foregrounds writing is by formatting her novel as an epistolary novel. Regardless of the standard criticism of the epistolary tradition and regardless of whether the epistolary tradition is held in high regard or not, the epistolary novel can never escape that it is about writing. Setting aside the entire story unveiled in these letters, the one sentence version of what the book is about is "several people writing letters to each other." Letters allow the author to grant more freedom to her character – freedom that allows Eliza to find herself in the tenuous situation that forms the basis of this novel's plot. The epistolary

tradition also allows Foster not to engage in the moral preaching that would be expected by the opponents of fiction: “By using a true epistolary format (in contrast to many early American epistolary novels which merely allude to epistolarity), Foster eliminates the overt authorial intrusion commonly aligned with didacticism” (Harris, “Hannah Webster Foster” 2). On the other hand, however, the epistolary novel allows the characters to have more authority over language and their own outcomes:

Chaperoned within adult society, an unmarried daughter was never entirely autonomous. Thus, she maintained a sphere which she resolutely refused to compromise: her own letters. For literate women in the eighteenth century, the letter always provided an outlet for private expression. For a young woman in the Republic, the letter became even more consequential. It was the first forum in which she could exercise her liberty, test her autonomy. The vocabulary of republicanism undergirded her narrative authority: her letters could become declarations of independence, by which she signed her governance over herself. (Fizer 252)

By using letters in this way, Foster is able to present a very capable female character, unlike Richardson’s Pamela, whose letters were mere pleas of an innocence in danger of being lost. Foster also invites comparisons of the letters in her novel to this country’s founding documents such as our Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, which are signed much like the letters in an epistolary novel. Irene Fizer’s comments also bring the analysis back to the idea that Foster was promoting a community of women with some aspirations for independence.

This focus upon speaking and writing is noticeable not only because of the epistolary format but also because all the letters have some type of reference to speech or writing. The letters have lengthy direct quotations set up to recreate the dialogue that occurred. Looking through the letters, readers can quickly detect various speech patterns as belonging to specific characters. For example, Sanford generally does not repeat anyone else’s speech, with two exceptions: he relays a very brief conversation with his wife, and he repeats Eliza’s long farewell speech. On the other hand, Eliza intersperses almost all of her early letters with dialogue, but

these speeches diminish as she becomes involved with Sanford and realizes that she has lost her virtue and strayed into territory from which she cannot return. As the narrative progresses, her letters decrease, which I argue goes beyond her ability to speak for herself because she also loses her ability to speak for others (or replicate that speech) in her letters. Challenging the way the character in the sentimental novel is depicted and changing the message of the expected moral, allows Foster the freedom to focus more on the theme of writing and allows her to promote her fiction as fiction – a novel – without hiding behind a moral's clause or having to disguise her fiction as something other than fiction.

Susannah Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*

Charlotte Temple is another novel that challenges the sentimental tradition in significant ways and engages the debate about the desirability of reading fiction in ways not thoroughly analyzed.¹³ *Charlotte Temple* is the most reprinted of Susannah Rowson's novels, having been reissued numerous times in countless editions since it was first published in England in 1791 and America in 1794.¹⁴ The plot follows a pattern similar to that of *The Coquette* in that an innocent virgin is seduced and abandoned, and she dies giving birth. *Charlotte Temple* differs significantly, however, from *The Coquette* in three major areas: Charlotte is young – 15 at the beginning of the novel; her child does not die; and the novel is not epistolary. Many critics argue that *The Coquette* is a better novel, but, ironically, critical attention has focused less on *The Coquette* than on *Charlotte Temple*, which also tends to be faulted for its poor imitation of the British sentimental tradition. Several recent critics, however, have excused this defect by crediting Rowson with writing a political allegory. I argue that Rowson does more than write a political allegory, and that in similar fashion to Hannah Foster, Rowson challenges the sentimental novel through a focus on characters, the change of the expected morality, and the

way in which she engages with the debate about the desirability of fiction. The self-reflexive moments within the text of the novel provide much evidence for and contribute to these subversions. In addition to the self-conscious preface, Rowson's primary use of self-reflexivity within the text is in the direct address to the reader, but she also uses a framing device and displays a self-consciousness about language and the fictionality of her text that further emphasize the adaptations she is making of the sentimental tradition.

Focus on Characters

We realize early in the text that the narrator believes traditions are being challenged with this tale when the narrator tells her readers, the "dear girls," that "it is now past the days of romance" (29). In other words, this story is not about a young girl having an adventure who will be rescued by a handsome gent who writes flowery love letters. In similar fashion to *The Coquette*, this novel does not conform to the sentimental tradition, because it reverses who gets forgiven and who gets punished. Rowson's narrator alludes to this change during her discussion of the moral of the novel by explaining that the message will not happen in the manner expected of novels of this type (98-99). Generally, the seduced heroine becomes the immoral fallen woman for whom no forgiveness or sympathy is possible except possibly at her death. In this novel, however, forgiveness from Rowson and other characters is easily given to Charlotte. In his attempts to seduce Charlotte, Montraville predicts that her parents will forgive her (43). After she runs away with him and her parents are still waiting on some word from her, they decide that they will forgive her, regardless of the circumstances (56). Mrs. Temple even speaks of forgiving Charlotte as her "duty" (90). As readers, we realize that her parents do not heed to the societal pressure to offer forgiveness only upon her death, as the ultimate way to expiate sin.

Rowson's portrayal of forgiving the fallen woman is similar in nature to the way she depicts Charlotte's infant who lives. Generally the fallen heroine's offspring rarely lives or is considered a sinful reminder of the mother's transgression and grows up to bear the stigma of that sin. The "innocent infant [that] partakes not of its mother's guilt" (81) is a concept not found in earlier novels, because a child born under these circumstances is generally either proclaimed as guilty or dies at birth, so guilt or innocence does not have to be addressed. The closest that the text comes to a negative characterization of Charlotte's child is when Charlotte refers to the baby as the "offspring of disobedience" (114). Charlotte's disobedience, however, is more about her disobeying her parents than her sexual misconduct. Ann Douglas says that "[i]f she has sinned, it is not an adult's sin but a child's (xxviii).¹⁵ In some ways, Charlotte is not only reborn as Lucy, but through Lucy, she is reunited with her parents. Mrs. Temple even begins "to almost fancy she possessed her Charlotte" (118). The birth of Charlotte's child, Lucy, and the Temple's acceptance of Lucy upend the traditional sentimental version because the parents do not forsake either; they just do not get to America in time to save Charlotte. They do, however, save Lucy and raise her as their own child.

Charlotte, the so-called fallen woman, gets her forgiveness and sympathy and never truly gets punished; whereas, the other characters all receive a punishment of some type. Montraville kills Belcour for his role in Charlotte's death, and unlike the unrepentant rake of many sentimental novels, Montraville prostrates himself before Mr. Temple, begging to be punished. Mr. Temple tells Montraville that his "own reflexions be thy punishment" (117). Montraville receives a slight wound in his fight with Belcour that results in a "dangerous illness and obstinate delirium" (118). His greatest punishment, however, is that he is "subject to severe fits of melancholy" for the rest of his life (118). The most fitting punishment is reserved for Madame

LaRue (Crayton), the woman who precipitated all the events. About ten years after Charlotte's death, the Temples find "a poor wretch" (119) waiting for them at their house, who reveals that she is the former La Rue. For the past seven years, she has been living "in riot, dissipation, and vice," (119) and after receiving help from the Temples, she dies within a few weeks, thus ultimately receiving the punishment normally reserved for the fallen woman. Punishing someone other than the protagonist is a clear challenge to the traditional sentimental novel.

In addition to focusing on character, Rowson gives us clues that this novel and its characters are in the realm of imaginative literature, by constantly referring not to reality or real people but to a staged, fictional version of reality. Textual evidence includes such comments by the narrator as "[t]he reader no doubt has already developed the character of La Rue" (57). In other words, she is a character, not a real person. The narrator also says that Colonel Crayton had a "peculiar trait in his character" and that "La Rue easily saw his character" (58). Belcour also claims that he will not attempt to ruin the "character of [La Rue]" (60), and earlier, he is described as "a man whose character might be comprised in a few words" (37). In each of these instances, the evidence can be read to mean personality or moral fiber, but it can also mean the character he or she represents. Later, discussing Belcour's nature in relationship to Montraville's, the narrator suggests that anyone who associates with "such a character" must have similar qualities – again the comparison is to a character. The narrator continues by saying, "But Montraville was a different character" (37) – not a different person or type of person but a different character.

Moral Message versus Plea for Solidarity

Charlotte Temple also challenges the expected morality of the sentimental novel, which usually includes a lecture or sermon that instructs the readers on the way they should behave and

what they should avoid. Without this lecture, part of the anticipated moralizing theme of the novel is lost. Rowson provides no such lecture and, through her characters, emphasizes that forgiveness is more proper than admonitions. Rather than religious, moralizing objectives, one of Rowson's primary aims with her novel is to create a community of readers who are sympathetic to Charlotte's plight. The direct address to her readers by the narrator encourages a solidarity of sorts among this community of sympathetic readers. In addition to being about this solidarity more than the expected didactic moral, the idea of solidarity among readers is important because it anticipates a community that can participate in and have influence over communal activities such as creating a literary tradition that is separate from the British. The sense of solidarity is further enhanced by the framing device of Boethian philosophy, which is juxtaposed against the expected religious theme. This framing device provides further irony and enhances the self-reflexivity noticeable in the novel. During Mr. Eldridge's story (the elder Lucy's father) to Mr. Temple, Mr. Eldridge says, "Then let us, my friend, take the cup of life as it is presented to us, tempered by the hand of a wise Providence; be thankful for the good, be patient under the evil, and presume not to enquire why the latter predominates" (17). Later, the narrator when relating what has happened to Col. Crayton and his wife (La Rue) says, "But fortune is blind, and so are those too frequently who have the power of dispensing her favours: else why do we see fools and knaves at the very top of the wheel, while patient merit sinks to the extreme of the opposite abyss" (100). Both comments suggest that the narrator through the voice of her characters subscribes to a Boethian-type philosophy of life as a series of ups and downs that are governed by the capriciousness of Lady Fortuna and her wheel of fortune. The significance of framing a novel of seduction with Boethian philosophy is that it underscores the fact that Charlotte is a victim of fate – that the choices she makes are not solely responsible for her downfall. This

philosophy is in direct contradiction to the generally held belief that the fallen woman in a seduction novel chooses to be seduced and, therefore, deserves the punishment that she receives.

The narrator actually criticizes those who take this judgmental stand. An example of the narrator chastising someone for this belief occurs in the scene in which the narrator discusses the lack of sympathy by the matron, which Davidson suggests causes the matron to misread the books and “concomitantly, misjudge women (such as Charlotte Temple) who have made a mistake” (Introduction xvi). Because the matron misreads the text, she “is certain the novel will seduce her darling daughter and reads disapprovingly, constructing a text consistent with her view that novels promote evil” (Introduction xvi). Susan K. Harris also believes that the matron may misinterpret the book and “that ironies can be missed, satires unappreciated, sympathies misconstrued” (*19th-Century American* 46), so the narrator begs the matron to keep reading because the novel is not trying to fill her readers’ heads with silly romantic notions. Davidson argues that the matron is not the only person who misreads the book; the critic who probably denounces the fictional form also misreads it:

The professional critic, Rowson knows, is also familiar with the elitist censure of fiction (no doubt, he has contributed to it), and he especially comes to women’s fiction with a host of predilections – against women writers, women characters, women’s themes; in sum against women. Whereas the matron will misread because of her high-toned moralism, the critic will misread because of his narrow aesthetic (and gender) convictions. In each case, Rowson insists, they will be wrong. They will be reading their own prejudices, not her novel. (“Introduction” xvi-xvii)

These prejudices are much the same today because this novel and others like it are still dismissed on the basis of aesthetic convictions that are predisposed against this kind of novel. Rowson’s comment on those who do not forgive people’s mistakes could apply to people who denounce fiction: “Let prudes and fools censure if they dare, and blame a sensibility they never felt, I will exultingly tell them that the heart that is truly virtuous is ever inclined to pity and forgive the

errors of its fellow-creatures” (75). Rowson could be referring to the novel that “fools censure” and that her novel stands ready to provide sympathy and forgiveness when needed. Both the matron and the dismissive critic misread the novel because the very pointed moral of the story is not placed on the fallen protagonist as expected but rather on La Rue, the woman who led the innocent girl down the path that ultimately led to her ruin. Those critics looking for a moral in this story believe as Harris does that “*Charlotte Temple* is a cautionary tale warning young women not to give in to sexual impulse” (*19th-Century American* 41), but this reading takes into account only the literal story and does not allow for the meaning created by other readers and gives no acknowledgment of the adaptation of an existing tradition or of the needs of an evolving literary history .

In several instances, Rowson allows readers to create their own interpretations of this text by not providing all the details and allowing the reader to imagine and supply her own details. Rowson thereby further encourages a bonding among the author, the reader, the narrator, and Charlotte. Rowson first omits details in Montraville’s letter to Charlotte in which the “reader who has the least knowledge of the world, will easily imagine” the contents of the letter (28). Another instance occurs when the narrator says, “It would be useless to repeat the conversation” (47) when Montraville is trying to convince Charlotte to leave with him. When the narrator is attempting to explain the relationship between Montraville and Belcour, she says, “[W]ill not the reader be ready to imagine” (37). On one occasion, however, the narrator is more pointed and directs the reader toward a predetermined conclusion, when she says, “Let not the reader imagine Belcour’s designs were honorable” (59). At the beginning of Volume II, Rowson portrays everything that Charlotte is questioning about what she has done and all the questions that the narrator brings up in order to guide the reader to have sympathy and pity for people in

Charlotte's situation. In each instance, however, the narrator assumes a level of knowledge and experience on the part of the reader that allows her to create her own meaning within the text, thus enhancing the solidarity between the reader and the text and between the reader and Charlotte.

Along with the direct address of the narrator, an earlier scene with Mrs. Beauchamp provides another instance of Rowson using her novel to create a bonding with her readers. Mrs. Beauchamp shows pity and sympathy for Charlotte, whom the narrator refers to as "far less guilty" (62) than La Rue. These direct appeals were employed differently in the early sentimental tradition. In *Pamela*, for example, the declarations to the reader were to entreat belief in the character's innocence – not for the character's forgiveness – as if lack of innocence is unforgivable. In the traditional sentimental novels, no pity or sympathy is provided to someone like Charlotte; however, a married woman such as LaRue is considered acceptable, as long as she maintained appearances – a fact that Rowson's narrator implies in discussing the type of moral many readers expect from her novel (98-99). Solidarity is not, however, only reserved for the women and young girls who are in circumstances similar to Charlotte's. Rowson also appeals to the "wife, whose breast glows with affection" and the "duteous, faithful wife, though treated with indifference" (66). Rowson shows the way in which their plight is not that much different from Charlotte's, and therefore encourages the notion that Charlotte deserves their sympathy also. Douglas acknowledges the direct address within the text for helping to create a solidarity between the text and the readers: "[I]n fact each authorial remark is designed to clear away, not reinforce, the obstacles that lie between Rowson's readers and full identification with the story" (xxvi).¹⁶ Davidson argues that "The text self-consciously puts itself forward as a concerned parent, a counseling friend" (Introduction xvii). In the case of *Charlotte Temple*, the text as a

“counseling friend” is creating a sense of solidarity through the sympathy of a friend – a friend who always understands what Charlotte Temple is going through and is supportive, regardless of the decisions that she makes. Kay Ferguson Ryals also connects this novel to an appeal to solidarity through friendship by saying, “The novel argues for the vital importance of friendship and community between women [... and] serves as a model for and calls into being what might be termed a ‘community of strangers’ composed of like-minded readers who are alive to Charlotte’s isolation and recognize it as representative of their own” (102). This solidarity is important because Charlotte refers to friendships, or the lack thereof, as a major source of her problems.

The American readers that Rowson was addressing had a different set of expectations for their novels than a British audience did – a quality that Tennenhouse discusses quite convincingly in “Americanization of *Clarissa*,” where he argues that the American version of *Charlotte Temple* published in 1794 was much more successful than the British version published first in 1791. This lack of success in Britain could be attributed to a Briton being cast as the villain.¹⁷ This solidarity, however, appears to be directly aimed at an American audience that is different from the English. The idea of an American being different from English is expressed by Mrs. Beauchamp, who talks to Charlotte about the importance of manners in a social situation. During this discussion, Mrs. Beauchamp refers to herself as an Englishwoman as if Charlotte is different – American – even though Mrs. Beauchamp knows that Charlotte got off the boat after her. She describes Charlotte as “naturally polite and well-bred” (76) but not English. The implication is that the American audience to whom Rowson was appealing for support and understanding through shared life experiences would have more sympathy for an American girl. Other critics share a similar view: “American readers may well have interpreted

Rowson's novel as an allegory of innocence betrayed by foreign seducers" (Gilmore 630).

Viewing the novel in these terms sets up Charlotte, the innocent, as an American who is seduced by the British. A significant point that follows from this reading is the possibility of extending it into areas other than the political arena, such as fiction. If people held the position that the British were an evil power who seduced and betrayed the innocent, the allegory within the novel could in part represent the English novel usurping the American novel in the midst of copyright laws that protected American novels at the expense of making them more expensive to publish and distribute as compared to the English novels, which had no such protection, yet were able to prosper, relatively speaking.

Writing as focus

Language and its effectiveness, or not, play an important role in this novel and contribute to Rowson's ability to challenge the sentimental tradition and emphasize the self-reflexivity in this novel. At the same time, language also enhances Rowson's attempts to garner sympathy for Charlotte and solidarity among the readers. Throughout the novel, Charlotte "reminds us that words are her only medium, but that they are nonetheless inadequate pointers to the meaning she seeks" (Douglas xxvii). Charlotte laments the fact that words seem to fail, and she constantly reminds us that her words are inadequate.¹⁸ In the case of letters to her parents, they never get there on time, or they get torn up without being sent. Two instances where the attempt at expression fails include the narrator telling us that "Charlotte bowed her head in silence; but the anguish of her heart was too great to permit her to articulate a single word" (104), and when Charlotte knew she was dying, she asked her father to "protect" her child and "bless" (presumably her), but she was "unable to finish the sentence" (115).¹⁹ Because her parents never got her letters, she feels that even the written word has failed her. Rowson ascribes some of these

same attitudes to Montraville because in his letter to Charlotte, he says, “Though I have taken up my pen to address you, my poor injured girl, I feel I am inadequate to the task” (93). Just as words fail the characters, so do the narrator’s. While the narrator is attempting to create a community of readers who can sympathize with Charlotte and apply her story to their own life, the narrator realizes that her words are also not always adequate to the task, as evidenced by her asking, “[w]ho can form an adequate idea of Charlotte’s misery?” (66), and referring to “an agony of grief which it is impossible to describe” (86). I argue that while the narrator may attest to the inadequacy of her words, she is really underlining the need for solidarity, as many women – for example, the wives referred to earlier – have been in similar situations where words could not define their problem nor resolve the issues. Although Douglas reads the inadequacy of words as evidence that Charlotte does not learn anything and that the reader gains nothing by the story (xxxiv), I question Douglas’s assessment of both *Charlotte Temple* and Charlotte Temple in light of the evidence presented.

The question of voice and the ability to use language effectively plays a role in the format of this novel. Unlike many sentimental novels of this time on both sides of the Atlantic, *Charlotte Temple* was not an epistolary novel. Rowson rejected the epistolary form in favor of third-person narrative in order to “gain a greater degree of authority and control over her work” (Barton 28). Other critics have argued that this narrative allows Charlotte’s voice to be heard in ways that the epistolary would not. This same narrator is the one responsible for attempting to create the community of readers who would be solidly behind Charlotte in their support. The solidarity also increases the chance of Charlotte’s voice being heard: “By maintaining a strong narrative presence throughout the novel, Rowson not only succeeded in preventing Charlotte’s quiet voice from being ignored or misinterpreted, but also succeeded in creating a narrative voice

capable of guiding her readers to ‘sensible’ conclusions” (Barton 28). While Charlotte may have had moments of inadequacy when attempting to speak, we still hear her and are led to sympathize with her. We also gloat at the misfortunes of Belcour and Miss La Rue. We come to these conclusions with the help of the intrusive narrator, who comments on the story, lectures the readers, and guides the reader toward the desired feelings of sympathy – a sympathy that creates a bonding among the readers and between the reader and Charlotte, as discussed earlier.

I have argued that Rowson attempts to challenge the sentimental tradition on several fronts. Those critics who read the American sentimental novelists as following the tradition they inherited read this novel in a fashion similar to Wendy Martin’s comparison of this novel to “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”: “Thus the American sentimental novel reflects the Puritan heritage of the spirit warring with the flesh and like the sermon [“Sinners” Edward], it attempts to instruct an audience in the ways of virtue and to illustrate the wages of sin” (4). This reading, however, is not borne out by specifics in the novel. The narrator seldom invokes God, and forgiveness and rebirth rather than punishment seems to be emphasized, which highlight the ways Rowson does not conform to the sentimental tradition in characters and theme. She further defies expectations by self-consciously pointing toward the fictionality of her “tale” rather than being defensive about its novelty, as many critics suggest. As with *The Coquette*, Rowson’s self-conscious challenges reveal her awareness of working within a new tradition that is uniquely American.

Charles Brockden Brown’s *Ormond*

Charles Brockden Brown also challenges the sentimental tradition, and his novel *Ormond* follows a pattern similar to that of other seduction novels. The novel has a young, innocent virgin, Constantia, who is pursued by a rake, and the novel ends with a death. Like many

sentimental heroines, Constantia is motherless and during much of the novel's action is without any effective parental guidance at all. While she is somewhat attracted to the male protagonist, Ormond, she resists his attempts to seduce her, unlike many other sentimental heroines. What truly separates this novel from others within the tradition is the ending. By the end of the novel, Constantia does not reform and marry the rake, nor does she compromise her virtue, necessitating her death. Instead, she kills Ormond, her would-be seducer, with a penknife – an instrument whose name is meant to evoke the instrument by which she writes, he writes, we write. Like Foster and Rowson, Brown also challenges the tradition by making changes to the characters and expected defense of the novel, instead emphasizing writing and the fictional nature of the tale.

Some critics recognize that Brown is changing the sentimental novel. Donald Ringe acknowledges some twisting of the sentimental tradition but does not focus on these changes and never fully explores them: “All the major characters function thematically in this novel to develop some serious ideas on the conflict of rationalism and religion and the proper education of women not usually found in the sentimental tale of seduction” (“Charles Brockden Brown” 279). Steven Watts labels *Ormond* as “a version of the standard eighteenth-century seduction tale,” but he recognizes that it seems “to pull in different directions” (*Romance* 89). Rather than discussing the way the novel challenges the seduction or sentimental tradition by going in “different directions,” he calls it “standard fare of Gothic storytelling” (*Romance* 89).²⁰ Sydney J. Krause also realizes that Brown subverts the sentimental tradition of the seduction novel when he says, “With its strongly ironic variation on the stock situation of a master seducer being mastered, it is seduction in a new key” (“*Ormond*” 571). Like the other critics, Michael T. Gilmore admits that Brown is attempting to modify the sentimental tradition, and also like the

other critics, Gilmore does not fully analyze these differences beyond a simple acknowledgment that they exist: “*Ormond* is a tale of female independence and political conspiracy that turns the popular seduction novel into an intellectually ambitious hybrid. Brown takes the simple plot of a maiden resisting a seducer and complicates it with unexpected turns and speculations” (650).

Gilmore, like the others, never fully explores these changes. He does not question the idea of the novel as a “hybrid” or analyze the way Brown “complicates” the seduction plot. As mentioned earlier, the push against genre boundaries is a characteristic of the novel, and the self-conscious attempts to challenge the standard characteristics of the sentimental novel make further analysis of these subversions worthwhile.

Focus on Character

Brown is more concerned with characters than other elements and challenges what we come to expect of the characters in sentimental novels. Several critics point to these changes:

The main thing [Brown] did to raise seduction above the run of the mill—and indeed melodramatic—treatment given it in popular fiction was to raise the character endowment of his participants. Quite simply, he gave them some depth as persons. Brown’s seducer is the epitome of cultivation. Eminently self-possessed, and deeming himself ‘superior to the allurements of what is called love,’ he rated physical gratification at the ‘bottom’ of ‘his scale of enjoyments’. (Krause, “*Ormond*” 577)

The reader, as does Constantia, becomes very well acquainted with Ormond because unlike Sanford and Montraville, he is not depicted at a very superficial level even though we do not hear of him until Chapter 10. We do not actually meet him until the following chapter, which is rather odd, considering he is the title character. Ringe also discusses the way the villain, Ormond, challenges the expectations of the villain in a sentimental novel: “[Brown’s] villain is not simply a sensualist, such as one encounters in Belcour in *Charlotte Temple*, but the kind of intellectual egoist who elevates his desires above those of others and, regardless of human considerations, tries to enforce his will on the world” (“Charles Brockden Brown” 277). In other

words, he wants to do more than seduce one young American girl. As an outsider – a foreigner – he wants to impose his power on all of America. Ormond, as the villain of this supposed sentimental novel is significantly altered from the traditional villain of other sentimental novels, as Krause points out:

Ormond is visibly quite different from the single-minded gothic villains. To this point, he is no villain at all. Rather, with his brilliancy of mind, correct taste, and liberalism of outlook, he is a tribute to the Enlightenment, of which he is a model specimen. Moreover, he has fallen deeply in love, and, though he would rather not modify his convictions to win Constantia, he would rather do that than lose her. (“*Ormond*” 578)

Rather than modify his convictions, however, he attempts to rape her, and when she initially pledges to die rather than allow the rape to occur, he says, “Living or dead, the prize that I have in view shall be mine” (285). Unlike Sanford, Montraville, and the other rakes in the sentimental tradition, Ormond does not use the same type of flattering “artifice” (135) as they did; rather he manipulates several situations, so she will turn to him. He really does not seduce Constantia: “He did nothing but lay the conditions before her” (135). The primary similarity that Ormond has to other villains in sentimental novels is his view of women, which sounds remarkably like Sanford’s in Foster’s *The Coquette*:

He had not hitherto met with a female worthy of his confidence. Their views were limited and superficial, or their understandings were betrayed by the tenderness of their hearts. He found in them no intellectual energy, no superiority to what he accounted vulgar prejudice, and no affinity with the sentiments which he cherished with most devotion. Their presence had been capable of exciting no emotion which did not quickly discover to be vague and sensual; and the uniformity of his experience at length instilled into him a belief that the intellectual constitution of females was essentially defective. (132).

Ormond may believe women to be inferior, but he does not characterize them as evil in the same way as Sanford does.

Just as the villain in *Ormond* is more fully developed in this novel than other sentimental novels, many critics believe the heroine to have “more substance” than other protagonists of

sentimental novels (Ringe, "Charles Brockden Brown" 278). Henri Petter also acknowledges that Ormond and Constantia "are different from the usual leading characters of contemporary fiction" (340) – contemporary fiction being dominated by the sentimental novel. While not exactly villainous, the characterization of Constantia early in the novel is almost the exact opposite of sentimental characters, up to and including Eliza and Charlotte Temple:

Her fortune and character had attracted many admirers. One of them had some reason to flatter himself with success. Miss Dudley's notions had little in common with those around her. She had learned to square her conduct, in a considerable degree, not by the hasty impulses of inclination, but by the dictates of truth. She yielded nothing to caprice or passion. Not that she was perfectly exempt from intervals of weakness or from the necessity of painful struggles, but these intervals were transient, and these struggles always successful. She was no stranger to the pleadings of love, from the lips of others and in her own bosom; but its tumults were brief, and speedily gave place to quiet thoughts and steadfast purposes. (*Ormond* 52)

Constantia is everything, including constant, that a sentimental heroine is not. Constantia was neither innocent and naive like Charlotte nor a coquette like Eliza, but rather "well-educated, independent-minded, and virtuous" (90). Part of what makes Constantia different is the way she strives for independence, especially economic independence. Her independence is further emphasized by her views on marriage because, unlike Eliza, Constantia is one who "chooses to remain single rather than to contract what she deems are unsuitable marriages, and who makes her way in the world by using her own good sense" (Ringe, *Charles Brockden Brown* 34).

Constantia believes marriage "was a contract to endure" (52) and would rather not marry without the benefit of love: "Education, besides, had created in her an insurmountable abhorrence of admitting to conjugal privileges the man who had no claim upon her love" (104). Like Eliza, Constantia is attracted to the man ultimately cast as the villain: "Constantia was young, and her heart was open at a thousand pores to the love of excellence. The image of Ormond occupied the

chief place in her fancy, and was endowed with attractive and venerable qualities” (164). Unlike Eliza, however, she does not allow her fancy to lead to her downfall.

Another way to read the Constantia character is as a villain rather than a heroine. James Russo provides a very convincing reading of *Ormond* in this way, by calling into question Constantia as a good character and arguing that reading Constantia as a villain is the only way to account for the “inconsistencies and contradictions” (“Tangled Web” 208) of the novel. If we read the text in this way, we do not have an authentic heroine, which totally challenges the tradition, since the female protagonist of a sentimental novel traditionally never has a questionable character; she is always virtuous until she is seduced; and she is never cast as a villain, as Russo has done quite convincingly. This reading also gives rise to several questions. If the subtitle “Or, The Secret Witness” is an appositive and the Secret Witness is Ormond, then why is he considered a secret and what is he a witness to? If the subtitle is in opposition to Ormond, then the subtitle is attempting to explain that someone besides Ormond is central. If this scenario is correct, then who is the secret witness? Sophia? If we believe that Sophia is an unreliable narrator, then she must have gotten some of the story from Constantia, and if we apply Russo’s convincing argument, every interpretation of events from the very first story of Craig embezzling money from her father must be called into question. Whether we take the story at face value – as many contemporary readers would have done – or whether we read Constantia as a villain, we see the various ways that Brown challenged the tradition through the various ways that he modified the typical character depictions of a sentimental novel.

Helena, on the other hand, fits all the characteristics of a sentimental heroine. If this novel were a typical sentimental fiction, then Helena would be the protagonist. She even dies as a good

sentimental heroine should. Unlike Constantia, Helena is described much like any traditional sentimental character:

Helena Cleves was endowed with every feminine and fascinating quality. Her features were modified by the most transient sentiments, and were the seat of a softness at all times blushful and bewitching. All those graces of symmetry, smoothness, and luster, which assemble in the imagination of the painter when he calls from the bosom of her natal deep the Paphian divinity, blended their perfections in the shade, complexion, and hair of this lady. Her voice was naturally thrilling and melodious, and her utterance clear and distinct. A musical education had added to all these advantages the improvements of art, and no one could swim in the dance with such airy and transporting elegance.
(*Ormond* 132)

While Helena may have fit the descriptions of the typical sentimental novel, she is not the protagonist, and Constantia believes that Helena and Ormond are not a good match for each other, partially because she questions Helena's intellectual ability. Ironically, however, Helena plays chess, which is considered a masculine game and one that requires a certain amount of skill and intelligence – characteristics that Ormond and Constantia do not believe Helena possesses in great quantity. She is seduced by Ormond, willingly becomes his mistress – much like Eliza in *The Coquette* – and kills herself when he threatens to leave her to pursue Constantia. Helena fits the description of the sentimental heroine in ways that Constantia does not, but she is not the protagonist, which is another way for Brown to challenge the way a sentimental character is depicted.

In addition to his focus on developing his characters more deeply than in most sentimental novels, Brown rewrites the traditional characters of the sentimental novel through gender subversion, which in itself is a subversion of the sentimental tradition and contributes to the subtle changes taking place in the American tradition. While a sentimental novel generally is didactic about personal virtues, *Ormond* uses a female protagonist and narrator who attempt to convey a message about education and commercialism that are generally a male purview,

challenging the contemporary male and female roles during this time. Throughout the novel, Constantia's education and her ability to maneuver through financial transactions are emphasized enough to call attention to these normally-male associations and the female protagonist. Constantia sees herself as being more like Ormond, a male character, than Helena, the one truly feminine character: "[Constantia] saw that their elements were more congenial, and the points of contact between [Ormond] and herself more numerous than between her and Helena, [who. . .] excited in her bosom no genuine sympathy" (155). Kristin Comment blames this lack of "female sympathy" on an absence of "maternal feeling" (58), which provides more evidence of the unfeminine characteristics of Constantia. Constantia acts in several ways that defy traditionally defined gender roles: she secures new housing; she confronts Craig; she sells the lute and negotiates to get it back; and she appears before the magistrate. Like Sanford, the rake in *The Coquette*, Constantia flees America to Europe after killing Ormond. Brown's greatest subversion of gender roles, however, comes in the character of Martinette, a relatively minor character, who was "delighted to assume the male dress, to acquire skill at the sword," (201), so she could fight in the Revolutionary War with her husband.²¹ Mary Chapman briefly discusses the way Brown subverts gender roles and hence the sentimental tradition: "*Ormond* itself is a cross-dressed text written by a male author in the persona of a female narrator writing, among other topics, about the benefits and risks of private women's attempts to participate in public life, to the mysterious I. E. Rosenberg, whose gender is unknown" (10). This gender subversion challenges the sentimental tradition within which this novel gets classified, adding to the challenges being made within the early American literary tradition that is attempting to separate itself from the British tradition.

Moral Message versus Plea for Solidarity

In addition to these challenges to the character of the traditional sentimental novel, *Ormond* also challenges the expected strategies for presenting acceptable fiction. Unlike traditional sentimental novels, *Ormond* has no role models of a good marriage, and virtue is not rewarded. This novel, however, appeals to its readers for a community within the new Republic, much like the novels previously discussed. Sophia, the narrator, states that her purpose in writing is to relate Constantia's "biographical sketch" (37), based on Sophia's own perception (39). She then states that the biography will relate the "society and manners" of America, and that being American is differentiated by not having "artificial degrees of esteem or contempt which connect themselves with different professions and ranks" (38), as was the norm in Europe. Making a distinction between American and European readers adds to the feeling of kinship created by the shared bond of being in a new country. Another way for authors to counter claims against their fiction is for them to claim they are depicting a real story, which is not the case with this novel. One storyteller in the novel attests to the difficulty in depicting reality: "To such as you, my tale might abound with novelty, while to others, more acquainted with vicissitudes, it would be tedious and flat" (194-95). In other words, "reality" and "realism" can change from reader to reader or from buyer to buyer. When discussing the depiction of reality, the reliability of the narrator and the various sources used by the author must be taken into consideration. At one point, Sophia accuses Ormond of not recounting the story objectively (136) – ironic given her own lack of reliability and the fact that she is actually the one recounting the story.

Writing as Focus

Like Foster and Rowson, Brown uses various metafictional techniques to convey his message and emphasize speaking and writing. *Ormond* is no exception with its numerous

references to speaking and writing. From the very beginning Brown stresses the importance of writing through several characters. He first depicts Dudley, Constantia's father, working as a scribe. In addition, Ormond "excels at mimicry (another example of speech aping writing's absence)" (Gilmore 650). Sophia later describes Constantia's writing habits:

The only intellectual amusement which this lady allowed herself was writing. She enjoyed one distant friend, with whom she maintained an uninterrupted correspondence, and to whom she confided a circumstantial and copious relation of all these particulars. That friend is the writer of these memoirs. It is not impossible but that these letters may be communicated to the world at some future period. (57)

Since Constantia appears to enjoy writing, several unanswered questions arise. Why is this not told from the viewpoint of Constantia? Why is a true epistolary mode not used since she obviously wrote numerous letters, and Sophia kept the letters? Why do the stories of various other characters play such a large role in the novel? While we may never be able to assign a good reason for Brown's narrative choice, not fully using the epistolary mode, as with Rowson, is also an attempt at modifying the sentimental tradition generally thought to have been begun by Richardson.

Foster, Rowson, and Brown created novels that challenged the sentimental tradition and attempted to create works that would help to define "American fiction." Much like Brown does in his novels that were analyzed in Chapter Three, these authors were self-consciously creating works that they believed were uniquely American and would appeal to their readers of the new Republic. They do this by challenging the characterization that we come to expect, by employing a theme that is not didactic in purpose, but calls for a solidarity among their readers, and by focusing on writing that calls attention to the fictionality of their works. Rather than viewing fiction as a suspect form of literature, they actually embrace literature as a way of achieving their objectives, such as calling for a solidarity among readers within the community of the new

Republic. We see this played out again in the novels studied in the next chapter. More specifically, the authors in the next chapter use comedy and satire to provide a telling indictment of the state of this new literature.

End Notes

¹ The only sustained analysis of the self-reflexivity, or metafictional techniques, of these early writings, is provided by Jurgen Wolter and two respondents, Bernd Engler and Terence Martin, who broach this topic in brief journal articles. Wolter says that “the discourse about the problems of writing fiction in spite of anti-fictional criticism is no longer confined to prefaces, epilogues, or footnotes, but has become an integral part of the fictional text itself” (72). I find it especially ironic that so much emphasis in Wolter’s article is placed on verisimilitude and discussions of reality when metafiction by definition blurs these lines. For example, Wolter says, “In these novels the narrator stresses the creative faculties of the imagination and consciously blurs the borders between fact and fiction” (72), yet he posits this blurring as a defense mechanism on the part of these authors. Ironically the critics who discuss metafictional texts today, such as those by John Barth and Robert Coover, refer to these authors as being very confident in their craft – hence their use of metafiction.

² The seduction novel is generally assumed to have several noteworthy characteristics that place it in the sentimental category. These novels tend to have an innocent, naive virgin and a lustful rake, who is reformed through the death of the heroine or marriage to the heroine. The heroine’s purity is seductive to the rake, and her purity is her best defense, so only she can cause or prevent her own ruin. Generally, these young girls have absent or neglectful parents. These novels are almost always narrated in a first-person, epistolary format, and they function in like morality plays in that they provide an example of proper behavior by rewarding virtue and show the depravity of improper behavior by punishing the sinner. The common elements in these works that lead critics to label them as sentimental are a young female protagonist in danger of losing her virtue, or who has lost her virtue, and the subsequent reformation of the rake in question or the death of the protagonist if she is unsuccessful in reforming the rake or in saving her virtue. Much of the criticism of the American version focuses on the ineptitude these novels display in comparison to their British counterparts.

³ Included in this new tradition would also be the poets, dramatists, and other writers who may be making similar subversions and rhetorical moves but are not analyzed in this study.

⁴ The penknife as an instrument of death is an ironic commentary on an instrument of writing.

⁵ Hutcheon believes parody is always self-reflexive but not all self-reflexive fiction is parodic, which allows me to make this comparison. Subverting a tradition, can similarly be considered a self-reflexive technique according to Anton Popovič, who defines metatext as “a meta-sign of a work which is already in existence” (233) and characterizes metatexts as having “interliterary

relations: the relations of a text to works in ‘foreign’ literatures, as well as to earlier works in the same literature” (234).

⁶ Just as Eliza need not apologize, neither does Foster apologize for her fiction, as noted in an earlier chapter.

⁷ Kristie Hamilton labels these women as the “spokeswomen for republican ideology” (141).

⁸ Sharon M. Harris disagrees with this assessment, or rather believes this assessment not to be a positive one. She finds “Mrs. Richman’s characterization much more complex and disturbing” (“Hannah Webster Foster” 20n13) because she argues that Richman is “a voice of patriarchy who not only perpetuates the double standard for men and women but, indeed, portrays that system’s ideals in a manner that continues to be incomprehensible” (“Hannah Webster Foster” 13).

⁹ Ian Finseth says, “Although Foster’s text, in keeping with the requirements of sentimental fiction, ultimately champions the institution, it does provide space for a critique of matrimony by acknowledging, on a number of occasions, those unpleasant realities” (147). However, I argue that Foster’s depiction of marriage casts doubt on whether she “champions the institution” at all.

¹⁰ Interestingly, Ms Richman plays a prominent role in this novel, and while her words are relayed by other letter writers quite often, she only writes one letter – again as if marriage consumes and subsumes her voice, and it must be filtered through someone else.

¹¹ These women, Mrs. Richman in particular, are attempting to guide Eliza away from Sanford and toward someone they feel is more suitable. Eliza says, “I hope my friends will never again interpose in my concerns of that nature” (13). She says this early in the novel in reference to their encouragement of Reverend Boyer’s suit, yet its sentiment is applicable to all their advice and is interspersed throughout the novel. Eliza calls Mrs. Richman “prudish” (13) – as does Sanford (18). Eliza also fears having to act as an “avowed prude” because Mrs. Richman calls Sanford a “professed libertine” who is well-versed in the “arts of seduction” (20). Throughout the novel, prudence – a nominalized and connotatively weaker version of prude and prudish – is linked to mothers, marriage, and in Eliza’s mind, boredom.

¹² The characters in *The Power of Sympathy* discuss the effects of reading novels as it relates to the Whitman story, and the author adds his own footnote to the story that reveals his views of novel reading: “She was a great reader of novels and romances and, having imbibed her ideas of the characters of men from those fallacious sources, became vain and coquettish, and rejected several offers of marriage in expectation of receiving one more agreeable to her fanciful idea” (43n). These comments clearly show William Hill Brown’s belief that reading novels contributed to the downfall of Miss Whitman, the prototype for the seduced heroine in *The Power of Sympathy* and *The Coquette*. Based on the readings I have done for this study, William Hill Brown appears to be an exception.

¹³ Many critics have noted Rowson's transatlantic publications and argue that some of her works "privileges the European perspective" (Bartolomeo, Introduction 15). Critics of her time also called into question her loyalty to American values, and she felt obliged to attest to her devotion to the country by directly responding to the charge in the preface to *Trials of the Human Heart* that is reprinted in the Broadview Press edition of *Reuben and Rachel* (413-16). Since I am not making an argument about Rowson's oeuvre, their arguments do not affect my reading of *Charlotte Temple* and the rhetorical moves that I see in this novel. While some critics may question whether *Charlotte Temple* is an American novel, I suggest along with Cathy Davidson and others that it is American. Davidson focuses on the novel as depicting Charlotte as the "archetypal postcolonial heroine" (22) and without question refers to the novel throughout *Revolution* as an American novel, even while referring to Rowson as being only marginally American. For a more recent reading of the novel, Stephanie Foote in Samuels's *A Companion to American Fiction 1780-1865*, calls *Charlotte Temple* "the first enduring bestseller of the new republic" (103). Only Verhoeven and Shapiro appear to question its possible Americanness by putting quotation marks around the word when they call it an "early 'American' classic" (122).

¹⁴ Edward J. Piacentino mentions Francis W. Halsey's 1964 edition as stating that 104 editions have been published. Patricia Parker quotes R. W. G. Vail who claims to have documented 161 American editions and 9 foreign ones. Martin claims 200 editions. Obviously, no clear consensus exists on the number of editions, but enough evidence is available to make the claim that it was widely republished in the years since its initial publication. No consensus exists, either, among the critics on how many novels Susannah Rowson wrote. Martin claims eight, but she does not count *Mary; or The Test of Honour*, also titled *The Test of Honour, A Novel* (1789), and *The Inquisitor* (1793), both counted by Piacentino.

¹⁵ This reading is rather ironic given Mr. Temple's decision to disobey his parents and marry the elder Lucy, and his only punishment is financial, but Charlotte's parents choose to overlook this obstacle to get married and, presumably, they have a happy marriage. Juxtapose Mr. Temple's disobedience and subsequent minor punishment with Montraville's obedience to his father in the matter of marriage, yet Montraville is ultimately not happy in life.

¹⁶ The direct address is actually the narrator's, and not the author's, as so many critics presume, and we cannot presume that the narrator and author are the same.

¹⁷ Sanford fits Richards's definition of a rake being un-American: "Rakes love Europe and themselves, hate America and women; to take up with a rake, whether as friend or lover, is not only self-defeating, but also un-American" (242). Evidence from the novel bears out this statement because Sanford has to initially leave the country to find a wife who can support him, and he flees the country after Eliza dies, rather than looking toward America for a wife or as a sanctuary for his flight.

¹⁸ Edgar Huntly and Clithero admittedly have this problem also, as discussed in Chapter Three.

¹⁹ Other instances of words failing Charlotte include her attempts to address Montraville, but she cannot finish what she is trying to say (43). We also read that "Charlotte could not find an

opportunity or to offer a single word till the whole was finished, and then found her ideas so confused, that she knew not what to say” (46-47). Later the narrator tells us that “Charlotte [...] was so confused she could hardly speak” (76). In another instance, Charlotte cannot finish her request for help, for “charity” (103).

²⁰ *Ormond* has been variously labeled as gothic in the tradition of Ann Radcliffe, as sentimental much like Richardson, and as a novel of purpose in the custom of William Godwin. One critic who labels this novel as gothic states, “For the most part Brown has been regarded merely as a link – and a weak one at that – in the chain of Gothic romancers” (Clark 366). As attested to by several critics, *Ormond* has elements of the gothic, especially in its depictions of the buildings with their hidden areas that allow unnoticed eavesdropping, but the novel also employs numerous characteristics of the sentimental novel and its subgenre – the seduction novel. A more productive reading is to look at the way the novel challenges the sentimental tradition, which also attests to the futility of putting these novels in discrete categories that allow no freedom of movement.

²¹ Kristen Comment calls Martinette’s depiction a “symbol [of . . .] perverted womanhood” (58).

Chapter 5. Self- Reflexivity: Satire and Humor in Early American Novels

The previous chapters discussed those novels commonly classified as gothic or sentimental. This chapter focuses on the novels normally categorized as picaresque, particularly *The Algerine Captive* by Royall Tyler, *Female Quixotism* by Tabitha Tenney, and *Modern Chivalry* by Hugh Henry Brackenridge.¹ The three texts that are the focus of this chapter are satiric, and inherent in satire is a degree of self-reflexivity: “nearly every satirist betrays this self-consciousness to some degree, if only in mentioning literary antecedents or in adopting familiar forms” (Roth 403). While these texts may have other metafictional tendencies similar to that of the other novels in my study, the fact that they are satiric and parodic makes them self-reflexive. Many critics have noted the similarities among these texts, as they are variously classified as picaresque novels and compared to *Don Quixote* (1604). However, they have not been analyzed thoroughly for their humor as it relates to their American literary heritage. Individually, *The Algerine Captive* has also been classified and compared to a variety of works focusing on Algiers as the fearful other² and to various travel and captivity narratives. *Female Quixotism* is most often cited as an inferior version of the British *Female Quixote* (1752), and *Modern Chivalry* is generally viewed as an American *Don Quixote* with a strong political message. These novels are also attempting to make a statement about the state of American letters and various other aspects of culture in the new Republic through the use of overt and explicit humor.³ *The Algerine Captive* self-consciously⁴ calls for an American literature even in the face of discontent with the genre by elite leaders of the time. *Female Quixotism*, regardless of criticism to the contrary, is not making a statement against novel reading and a better comparison is to *The Coquette* (as a comic parody) rather than *Female Quixote* and what that comparison says about sentimental novels; and *Modern Chivalry* is also a comic parody but not an imitation of *Don Quixote* but

rather a parody of the various political and religious writings of the time and what that parody reveals about his view of American literature and culture. Together, these three authors find the efforts at creating and defining this American literature lacking. They are not opposed to the novel form but are instead poking fun at the feeble, uncertain attempts at creating this literature and are using humor and satire to make their point.

The Algerine Captive

Royall Tyler wrote and published in all literary genres but is most well known for his play, *The Contrast* (1787), and his novel, *The Algerine Captive*, written ten years later. These two works, along with his other works, were “[d]edicated to the rise of native literature, [and] Royall Tyler used patriotic themes and skillful characterizations in drama, fiction, poetry, and essays to encourage and record early American art and culture” (Crain *vii*). Many critics find humor in *The Contrast*. They point to Jonathan as a bumbling Yankee who ultimately becomes a stock character in American literature and to Manly, who may be admired for his numerous “manly” qualities but is mocked nonetheless for his pretensions. *The Algerine Captive* on the other hand has primarily been analyzed for its apparent political message.⁵ While virtually every critic discusses its ironical or satirical stance, when they discuss the humor in *The Algerine Captive*, they usually mention it as an incidental occurrence, and they spend very little if any time discussing the way the irony and satire are meant to be humorous in the same way as in *The Contrast*. In other words, the critics appear to view this work more seriously. However, according to Louis B. Wright, “From early in the history of American literature, satire has been one of the commonest forms of humorous writing. Americans have enjoyed poking fun at pretentiousness, pomposity, and vainglory. They have used satire as an instrument of reform and have sometimes laughed out of existence shortcomings in society that provoked the scorn and

ridicule of writers” (Wright 17). Edward Watts also attests to this use in *The Algerine Captive* when he says, “Tyler’s use of this presumably reliable figure [of the doctor] to write a broad satire of American manners is employed to dramatize the broader failure of Americans to explore alternatives to European modes of action, thought, and literary exchange” (25). In other words, American manners become a target of satire because of the “pretentiousness, pomposity, and vainglory” that Tyler sees because of Americans’ attempts to imitate the British.

Many critics have long acknowledged that Tyler has been concerned with America having its own literature: Underhill “calls for a declaration of literary independence, urging that American authors from now on write their own novels and that they write about American manners, *not* English ones” (Verhoeven and Shapiro 120) and “[t]his text [...] demonstrates Tyler’s disillusionment with republicanism’s continued veneration of British modes of thought and language” (Watts *Writing* 76). Tyler’s own writing in works such as *The Contrast* and *The Yankey in London* (1809) have a consistent theme of urging for an American culture by mocking European culture. This work is no exception. Wood argues that the novel is not as many critics argue a “gung-ho manifesto for American literature and a textbook lesson in American patriotism” (137) that frames itself in patriotic language in order to escape anti-sedition charges. I argue that what Wood perceives is not a sign of Tyler’s lack of desire to see an American literature but his perception that no literature has yet been produced that is worthy.

The Algerine Captive, which blends a captivity narrative with a travel narrative,⁶ purports to be the adventures of Updike Underhill. The first volume is an account of his ancestor, his attempts at various professions, and his travels, especially in the South prior to his captivity. The second volume provides the story of his captivity and descriptions of the various places and people that he meets during his captivity along with descriptions of the cultural milieu of Algiers,

including language, religion, and various aspects of life. Running through both volumes, but starting with the title and continuing with the dedication and preface, Royall Tyler pokes fun at Americans. He primarily does this by making certain promises to the reader that never get fulfilled and by exposing the hypocrisy that he sees everywhere. The title promises to tell us about his “life” and “adventures” as a captive, but most of the life story and adventures occur prior to his captivity and much of what he relates after his captivity is focused more on his observations of Algiers and Algerians than on any adventure he experiences. In the preface, he implies that he will write a “book of amusement” that portrays “New England manners” and “the manners of that ferocious race” (6-7). While he may portray the manners, he spends more time mocking them, and regardless of his promise, we never truly see a ferocious race, since his portrayal of them is mostly positive. I argue that Tyler’s self-consciously humorous and satirical treatment of broken promises and hypocrisy parallel the unfulfilled promise of the new country attempting to create its own literature and culture.

Much of the humor in the novel is overt, but at other times, Underhill⁷ uses hyperbole, understatement, and dry wit to evoke laughter. At times, he also uses black or sick humor that makes us uncomfortable but is intended to be humorous nonetheless.⁸ As many critics have pointed out, the satire and irony have specific targets – namely: religion, education, various professions, literature and culture and others. The humor creates an incongruity among these targets, so we get the impression, for example, that teaching and slavery are equally onerous. The biggest piece of humor, however, turns out to be that the joke is on us because the entire work is an extended joke. The humorous elements begin with the dedication to David Humphreys. The American audience would have been aware of the inadequacy of the American foreign policy toward the Barbary coast and the role that David Humphreys played in this policy. Yet Tyler has

a fictional character, Underhill, dedicate a fictional captivity narrative to this diplomat. The author acknowledges that no money will come his way for dedicating the book to Humphreys, as it might under the European patronage system, but he addresses him as “His Excellency,” which is more in line with European titling than American.⁹ This dedication appears to be not only poking fun at the European system of patronage but also the use of dedications in this manner. Humphreys’ “energies” may have helped “liberate hundreds of our fellow citizens” but as Caleb Crain points out, Humphreys’ primary role appeared to have been to send “each prisoner a hat, a suit of clothes, and monthly allowance” and to embarrass the Washington administration by his appeal for “charitable contributions” (n.p.). Joseph Donaldson Jr. and Joel Barlow are the ones ultimately credited with negotiating the 1796 deal that freed the Americans held until that time (Crain 228n1).

Following the dedication is a preface similar to prefaces in the other works within this study. While this preface was briefly mentioned in Chapter Two, several noteworthy discussions by critics compel a more thorough discussion of this preface prior to the analysis of the novel. Any discussion of the preface must begin by repeating that the preface and the dedication are both written by Updike Underhill – the fictional protagonist of the novel. While Tyler and Underhill may share some sensibilities, we cannot equate the two, so attempts to attribute those ideas solely to Tyler without acknowledging the role of the fictional author, narrator, and character are not providing a fair or complete rendering of this work. In the preface, Underhill mentions new novels being published just for amusement, whereas, prior to his departure, most rural people were reading confessional narratives or quasi-religious poetry.¹⁰ Upon Underhill’s return, not only does he see more novels for entertainment, he also finds them spreading to the peasantry. He believes this spread is possible in America because the new country has more

people who can read, and he says, “no sooner was a taste for amusing literature diffused than all orders of country life, with one accord, forsook the sober sermons and Practical Pieties of their fathers, for the gay stories and splendid impieties of the Traveller and the Novelist” (6). Some critics read this preface as an indictment against novels; I read it in a more positive light. When Dolly and Jonathan were reading the earlier literature, they were weeping together, but after amusing themselves with a gothic, Underhill appears to suggest that they were sleeping together, and he does not appear to posit this change as negative. He also states that the “frivolous” literature was actually “pleasing” to him. He only regrets that they were not of American origin – much like the artifacts in the Natural History museum that he visits early in the novel (60). In fact novels can present “the vices of the parent country” and “an erroneous idea of the world, in which she is to live. [The English novel] paints the manners, customs, and habits of a strange country” (6). Ostensibly then, he should be writing a book that points to the “manners, customs, and habits” of America since that is his primary concern. Watts and Michael T. Gilmore agree with this assessment: “The prefatory materials [...] suggest Tyler’s belief in the incapacity of European techniques to express American subjects” (Watts *Writing* 79) and “[Tyler’s] preface condemns the national craving for English fictions” (Gilmore 637). Watts calls the preface “Tyler’s joke” (*Writing* 82), and I agree. The entire preface sets us up to read the novel in the same manner as other novels of the time period but ultimately we discover – only at the end – that the joke is on us because the novel does nothing that we expect.

With one adventure after another in Volume I, Tyler manages to satirize every aspect of the new American life. The novel begins with a discussion of his ancestor, Capt. Underhill,¹¹ who was charged with adultery because he looked at a woman who appeared “at the same lecture with a pair of wanton open worked gloves, slit at the thumbs and fingers” (15). Some critics

point to this story as poking fun at the Puritanical history of the country. I see the humor not only in the way in which Underhill reports the story of his ancestor but also in the understated way he reports the judicial proceedings. His ancestor was convicted not on a Puritanical law but a law that was in someone's mind but was not a law yet (18). At this point, he tells us that only with great "reluctance" (18) does he publish the letter because he does not want a "few dark spots of zeal" to overshadow all the goodness of the new country. This comment becomes ironic (and somewhat amusing) as we continue reading and begin to realize that he generally does not keep his promises, yet he publishes this letter despite his reluctance. This Puritanical – and hypocritical – justice must be compared to the Algerine system with which he is "delighted," especially when compared to the slow judicial system in the United States. He believes we might want to emulate the Algerine "excellent display of summary justice" (189), and again the scene is humorous because of the dry wit in which he observes that "obstinate" United States citizens seem to believe that our system of justice prevents others "from capriciously invading the rights of the citizens" (190). This example is one of many in which the comparison of America to Algiers does not favor the Americans and provides another means by which Tyler can mock an American system that does not fulfill its promise.

His mockery is also directed toward religion. When he is traveling in the South, he attends a church in which attendance is primarily for the horse races afterwards because the service itself is described as "hum drum an amusement" (79). When the parson arrives, he enters the scene whipping his negro and "accompanying every stroke, with suitable language" (80), in what appears to be an attempt at physical humor and at undermining the hypocritical preacher, who begins to preach on sins of the tongue and the Fourth Commandment,¹² saying without irony that he will keep his "tongue as it were with a bridle" (80). Underhill also asks the reader

that “whenever he meets with quotations of speeches, in the above scenes, excepting those during divine service, that he will please, that is, if his habits of life will permit, to interlard those quotations with about as many oaths, as they contain monosyllables [sic].” By adding curse words to the above, the reader “may rest assured, that it will render the scene abundantly more natural” (81). He says that he does not add them himself because he does not “swear profanely” but that without those “palatable expletives” most readers “would esteem [the scene] as tasteless and vapid” (81). While he may insist that the curse words should not be inserted into the “divine service,” the earlier scene of the parson using “suitable language” makes the reader realize this entire scene points out the hypocrisy of a preacher using this type of language and then preaching against sins of the tongue. In addition, this church scene and sermon contrasts with the more “dignified” version presented in Volume II (191-93), and again, the incongruity is striking, allowing Tyler to mock another aspect of American culture.

In addition to satirizing justice and religion, he also satirizes the medical profession. John Engell views the scene in Ch IX as non-satiric, non-ironic, and see the preceptor as being one of three totally good and totally free characters,¹³ but the description of the blind young man who can see after surgery is couched in comical terms. Three times, he “pass[es] his eyes” around (41), and Underhill mentions the preceptor as “restor[ing] life and usefulness” to this young man (42), who was, tellingly, quite lively and useful before his operation, so I am not convinced that we are supposed to view this scene any differently from all the other satiric ones. He follows this chapter with another chapter that provides further evidence of a blind person being more useful than two sighted people. Additionally, his non-ironic, non-satiric, non-funny description of the doctor appears to be motivated only by the fact that “it is possible that some friend of his may peruse this work,” and he believes he must show him a “tribute of gratitude” (57). Readers might

also laugh at his supposedly naïve, innocent lecture on abortion potions that he provides to a young girl who is presented to be a virgin. One of the most comical episodes is the one in which all the doctors arrive to deal with a trauma patient, and they end up fighting, literally “fisty cuffs” (73) because they cannot agree on the proper treatment. Ultimately, the local veterinarian treats and cures the injured man with “a dose of urine and molasses” (73). This scene provides another example to satirize an American profession, which provides additional focus on Tyler’s view that America is not living up to its promised glory.

The type of education viewed as valuable and the profession of education are also satirized and presented in comical terms. Updike tells us that “gentlemen considered the classics the source of all valuable knowledge” (26), but his dad is later told that this type of education is good for nothing except preparing him for college (27). When Underhill is asked to read out loud as a testament to his learning, he “recited as loud as [he] could speak, without regard to emphasis or stops” (24), yet the reading is widely admired as a grand display of learning because sheer volume and exuberance overshadow any interest or value of the content. His tutor knows the classics but did not know English grammar, and from Underhill’s memorized recitation of Homer, the clergyman determines that Underhill is qualified to become a general, congressman, or a clergyman.¹⁴ He ultimately works on his father’s farm, but all he could do with his Greek was give “Greek names to all [the] farming tools; and [cheer] the cattle with hexameter verse” (29).¹⁵ Later, following instructions from Virgil, he kills a cow in order to raise bees, so his father decides he “should renew [his] career of learning” (29) rather than continue working on the farm. He becomes a teacher partially because he likes “hearing how [his] title [Master Underhill]” sounds (30), and he even practices saying it out loud. When he begins thinking of the way he will manage his classroom, these thoughts are “less pleasing, but more rational” (30). Of

course, the reality of his time as a schoolmaster is almost a Three Stooges comedy, which further emphasizes his point that much of American culture is lacking in its attempts at being independent and being worthwhile.

Underhill satirizes the state of American literature and culture during this time, which is his ultimate target. At one point in his travels, he is disheartened and disgusted to discover that the Natural History museum at Harvard – the epitome of great, classical learning – has no worthy artifacts from the new country except “an overgrown gourd shell,” “shavings of the cannon,” “a stuffed wild duck,” “fungus of a turnip,” and “a miniature birch canoe” (60). These feeble attempts at stocking a museum reflect the other feeble attempts at creating an American culture that Tyler has been targeting. Later in the novel while he is in captivity, he is allowed to travel to Medina, and during the trip the group stops because a saint arrives. Underhill’s ensuing comments encourage the reader to recall the trip to the museum and its limited American artifacts: “I had never seen a saint, being bred, in a land, where even the relics of these holy men are not preserved, for I believe all New England cannot produce so much as a saint’s rotten tooth or toe nail” (212). This satire against culture is also evident in his interaction with a “learned lady” (53) who pretends to read all his books in order to make a favorable impression upon him. Her pretension, of course, is another example of hypocrisy. American culture is further mocked when he thinks he favorably impresses a young woman with a Greek recitation and composes an ode to her, which includes a description that refers to her as “ox-eyed” (46).¹⁶ The ode actually incites one young gentleman (in very poor English) to challenge Underhill to a duel. Underhill appears initially not to realize that he is being challenged to a duel, and he answers that “with pleasure” he will “wait upon the gentleman” (48). After someone else explains that it was a politely requested challenge to a duel, Underhill says, “Lord deliver me from such politeness. It

seems to me, by your account of things, that the principal difference between a man of honour, and a vulgar murderer, is that the latter will kill you in a rage, while the former will write you complaisant letters, and smile in your face, and bow gracefully, while he cuts your throat” (49) – another acknowledgement of hypocrisy. This scene exemplifies many of the comic scenes throughout the novel that others read as ironic and satiric, but they do not focus on the point of the humor and the way hypocrisy is highlighted. Yes, elements of irony and satire are present, but just as today where the innocent protagonist who fumbles his way through (mis)adventures provides a stock character in popular movies, Underhill appears to blunder his way through his quest, and I find no evidence to suggest that this scene would not be viewed as comedic in 1797. Comments like these, which I find funny, also lead me to suggest that he is not the bumbling, naïve narrator that he seems to imply in other scenes but often a very astute observer of human nature with an acerbic dry wit.

The humor sets up the reader to see ironic juxtapositions that reveal hidden prejudice. For example, when he is trying to find a town in which to practice medicine, someone suggests that he might have to teach during the winter but “at the bare mention of a school, [he] fled the town abruptly” (63). Later during his travels in the South, he provides an unflattering portrait of the area and its people. Because he is broke, he almost contemplates teaching but decides he would “have preferred laboring, with the slaves on their plantations, than sustaining the slavery and contempt of a school” (83). This comment is the third time that he equates school teaching with slavery, which means that when he discusses slavery in terms such as “infamous, cruel, commerce,” “execrable traffic,” or “horror” (94-95) during his initial overseas journey, we are more apt to focus on the fact that he devotes more space to detailing the various stops than to description of the inhumanity of the slave trade.¹⁷ We also see that his thoughts about their poor

treatment only make him “blush” (95) – not the grand indictment of slavery that many critics attribute to him. He also inspects the slaves as part of his duty as the ship surgeon, and the details that he provides seem almost titillating and gratuitous, especially in light of no real prior context – much like the seduction scenes in seduction novels. This scene also reveals that the narrator, who is observant and witty at times, is not altogether different from the other hypocritical characters that he exposes.

Besides setting up an incongruity to highlight aspects of American culture that he suggests is not fit for the new country, the humor also underscores the fact that the narrator makes numerous promises throughout the novel that he rarely fulfills, which parallels the unfulfilled promises of the new republic. Many of his arguments or summaries at the beginning of each chapter are a way for Tyler to break his promises, because in several of them he says that he will discuss something but does not or vice versa. For example, in Chapter XVI, he says that he “maketh no Remarks” (59), but the chapter is still there with his remarks. Chapter XXVI starts out with a one-word summary, yet in the first paragraph he says, “Here a field of boundless remark opened itself to me” (85) – yet the chapter and the opening summary is very short, not “boundless.” His discussion of his birth, which is reminiscent of *Tristram Shandy*’s discussion, foreshadows his “suffering, many years as a slave, among barbarians, more cruel than the monsters of our own woods” (23). Of course, this “suffering” never really comes to fruition because we never get a sense that his years as a slave “among barbarians” are that onerous. In fact, he is able to achieve professional success as a doctor only while in captivity. In another instance, he says he will return to the narrative but does not (194). Instead, he delves into a discussion of Jews in Algerine society, which does not fit with his stated purpose in the preface. At another point he says, “I shall mention a little incident, which happened about this time, as it

contains a lesson, valuable to the reader, if he has penetration enough to discover it, and candour enough to apply it to himself” (55-56).¹⁸ In this minor incident, he actually fulfills his promise of mentioning “a little incident,” but he is also poking fun at the reader and at authors who address readers in such a manner. The incident in question is one in which he discovers money that had been left in a Bible by his mother, a Bible that he had not opened in almost two years. When he finally opens the Bible and discovers the money, he pledges to read the Bible every night – a pledge that he keeps for about two weeks. He later promises to dedicate his life “to preaching against this detestable commerce” (106) of slavery, but the reader may well remember the last time he promised to do something forever and only lasted two weeks. He also never really mentions this promise again. The only time he keeps a promise is the time that he says he will “lay before my readers” (153) a description of Algiers and its people and spends the next few chapters doing so. He admits the history is “dry” and “will probably be passed over by those, who read for mere amusement, but the intelligent reader will, in this concise memoir, trace the leading principles of this despotic government” (161). However, he never truly depicts the despotism: rather, he demonstrates the way other countries, including Britain and America, have misused the country for their own profit. These examples all parallel the broken promises of this new country and its feeble attempts at creating its own culture as separate from the British.

Much of the humor in this novel still needs to be decoded or analyzed against the cultural context of the time in which it was written, the parallels between the two volumes are too pervasive for us not to account for them together. While I am mostly in agreement with Davidson’s assessment of Volume I, we diverge completely when considering her reading of Volume II. She reads Volume II as a “captivity tale with a powerful political message” (*Revolution* 299) – taking literally Underhill’s accounts. She acknowledges, however, the

subversion in a story, which has “more similarities between Tyler’s Algiers and America than most Americans in the 1790s would have cared to admit” (*Revolution* 302). She, as do so many others, reads the final comments in Volume II literally and believes that Underhill has learned great lessons in his years of captivity. Gilmore’s analysis parallels Davidson’s when he says, “the freewheeling satire of the first volume yields to the moralizing and factual exposition of the second” (637). While the almost-slap-stick type of humor evident in Volume I is lessened to a degree in Volume II, Volume II should not be read as the serious, dogmatic captivity tale that many critics see. If Volume II is a “replaying” of Volume I “only on foreign soil” (Wood 111), and since Volume I attempts to be rollicking funny, I suggest that we should read Volume II in a similar manner or at least not with the seriousness that many critics do. By reading the two volumes as mirrors, as Wood does, we begin to see what America is lacking and what Tyler is lamenting about the state of American culture. Wood argues that “[w]here literary genre is concerned, *The Algerine Captive* is duplicitous: it is a Barbary fiction that masquerades as a factual account of Barbary captivity. Where ideology is concerned, *The Algerine Captive* is similarly double-tongued: it is a political critique of the United States that masquerades as a patriotic eulogy” (Wood 122). Critics see the “duplicitous” nature because Tyler has created the novel to be a joke. Then again, maybe Tyler has set us up to read it this way and that is also part of the point – the joke is the way he guides us to read the novel but the joke is also on us for falling into his trap and reading it at every turn the way he guides us to.

Those critics who favor a reading that glorifies America point to the following quote as embodying the theme: “If a man desirous to know how he loves his country, let him go far from home; if to know how he loves his countrymen, let him be with them in misery in a strange land” (198). Two problems arise with this reading. First, he is not with his other countrymen.

Secondly, he states that he cannot help them avoid their fate; therefore, he takes an oath not to speak to them. At one point, however, he is “almost tempted to break it” (199), an ironic (and amusing) acknowledgement from someone who freely breaks other promises. Davidson ultimately views the novel as the literal freeing of Underhill’s negative assumptions about his country by saying that the negative aspects of America that he encounters in Volume I are outweighed by the “despotism of Algiers and the hateful institution of slavery” (*Revolution* 284). But we never truly get a sense of the despotism nor does he ever do anything about slavery that he promises to in several instances. Upon his release and return to the United States, he tells us what he plans to do now that he is free, but again the contradictions throughout the novel force us to reexamine these promises more closely. Like the promise to faithfully read his Bible that only lasts two weeks and the promise to eradicate slavery that never gets mentioned again, this novel never fulfills any of its promises. What we realize by the time that we get to the end of the novel is that Tyler is not making a statement about an upstanding federal citizen or the desire to actively end slavery but rather he is spoofing all the formulaic conventions of novels and so-called historical captivity and travel narratives.

Female Quixotism

Female Quixotism by Tabitha Tenney is very seldom discussed by critics without them mentioning that the novel is an inferior version of the British novel, *Female Quixote* by Charlotte Lennox¹⁹ on which most critics claim it is based.²⁰ Criticism of Tenney’s novel tends to parallel Henri Petter’s analysis, in which he says *Female Quixotism* warns of “the possible serious consequences of immoderate novel-reading” (38). A portion of the critics’ evidence rests on the preface of the novel (which they take literally) in which the stated purpose is for readers to be able to “avoid the disgraces and disasters that rendered [Dorcasina] despicable and miserable”

(3). For example, Gilmore argues that *Female Quixotism* was “a novel satirizing the harmful consequences of novel reading; like many another fiction writer, she exempted her own work from the indictment of the genre and pleaded a socially useful purpose” (624). Stephen Carl Arch is also insistent that Tenney “is attempting to prevent us from reading the novel as anything but a warning against novel/romance reading” (186). Jean Nienkamp and Andrea Collins reinforce reading *Female Quixotism* as a cautionary tale by thoroughly reviewing the reasons for the disapproval of fiction and Tenney’s answer to those attacks.²¹

Many critics add to Petter’s assessment by arguing that this satire on novel reading has as its purpose some type of social or political critique. They agree that even if Tenney’s point was not about the dangers of novel reading, the novel at least satirizes reading novels of the type Dorcasina favors. Recent critics Nienkamp and Collins view this novel as a charge against patriarchy – in this case, the patriarchal oppression of England over America, and relate Dorcasina’s adventures to the new country: “the novel advocates a morally based isolationism to protect America from corrupting European influences” (xix). The argument is similar to the one I make about Royal Tyler’s lamenting England’s corrupting influence.²² In fact, many of the allusions in the novel are to English works, and these works are rendered parodically.²³ Other critics also read the novel as a social critique. Davidson reads the novel “as a critique of the American educational system” (“Tenney” 271) and “as a more subtle how-not-to-read-a-novel novel” (*Revolution* 275). Cynthia J. Miecznikowski expands this argument into a reading that suggests the novel is a “criticism of women’s roles” (36) and “warns less against the ‘dangers of reading’ than against the dangers of reading uncritically” (40), which also parallel Davidson’s argument.²⁴

These political, cultural, and social readings of the novel are often persuasive, but again, any discussion that does not include a thorough analysis of the humor and the resultant self-reflexivity as a way for this novel to laugh at itself is an incomplete rendering of the work. Lawrence Buell calls the novel “a reflexively self-ironic meditation on the legitimacy of engaging in the act in which the text is engaging: the adaptation of fictive models to the American scene” (87). As with the other narrators discussed in my study, the compiler addresses the reader directly on several occasions, which accounts for some of the self-reflexive moments. Other evidence of self-reflexivity can be found in the author’s focus on humor and over-the-top satire that creates a parody, which as Hutcheon discusses, is inherently self-reflexive. As with *The Algerine Captive*, virtually every critic recognizes *Female Quixotism*’s satirical elements and humor, but this recognition usually comes in the form of a single comment with no thorough analysis of this aspect of the novel. For example, Davidson calls the novel a “forerunner of a comic tradition” and says that it runs from “free-spirited humor to biting satire” (“Tabitha Gilman Tenney” 271, 272). Nienkamp and Collins describe the novel as an “absurd comedy” (xvii) with “farcical” (xxi) and “slapdash” humor (xxiii).²⁵

The satire and humor begins in the preface,²⁶ which was discussed at length in Chapter Two. The compiler announces who the intended audience is for the novel: “To all Columbian Young ladies Who read Novels and Romances” and then describes the novel as telling the “whole history” of real Dorcas and her “adventure” (3). According to the compiler, the purpose of publishing the novel was “for the advantage of the younger part of her sex” and then says that the work is “singular and extraordinary” (3).²⁷ However, in order to convince the reader of the truth of this novel, the compiler suggests that a comparison to the “authentic history” (3) of Don Quixote will erase any “doubt” that the reader may have. We are prepared not for a truthful

story, but instead for satire, parody, and some humor. In a discussion of the preface, Petter argues that

The novels of the day were often declared by their authors to be based on truth. Mrs. Tenney did not miss her opportunity of making fun of the pretense. [...]. Mrs. Tenney testified to the authenticity of her tale only by referring to a fictional precedent, the authority of *Don Quixote*. In other words, her book is as little a report from life as the writings of other authors who rely patently on literary models or on pure inventions” (47).

While many critics take these prefaces literally and argue – as did the critics of the authors’ time – that the authors used the prefaces defensively as a means of making their own novel more acceptable, Petter recognizes the mockery and irony of Tenney comparing her “truth” to a fictional work. However, these comments were not the focus of Petter’s argument and were not further analyzed. Only Miecznikowski comments on this ironic portion of the preface by saying, “Tenney undermines her implied author’s credibility in his commitment to the veracity of *Don Quixote*” (37). From this point, we realize that the compiler is also the target of Tenney’s humor and satire.

Obviously much of the comedy centers around Dorcasina either as the instigator of the comedic moments or as the cause for other character to have their moments. Several of the funny scenes involve physical humor such as carriages overturning and people falling all over themselves, hiding under beds, and crawling out window. In a couple of scenes Dorcasina gets attacked – once by a group of kids who are trying to have fun and again by her second suitor who is disguised as a scorned woman. The fight that ensues with the disguised woman, Dorcasina, and Betty is a bodice-ripper, similar to scenes that were considered standard fare for sentimental novels, but not in the caricatured fashion presented here. Dorcasina’s second suitor, named Philander, is a “native of Connecticut, that hot-bed of American genius” and described as a “wag” (104).²⁸ He also uses romantic language to woo Dorcasina, but not so much for her money

but more as a joke. As another “diversion” (118), Philander convinces a “foppish” barber (117) that though unknown to him, Dorcasina is in love with the barber. He sets up a meeting, but the barber does not live up to Dorcasina’s romantic expectations set up by Philander’s letters. The barber tries to kiss her, and another fight follows with the barber getting tied up by Betty and Hannah, while Philander watches with “relish” (122). Philander, of course, is not done and cooks up another funny adventure involving cross-dressing and disguise and a fake kidnapping scene, which Dorcasina calls “charmingly romantic” (131) even though she is not aware it is fake. One of the funniest scenes in the novel is when she goes horseback riding with John and loses her hat and wig that end up as hog fodder (256-57), which seems almost a distortion of the Lady Godiva of legend. The wig was later found by boys and used for target practice until it was returned to Dorcasina for a reward where it “underwent anew all the tortures of papering, pinching, boiling, and baking” but it was never really presentable again (259). Through all the comedic episodes, we are constantly reminded of her advancing age. Each description of her becomes more and more of a caricature of a romantic heroine, leading to the point where one young man believes she is a witch (288-89). This caricatured portrayal of the sentimental heroine is one of the ways that this novel laughs at itself and in turn at other sentimental novels.

Betty also provides much of the comedy in the novel. Following her first unseemly suitor fiasco, Dorcasina wants to reenact their first meeting, so she has Betty dress up in Mr. Sheldon’s clothes and act as O’ Connor. The playacting is first interrupted by Dorcasina who is not impressed with Betty’s reenactment and again by the other servants who believe someone has stolen Mr. Sheldon’s clothes, and they begin laughing upon discovering who it is. Betty refuses to continue, and instead climbs up a tree, remaining there after Dorcasina leaves and comes out only when she falls out. She scares a group of girls underneath the tree, which provides its own

humorous moment. She then has another comedic moment on the way home when she imagines a small cat is a ghost the “size of a horse” coming to get her (97-103). As Dorcasina tries to reassure Betty that ghosts do not exist, she tells Betty that the “stories are fabricated” (103) – without recognizing the irony or humor since she is a firm believer in the romances she reads. In another episode, Dorcasina allows another suitor to borrow her deceased father’s bedroom and clothes, but Betty was not aware. Again, Betty imagines ghosts and turns to Scipio for help. Scipio locks John Brown, the suitor, into the room. Another slapstick scene ensues with John going out the window, people screaming, a person fainting, and lights going out. Through it all is “Scipio grinning and rejoicing” (245), and even “Dorcasina could scarcely refrain from laughter” (245), which tell the readers that they likewise should be laughing.

When they are not instigating any of the events, on the sidelines are Harriot and Scipio who appear to be the gauge that the readers draw on to know when laughter is appropriate. At times Harriot does not say anything “for fear of laughing” (177), and at other times, she “burst[s] into a laugh” (179). On at least two occasions, Harriot is credited with “good humour” (199, 202). Scipio is another character who enjoys having fun and playing pranks, and he is referred to as an “African wag” (211). Like Harriot, he is also described as being full of “merry humour” (208). He plays tricks on people, especially Betty, similar to those that Philander plays on Dorcasina. He tells Betty that Mr. Cumberland, a real suitor of Dorcasina’s, is actually there to court her, which Betty believes because “her ideas were now as wild and extravagant as ever those of her mistress had been” (209). Ironically, she is supposed to be one of the monitors who keeps Dorcasina out of trouble. After this affair is revealed, Harriot is “highly entertained and diverted” (214) and “tittered” (216), and even “Mr. Sheldon, in his heart, felt more disposed to laugh than to be angry” (217). During another episode of physical humor, Dorcasina convinces

John, another suitor, to escort her down stairs. They fall to the bottom in a heap just as Harriot enters, and the scene is described as “ridiculous” (235). Harriot later relays the scene to her mother in a “lively and humorous manner” (236). Similar to the scenes about Betty, these instances of comedy and laughter let the readers know that laughter is the appropriate reaction.

When Harriot realizes that her mother’s entreaties will not keep Dorcasina from John, she comes up with a scheme to dress as a man “to pretend to be violently in love with [Dorcasina]” and “to endeavor to disengage her affections from Brown” (251), and she means the violence literally. Harriot is “delighted” with this scheme and feels it would provide her with much “amusement” (251). Harriot also says she will only tell her beau Captain Barry if the “humour takes [her]” in that direction, and if he does not find it humorous, then she will laugh at him but if he finds it funny, then she will “tell him he is a man after [her] own heart” (252). Ironically, Harriot talks more like a romance novel than any other suitor – yet, supposedly, she has never read a romance novel. This manner of talking suits Dorcasina even if she is “fixed” on John Brown (263) but having two rivals “was so pleasing and so romantic, that she could hardly contain her satisfaction” (263). When Harriot runs off John Brown with a sword, Scipio “admire[s] Miss Stanly’s spirit and humour” (266), and Harriot quite relishes her role as conquering suitor. Scipio and Harriot also entertain themselves with scaring John Brown with fake ghosts. Harriot ultimately fails, so all of Dorcasina’s friends concoct a scheme to kidnap her away from John Brown in the name of Montague, Harriot’s disguise, which results in further physical adventures up to the very end to include one final suitor while she is supposedly safe in captivity. Again, these scenes are a way for Tenney to mock bad exemplars of the sentimental tradition by laughing at the caricatured portrayal of these elements in her novel.

Another way to view this novel is to compare Tenney's novel to Lennox's and this analysis can be fruitful, but it also renders an incomplete picture. In a comparison to Lennox's novel, Tenney's novel does something very similar to the other novels in my study: it challenges the sentimental tradition. While Dorcas proclaims at the end of *Female Quixotism* that she will continue to read novels, in *Female Quixote*, the tradition (i.e. British) is upheld because the hero reforms the bad reader, Arabella, who gives up novel reading.²⁹ In *Female Quixotism*, Tenney modifies this tradition by having no true "hero" who reforms Dorcasina and by having her not repent nor stop her novel reading. Comparing these two novels, while productive, provides an incomplete reading because it does not fully address the primary differences between the two main characters, nor does it satisfactorily deal with the differences in the ending – both of which are different because of the humor. Arabella is never rendered as pathetic as Dorcasina, and Arabella's adventures also never approach the absurdity of Dorcasina's as Neinkamp and Collins point out: "The contrived nature of the abduction scenes in *Female Quixotism* reduces to an absurdity the abductions" in its English counterparts (xxi). Critics, then, who view this novel as an inferior version of Lennox's or who solely focus on the idea that the novel exposes the dangers of novel reading, fall into the same trap that Tenney appears to be denouncing: "*Female Quixotism* asks to be read as an allegory of reading. The novel insists that the 'fall into fiction' is as inevitable as the nearest diversion; and it insists that fiction is as ineffectual as its opposite, truth (or reason), in curing humanity of maniacal impulses" (Arch 198). I agree readers fall into fiction, but as in my reading of Royal Tyler – the joke is on us if we read *Female Quixotism* without recognizing the mockery she is making of the sentimental tradition as it is developing in the new country.

While modifying the British tradition through the reworking of her quixotic novel and character, Tenney has also created a comic parody – a satire that points its “formidable wit” (Gilmore 635) at the conventions of sentimental novels in general and *The Coquette* in particular.³⁰ The similarities are enough to warrant this comparison, but it also allows me to make the argument that Tenney’s novel is more about writing and reading and a commentary on the current state of American literature than an attempt to side with novel detractors. Like the other novels in my study, the focus on writing and reading is explicit throughout. Besides the obvious references to novels and novel reading, the text mentions numerous other writings also. The novel also includes numerous letters, references to letters, or references to letters that need to be written.

Because it is a parody of sentimental fiction in general and *The Coquette* in particular, I argue that the novel is also making fun of these early attempts by American authors to create a unique tradition. Miecznikowski argues that *Female Quixotism* is a parody of the romance:

Working within a form that is not highly regarded in order to re-form it, Tenney’s novel parodies the romance by calling attention to its aesthetic norms and marking the difference between her novel and its implied text, or texts. By deviating from its norms, *Female Quixotism* dispels the mythical truth of the romance which its authors claimed, its readers invested in, and its critics repudiated. (35)

This parody, according to Miecznikowski,

allowed [Tenney] to satirize both contemporary criticism of the novel—the prevailing, misconceived attitudes toward fiction that her ‘real’ and ‘implied’ readers knew too well—and the conventions of the genre from which these criticisms derived. As Davidson has suggested, the novel is best read as an ‘allegory of reading,’ a phrase which implies its self-reflexive, intratextual elements and parodic inversions. (35)

What Miecznikowski never does, however, is provide a reading of this novel beside any of the romances about which she is arguing. When read alongside *The Coquette*, we see the deviations and the mockery to which Miecznikowski is referring.

As the novel opens, we are introduced to Dorcas who has been raised solely by her father since she was a young child. We learn about her reading habits, which the compiler does not present in a positive manner. Ironically, her father enjoys the same books but is not affected by them in the same way. When she is eighteen, Dorcas changes her name to Dorcasina because she believes it is more fitting of a romantic heroine. Two years later, she is introduced to a young man who suggests that they marry. She turns him down because his letter to her is not what she had been led to expect from reading her romances. This suitor, as it turns out, is her most realistic chance at getting married. Her adventures in absurdity begin several years later when she is 34. She is wooed by various men – sometimes intentionally, sometimes not – but they always have ulterior motives. Most of them are after her money and even resort to kidnapping, but some of the suitors are just out for a joke. Only at the end of the novel are her eyes opened to her true and pathetic self, but even at the end, she remains essentially unchanged from the beginning and will continue to read novels that are purely for amusement.

The heroines in sentimental novels are mocked on several levels in this novel, particularly in comparison to *The Coquette*. On a general level, the description of Dorcasina is anything but the image of a romantic heroine. If anything, the description of her is more in keeping with Shakespeare's sonnet to his mistress or Underhill's "ox-eyed" girl. The compiler first explains the way she should be described: "elegant form, delicately turned limbs, auburn hair, alabaster skin [...] with which almost all our heroines of romance are indiscriminately decorated" (5). However, the reality is that "she possessed few of these beauties, in any great degree"; instead, she is described as having a "middling stature," "dark" complexion, "rough" skin, with "features remarkable neither for beauty nor deformity" (5). Of course, the later descriptions when she is older are even less flattering: "her skin was sallow and full of wrinkles.

Her front teeth were all gone, and her hair was quite white. In short she looked older than many women of sixty” (234). The mockery of the romantic heroine continues and is strengthened through the number of times Betty, her servant, and Violet, an African-American love interest of Dorcasina’s “negro” servant, Scipio (52), successfully stand in for her and assume the role of the heroine or even as the love interest in scene recreations. At one point, Violet is even described as having a bit of the “coquette” in her (53). In another scene, one of Dorcasina’s future suitors mistakes a prostitute for her, and the prostitute is described more like a romantic heroine than Dorcasina ever is (22), which only intensifies the mockery of the romantic heroine. At another point, Dorcasina finds herself “with her snowy arms, [around...] Scipio’s ebony neck” (59), further satirizing the idea of her as a romantic heroine.

While the plot is the focus of picaresque novels and this novel has the expected tell-tale adventures, the similarity between characters, albeit skewed, is more comparable to Eliza in *The Coquette* than to Arabella in *Female Quixote*. On a more specific level, Dorcasina and Eliza have several common traits, but they are so distorted in *Female Quixotism* as to render them parodic and very laughable. Dorcasina views herself (and others) as characters in the story of her life that is sure to be a romantic adventure resembling her novels. Her idea of what is pleasing to her comes straight out of a sentimental novel, as she mentions several times, and is a fact of which her readers would have been aware. Like Eliza, Dorcasina discusses things as being to her taste. The difference is that Eliza wants a person to suit her fancy and taste, and Dorcasina wants a “plot” to suit her taste (7), because instead of fantasizing about what type of person she wishes Lysander was, she mulls through various circumstances under which she wishes they would be meeting: “She wished that, in passing by, his carriage had broken down, and he been brought in wounded; or [...] that her horse being unruly, he had arrived just in time to save her from falling;

or, [...] some resolute fellow [...] had carried her off by force to marry her, and that Lysander had rescued her by his gallantry” (7). However, she contents herself with the thought that “if, at their first interview, he beheld her with raptures of delight; and of this she entertained not a shadow of doubt” (7), then she would be happy. The plots and adventures that she dreams about actually occur in some fashion or another, but the end never occurs as she envisions because she is never “saved” by a gallant hero.

The two characters have other similarities as well. They are both nearly the same age. The beginning of Dorcasina’s (mis)adventures occur at 34, which makes her about the same age as Eliza, whose age already makes her almost a caricature of a romantic, sentimental heroine. More significantly, however, in *The Coquette*, Eliza says that she is “undone” (105) and eventually dies, and Dorcasina says, “I am ruined and undone” (91). The humorous part about this comment is that it comes at the end of her first adventure and comes not because O’Connor actually succeeds in seducing her but because her father ran him out of town, and she goes on to have several more adventures with more unsuitable men cast as the romantic hero.³¹ Both Eliza and Dorcasina have monitors who function much like a Greek chorus. Eliza’s chorus members are the republican women who attempt to keep Eliza from getting involved with Sanford, as has been previously discussed. Dorcasina’s monitors are primarily Betty and Harriett, who actively encourage and participate in her delusions rather than provide help and protection. They play the roles she asks them to, and some she does not. They don disguises and masquerade as suitors that render their “help” laughable and definitely suspect. Similar to Eliza, Dorcasina rejects their advice when it does not fit into her delusions. Some critics also suggest that sentimental novels are about the failure of parental supervision. If these novels are about the failure of, but need for, filial supervision, then what do we make of this novel where supervision is ever present – yet it

does not stop the madness? Dorcasina scrupulously abides all filial requests, yet she still finds herself in these predicaments.

Like *The Coquette*, numerous references are made in *Female Quixotism* to the appearance of things rather than the reality, which highlights the fictionality of the text, such as “appeared much offended” (22), “pretended to be greatly affected” (23), and numerous other instances.³² Even her name is a fiction, since she changed it herself. *Female Quixotism* also emphasizes this issue through its numerous scenes of masquerades, disguises, and mistaken identity in some very telling and hilarious scenes. In addition, her suitors are all imposters or fakes except for Lysander at the beginning. As Bryce Traister points out, references to the word art and artifice are made numerous times, which also emphasizes the fictionality (28n30).³³

One of the telling similarities between *Female Quixotism* and *The Coquette* is in the marriage role-model and in unrewarded virtue. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, the Richmon marriage does not appear to be the enviable marriage that many critics claim. We have a similar situation in the Stanly/Barry marriage in this novel. At the end of the novel, when Dorcasina realizes what a dupe she has been, she tells Harriot that she realizes she has been wrong about marriage. Dorcasina says, “I imagined that, in a happy union, all was transport, joy, and felicity; but in you I find a demonstration that the most agreeable connection is not unattended with cares and anxieties” (320). In response, Harriot tells her that Barry is a good husband, “[y]et, strange to tell, I have suffered more than I ever did before, in the whole course of my life. The first shock after my marriage, was from losing my dear mama, [...]. I then suffered severely in bringing into the world a son. [...]. But, alas! [...] he was carried off in a fit, before he had completed his fourth week. [...] Mr. Barry was severely attacked, and his life endangered by a colic” (321).³⁴ Harriot goes on to relate other minor issues that have contributed to her “cares and anxieties.”

Yet Harriot who has read no novels and has dutifully fulfilled everything expected of her has “suffered more” since being married, including her mother dying and giving birth to a stillborn child. In other words, virtue is not rewarded, and the model of marriage as not being all positive for women is similar to that experienced by the characters in *The Coquette*.

Tenney also appears to be mocking the sentimental novel by poking fun at the epistolary format, which is commonly used in these novels, including *The Coquette*. Tenney’s novel, like *Charlotte Temple*, is not epistolary but has several letters that are crucial to the plot. These letters include the ones exchanged between her and Lysander that cause her to reject his marriage proposal. She gets introduced to O’Connor, her next suitor, through a badly written letter by his landlord. Several letters eventually pass between Dorcasina and O’Connor, and during her grief after his departure when he is discovered to be a fraud, she creates a book of his letters that she titles “*Letters from my dearest O’Connor before marriage*” (93). She treasures this book of letters – at least until the next suitor comes along. Virtually every suitor, including Harriot disguised as Montague, writes her letters, many of which are reproduced in the text, but all of them are written in the romantic style Dorcasina expects. Even in the end when Dorcasina acknowledges her absurdity, she does so in a letter. Another mockery of letters is that, unlike in other sentimental novels, letters and help always arrive on time, but Dorcasina moves on to the next adventure and chooses to ignore the help and the evidence presented to her.

Similar to Underhill in his conclusion, Dorcasina “sketched out for [her]self a plan” (324). She intends to “seek out proper objects of charity” and for “amusement,” she will continue to read books (324). She explores this idea further by explaining that histories and travel narratives are “dull and uninteresting” (324) and that only “works of the imagination” provide amusement but “[t]hey now amuse without the power of injuring [her]” (325). She does,

however, believe that Harriot should keep her children away from these types of works. I argue that this admonishment is not an acknowledgment by Dorcas (who has changed her name back) or by Tenney that novels are totally suspect, but rather “in this life,” the works she wants (and America needs) are “unattainable” (325). Just as Underhill deplored the lack of an American tradition, which he satirizes throughout his novel, but especially with the Natural History Museum, the unfavorable comparison to Algiers, and the broken promises throughout his novel, so, too, does Tenney through Dorcas(ina) deplore the state of American fiction. Davidson argues that the defensive prefaces of these authors were to teach readers to read the good novels as opposed to the bad ones (*Revolution* 276). She says the novel was a double satire – not only on the female reader, such as Dorcasina, but also the larger society which endorsed the lack of education for women (276). I agree to a point, but the bigger satire is on those who condemned fiction in the first place because they are the ones who are misreading the novel by trying to impose a serious moral on a novel that laughs at itself and in turn laughs at the current attempts to create a new American literature.

Modern Chivalry

Modern Chivalry, like *The Algerine Captive* and *Female Quixotism*, is generally included in the picaresque tradition and like those two novels has an element of humor that has been discussed but has generally not been the focus of extended analysis. As with the other two novels in this chapter, I argue that one of Brackenridge’s primary targets for his humor and satire, which is inherently self-reflexive, is the state of American literature and culture. Engell says, “Tyler’s *The Algerine Captive* (1797) and Brackenridge’s *Modern Chivalry* (1792-1815) are, by general acclaim, the best pieces of satiric fiction written by the first generation of American authors” (19), and I would add Tenney’s to this list. Brackenridge rarely turns off the satirical tone and

what he is primarily focusing on is the long-standing satirical tradition of using satire to improve society, and he has turned that satirical gaze toward the many aspects of the new country, especially the cultural elements.

Many critics focus on the very apparent political satire although they may disagree with each other on what exactly Brackenridge is attempting to convey to his readers with this satire. This criticism begins with Newlin, the editor of what is considered the definitive edition of *Modern Chivalry*. He believed the novel was “concern [ed with] (1) the ambition of unqualified persons to rise to high position, (2) the lack of intelligent discrimination on the part of voters, and (3) the excesses of democracy” (xxviii).³⁵ Other critics have followed his lead with comments similar to William L. Nance’s who says that Brackenridge’s objective was to “expose certain abuses in the new democracy, especially misguided ambition in candidates for public office and folly in the voters who elect unqualified men” (381). This criticism was common during the 1970s with varying degrees of emphasis and with varying characters and scenes being the focus of the thematic study.³⁶ In the 1980s, much of the criticism shifted to a focus on language, but the critics still viewed it primarily as a novel with a political message about the state of the new democracy.³⁷

Modern Chivalry is an American version of *Don Quixote*, which is considered by many to be the world’s first novel and a good exemplar of the genre. *Modern Chivalry* comes complete with an American officer and his trusty sidekick as they travel through various parts of the new country without straying too far from their starting point, an ironic and humorous detail that is possibly Brackenridge’s jeer at the picaresque tradition. Brackenridge presents a Quixote-like character, Captain Farrago, who travels through the Pennsylvania frontier with this Sancho-like sidekick, the Irishman, Teague. Many of the scenes in the book are Farrago’s attempts to keep

Teague out of what the Captain views as trouble. During the course of this novel, Teague almost gets elected to Congress, almost becomes a preacher, almost becomes an Indian chief, almost becomes a lawyer, and eventually gets hired as a government employee. He also works stints as editor, writer, apothecary, judge, and soldier. These adventures allow Brackenridge's narrator to satirize virtually every aspect of the new country and its society and culture, much the way Royall Tyler's narrator does. Brackenridge's fictional narrator satirizes these various professions generally by depicting their use of jargon and putting the so-called professionals in ridiculous situations. In between these adventures, he provides reflective observations and comments that become increasingly frequent as the novel progresses and add to the self-consciousness of this work. These reflections generally contain humor in the form of ironic and satiric understatement.

While many critics focus on the state of politics that allows an uneducated person to ascend into that profession, I argue, however, that with Brackenridge's emphasis on letters, words, and language in his preface and throughout the novel, he is primarily focusing on and mocking the state of letters in the new Republic, and his desire to see America attain a literary independence from the British. Watts supports this contention by saying, "Having recognized the inability of British genres and language to express American subjects, he is left without a model: to transcend mere reaction, he must seek a new literary paradigm" (*Writing* 39-40). This mockery begins with an introduction to the novel in which the narrator discusses the purpose of the text. He says, ironically, that this novel is an attempt "to fix the English language" because "to expect good language and good sense, at the same time, is absurd" (3). The narrator believes that past attempts at good writing have failed because the writers were attempting to do both things at once (4). This attempt to "fix" the language, in this case, the literature, is reminiscent of Daniel Webster and his dictionary, which was also an attempt to fix the American language. He

also believes that focusing on language and creating a model of good writing leaves him immune to criticism because “in a model there can be no defect” (4). He says tongue-in-cheek that his work “will be useful to young minds” (4). However, he later emphasizes that the usefulness of the work is only a side advantage because the major objective is “to give a model of perfect stile in writing” (5). However, in order to provide a perfect model of style, the reader must never be aware of this attempt or else the style is not very good: “It is the secret of good taste and perfection in behavior to conceal that you ever think of it at all. So it is the most perfect proof of a good stile, that when you read the composition, you think of nothing but the sense; and are never struck with the idea that it is otherwise expressed than every body would express it” (161). In other words, while he keeps professing that every writer should strive toward good “stile,” he believes it cannot be achieved if a writer strives too hard toward it. Ironically, he undercuts his own argument by calling attention to this focus on style. Much like *Female Quixotism*, *Modern Chivalry* laughs at itself as a way of mocking the literary attempts that come before.

At various points in the novel, he reiterates his purpose and reflects on whether he is accomplishing his goal. For example, at the end of Volume I, he says that future publication “will depend on the reception of this” (76). He is thus far happy with the work because he is able “to amuse himself with writing” (76),³⁸ which he is glad of because he is “at a distance from books and literary conversation” (77). In terms of the quality of the manuscript thus far, he humorously says that only “one word [he] would alter” (77). He also says that from this point forward, he will attend to more serious subjects as more befitting to someone who was recently “admitted a Counsellor in the supreme court” (78), and he, ironically, suggests that readers will not be entertained by “the fistycuffs of two ragamuffins” (90) but would rather have more serious subjects. Yet, the reader quickly discovers that his subjects do not change much over the

course of the text, and he continues to provide the reader with amusing stories about his two characters. As the novel progresses, he repeatedly provides additional specific views of what he considers to be a good “style.” He later clarifies somewhat the idea of perfect style in his advice to Teague: “just write as you would speak, and give your account with simplicity, without affectation; understanding your subject well, and using no more words, than is necessary to express your meaning” (355). The reader realizes this advice is a mockery since Teague is depicted as uneducated and does not speak very well. This characterization of style or variations thereof get repeated throughout the novel.

In addition, like Brown, Brackenridge tells the reader in the introduction that he hopes to provide a picture of “human nature” and, if nothing else, that his book “may yield amusement” (6). We later discover that he intends to “*interlard pleasantry to make the boys read*” (443). At one point, he gives a short discourse on the benefits of reading for amusement and believes that works for amusement can also have “utility” (406). After explaining why he interrupts his text with moral reflections but returns to the more entertaining sections, Brackenridge says, “Were it not that I am afraid of lessening too much the chapters of amusement, and so losing readers, it would be more agreeable to my own mind to moralize more. But I must not forget, that it is only by means of amusing, that I could get readers; or have an opportunity of reaching the public with my lecture” (619). In other words, an amusing and entertaining text is important in order to keep readers interested. While David Hirsch claims that this comment shows Brackenridge’s opposition to novels for amusement (68-69), I argue that Brackenridge is again being ironic. He brings up the idea of amusement too often, and he actually appears to be saying the opposite of what Hirsch suggests because he also says,

In throwing out these reflections, of a moral nature, I refresh myself a little in the course of my memoir; and present a chapter now and then, like an Oasis in the great sands of

Africa; here the reader, like the caravan, may stop for a little time, and taste the cool spring, or nibble a pile of grass; and go on again. In short, all other parts of my book, will appear to some, a wide waste, producing nothing profitable. (619)

In other words, he provides a little of both to appeal to all readers. When he admits that he is writing for his own and his reader's entertainment, he does not discount that the novel can have value as something other than amusement. However, the instances of him referring to the work as a source of amusement is often enough that we realize it is an important objective for Brackenridge and his narrator. At another point, he says, "All the objects of men, are in great part to please the imagination. Utility is but one half. I admit at the same time, that he who comprises both, hits the nail on the head, and carries all votes. But it is even something to attain one of these. This much it may suffice to say, as an apology for the publication" (480). The idea of a work for amusement with utility is carried throughout the text. While some critics may read this comment as his sincere apology for writing the novel, I read it as a mocking commentary directed toward readers who will not see the irony but rather will view this apology as real.

When he discusses aspects of writing not related to style or amusement, his humor and satire are especially evident, providing additional ways for him and his readers to laugh at his intended targets. At a couple of points, he discusses the unlikelihood of making a profit with this work and the reality of the unprofitable nature of being a writer and says that if he does not sell more, he may not be able to keep writing – he may have to resort to buying all the copies himself. He humorously suggests the possibility of high ranking political figures buying multiple copies – anyone except for Congress (156-57). He also displays humor when Teague, who cannot read or write, discusses the possibility of writing his own memoir with Farrago. Farrago gives Teague advice on the writing process, and says, "the first thing to be thought of, is a place to write. The extremes are two, the cellar and the garret" (355).³⁹ This advice recalls an earlier

scene in which Farrago discusses his adventure of trying to find a writer in a garret apartment, but that writer had died two weeks earlier. The narrator ends up with the dead writer's manuscripts, including a poem, which he includes for the reader (173-94).⁴⁰

Regardless of its close ties to history or political pamphlets and its use of mixed genres, *Modern Chivalry* is undoubtedly self-conscious about its form and purpose as a novel. By using a novel to pattern his text, Brackenridge lets the reader know immediately that his work is within the realm of imaginative literature, and he wants it to be considered part of that literary culture that he wishes was more advanced in the new country. He says, “[i]f this were intended as a book of morals, or physiology, and not as a mere belles letters composition, there might be something said; — as the case is, critics must be silent” (90). The idea of Brackenridge referring to this text as something akin to polite literature is in and of itself a satirical moment. However, this satirical statement does not discount his belief that the new Republic is in need of such literature or that he is parodying others' attempts. This passage reiterates his objective of focusing on style over content, but it is also evidence of a focus on imaginative literature more than on any particular philosophy, including political ones. He later reemphasizes this when he says that “[i]t is well for men in office, that my pen has taken this turn; and that I employ myself in writing harmless nonsense, rather than strictures on their conduct” (156). In other words, he is writing fiction, not a moral primer, but couching the term “fiction” satirically as “harmless nonsense.” While he says he is writing “harmless nonsense,” his further comments on this subject ensure that the reader understands he is not ridiculing the novel form as much as he is ridiculing the contemporary attempts. We get a sense of this affinity for the form during an “inquisition” (430) that was held to determine whether a man was a lunatic or not because he was a “man of books” (431). During the course of the examination, the examiner and the man of books had the following exchange:

You are a man of books—
A little so.
What books have you read?
History, Divinity, Belles-letters.
What is the characteristic of history?
Fiction.
Of Novels?
Truth. (431)

Earlier in the novel, the narrator had mocked histories when he said, “Having given the preceding history [story of Teague’s love story], and put my name to it, there is no man that knows me, will doubt of the truth of it. For I have always considered the first character of an historian to be veracity; and in all my former compositions, have endeavoured to preserve that character” (240). The reader knows this text is not a history but rather a work of fiction, so comparing Farrago to a historian and then claiming Teague’s love life to be part of historical truth is a way of mocking not only histories but also fictions that he believes attempt to disguise themselves as history.⁴¹

The discussion between Farrago and Teague about Teague’s possible memoirs also focuses on truth in writing: “It is true [...] navigators and travelers make many a fiction” (91), but he does not believe they should resort to fictionalizing their account. During a similar discussion, Farrago tells Teague that “One advantage you will have, that you need not stick pertinaciously to the truth; for travelers have a licence to deviate; and they are not considered as on oath, or upon honour in giving their accounts; embellishment is allowable. Some illumination of their story: though, confining yourself to the truth strictly, I make no doubt, your story will be sufficiently extravagant, and of course border on the marvelous” (354). In this passage, he is ridiculing the faith that history will be truthful and mocking those who oppose novels because novels tell lies. I also argue that he ridicules the novelists who appear to defend their works against this opposition by stating that they are basing their novels on true stories.

In addition to using the novel form as his platform, Brackenridge plays with this form by introducing numerous other genres in the text. This variety is evident throughout the novel but especially in the Introduction to Volume 3. The narrator provides us with a review that he purportedly found in *Young's Magazine*. The reviewer believes that Brackenridge “scrupulously adheres” to his object of focusing on style and that any “semblance of idea” can be “attribute[d] to the imagination of the reader” (162). The aesthetic standard on which the reviewer bases the novel’s success is that of simplicity and the fact that it appears to have been written with an air of “carelessness, but which the sound critic will discover to be the result of a perfect mastery of all that relates to language” (163) – harkening back to the narrator’s idea that style must be simple and must not be something a writer strives for. The reviewer believes that the narrator will be successful in his quest to fix the language, calling the novel “a restorer of all that is correct and beautiful in writing” (164). Following this review, Brackenridge includes a satirical poem (164-67) in response to the condemnation he anticipated despite having stated he was immune from negative criticism. He pretends to be unhappy with this unexpected good criticism because he “wished to have a quarrel with the critics” and he “should have had an opportunity of shewing [his] polemic talents (164). He goes on to relate that the only criticism he has ever heard is that he is a one-hit wonder and that he would flop as an orator, so then he feels the need to provide the reader with a sermon that he delivered to prove his ability as a speaker. Ironically, however, providing us with a written speech does not prove his ability as an orator, but he says that he is providing a copy because it is another example of “stile” that he is capable of producing (167). He also qualifies any possible deficiencies in the work by stating that he wrote it in a hurry with short notice; however, earlier he has said that “stile” must have that very mark of carelessness, as if written hurriedly. He believes these multiple genres prove that he has “great versatility of stile,

and vast compass of sentiment and imagination” (171). While these examples are centered on one portion of the book, he includes different genres throughout the novel. This inclusion reveals his attempts at experimenting within the form and allows him to mock current productions and the reviews that often accompany their publication.

Reading the novel, we begin to realize that Brackenridge’s political satire is rather inconsistent and his political positions cannot be fully determined – a fact also demonstrated by the various critics who all have contradictory views about his political stance and supported by Wood’s contention that “locating any stable or authoritative voice proves impossible in *Modern Chivalry*, an encyclopaedia of contradictory public opinions, distinguished by a polemical tone and shifting ironic stance” (99). The question remains, then, if political satire was apparently not his sole objective, what else could be? Wood continues by saying that “[c]onfidence-tricks, deceptions, and in particular, burlesques, are repeatedly suspected in the text, though the subject of the burlesque is usually impossible to ascertain” (99). I suggest Brackenridge’s narrator was not dissembling when he stated that his objective was to focus on style. Brackenridge, like Royall Tyler, is perplexed at the lack of literature and culture in the new country, and this lack is his main target. For example, in one scene, Farrago is trying to explain why women were captivated by Teague, and he says about these women:

For though abstractedly considered, it would seem improbable that the female mind of great delicacy, and refinement, should be captivated by a rough and gross object; yet we know that the fact is in nature, and we must leave it to the philosophers to account for it. Nor will this be any difficult task, when we consider the powers of imagination. Here was a new object, unknown as to its origin, and high as to its pretensions; and what is novel, and not fully comprehended, and lofty in its nature, has a supereminent dominion over the human mind. (229)

While he may have been discussing Teague, these comments can very easily be read as a discussion of the American novel. The comment is similar to a comment that Brockden Brown’s

narrator made about Carwin, whom I have also argued may be compared to the novel, and like all the novelists in my study, Brackenridge's primary focus seems to be on writing itself. We know the view that many elite critics had of the novel at that time, and they would have agreed with a characterization that describes novels as "rough and gross." We also know from earlier discussions in previous chapters that women were often the primary audience for novels and the primary concern of the critics. By considering Farrago's comments above in relation to literature in general and the novel in particular, we can see his concern about the power these novels have over women. His concern is not because of the form, as is with so many critics of the time, but his belief that good ones have not been produced to this point.

At times Brackenridge appears to be making a distinction between low and high art, because Captain Farrago is concerned about the way people "elevate the low to the highest station" (18). Many critics discuss this comment as a political one about people in the lower stratum of society being elevated to the highest with no consideration for their qualifications. I suggest that it also applies to culture and literature in which low art is elevated to a high art with no consideration for a standard, beyond gaining the attention of readers. However, the narrator undercuts the possibility about a commentary on high and low art when he says,

The vehicle which I have chosen of supposed travels, and conversations, affords great scope, and much freedom, and furnishes an opportunity to enliven with incident. Doubtless it is of the same nature, with many things in the novel way, written by philosophic men, who chose that form of writing, for the purpose merely of conveying sentiments, which in a didactic work, under the head of tract or dissertation, could not so easily gain attention, or procure readers.

But the characters which we have introduced, are many of them low. That gives the greater relief to the mind. (630)

He appears to posit the novel as the great leveler, especially in terms of class. He goes on to say, "It is Tom, Dick, and Harry, in the woods, that I want to read my book" (471), and "[t]his book is written for individuals of all attainments, and of all grades of intellects" (584-85), which

indicates a readership that cuts across all status lines. In a related discussion of Teague's memoir, the narrator says, "The memoir of the bog-trotter had now made its appearance, and was read with avidity by all ranks, and classes of the community. The novelty of the matter made the stile agreeable, and it was called up as a model of fine writing" (376). In other words, Teague's memoir is written in the style suggested by Farrago's advice but the reader knows that Teague cannot write and do not necessarily trust that Farrago's writing advice is sound. Ironically, on the basis of this memoir, Teague is considered for a spot at the University, yet we know he cannot write – a commentary on the state of letters and education similar to that presented in *The Algerine Captive*.

Like most novels that are labeled as falling within the picaresque tradition, this novel is episodic, with various plot threads beginning and ending throughout the novel. The idea that Brackenridge is making fun of the state of letters in the new country is also suggested by the way he appears to weave popular types of other novel plots into his narrative, but makes them ridiculous. In Volume II, Book 4, the narrator presents us with a mock seduction novel. The mockery is in the fact that the "heroine" is a prostitute, and the story takes place in a whorehouse. When this story gets related to Farrago by the prostitute in question, he wants to help but can only help with words, which is a turn-about on the sentimental novels where words fail the characters: "As to money, it is not in my power to advance you any great sum; but as far as words can go, I could wish to serve you: not words to yourself only; but to others, in your behalf" (111). He then describes her as a "considerable beauty" which is the way almost any sentimental heroine is described. He even tells her that she has not lost her virtue yet because her "mind has not been in fault, or contaminated" (111). However, his assurances are not strong enough, and she kills herself, which totally upends the sentimental novel. In a sentimental novel

of the time, the fallen heroine generally dies but she dies of natural causes, usually childbirth. Farrago's end speech at her graveside is similar to the lament we hear in *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* (112-13). Since he has turned the sentimental tradition inside out, we realize that he is mocking bad examples of this type of novel even with this seemingly serious speech.

Farrago, whose name means "a confused group; a medley, mixture, hotchpotch" (OED) is not without his own similarities (ironically) to a sentimental heroine. He reworks the Ulysses story in order to help get Teague out of trouble and tells Teague that it is his reading that has enabled him to recognize the trouble ahead of time and to help him out of the mess. Farrago is lacking in knowledge of life experience, and he gains knowledge from reading, much like the heroines in the novels of this study. However, he also says that he has "read the writers on the government of Italy and Greece, in ancient, as well as in modern times. But [he has] drawn a great deal more from reflection on the nature of things, than from all the writings [he has] ever read" (21). In actuality, however, he appears to learn no more from his experiences than does Teague, which also provides a commentary on the state of American culture.

Like Royall Tyler, Brackenridge is concerned with the influence of Europe, especially the British, on the beginnings of American literature. He states that he is happy with the work that we are reading, but in some respects he attempts to deny the satire within the work. However, this denial does not appear convincing or sincere until one determines that what he is denying is not the satire but rather the influence of others. Rather tongue-in-cheek, he discusses how he has avoided the influence of these past writers and has avoided satire, "wit and humor" (43). While we may somewhat believe that he is avoiding the heavy influence of others, we cannot believe that he is devoid of humor and satire.

We see the idea of the need for a more independent American culture embodied in the Cincinnati Club. This club, which is a social, literary, philosophical club seemingly similar in nature to those in which Benjamin Franklin and Brockden Brown had participated, plays a big role in the various adventures in this novel. Brackenridge's narrator includes an essay from one member in which the gentleman says,

I wish to say those things that never have been said, and that never will be said again. Because, in this case, there will be the characteristics of novelty and singularity; the two great constituents of pleasure, in all intellectual entertainments. But what can I say new? Has not the whole world resounded with the justness of the cause in which we have been engaged; with the greatness of the attempt to withstand the power of Britain? (73)

A couple of items are worthy of further notice in this letter. He repeats the idea that novelty and originality are a key component to intellectual entertainment – an idea that challenges a central complaint against novels. The other item of note is his plea to “withstand the power of Britain,” which is introduced with a discussion of novelty, pleasure, and intellectual entertainment and suggests a literary independence as parallel with and equal to political independence.⁴²

Later, in a discussion of the nature of the *Porcupine*, a newspaper devoted to American interest, an “advocate” (337) of the newspaper discusses the way the British taste is different from American taste: “In Britain, or some other countries, delicacy may succeed. But the course stomachs of the Americans crave rather indelicacy and indecency, at least a portion of it. Rough like their own woods, and wild beasts, they digest scurrility” (338). This is another reference to what has been produced so far and parallels the earlier discussion of why Teague is so popular with the women. The narrator is asked why he chose an Irishman for his “clown” and he says that “the American has in fact, yet, no character; neither the clown, nor the gentleman” (405), which is another comment on America's lack of culture and literature. We know, however, that Brackenridge is not calling for a return to British type literature because he says, “people of an

old country undervalue the new” (89). The narrator also believes “[t]here is a natural alliance between liberty and letters” (401), which is the reason he believes American needs its own literature. At one point, Teague almost becomes a Kickapoo Chief and Farrago, the narrator, spends a couple of chapters discussing the Indian situation and treaties. During this scene, he discusses the worthlessness of these treaties and decides that “[t]his being the case, it can be no harm to make a farce of the whole matter” (57) – much the way he is making fun of literature throughout this text.

He ends the novel by discussing his accomplishments in the last two chapters. He admits that “[i]t is a caricatura doubtless; but it is by caricatura, that the ridiculous is discovered” (803). While seemingly optimistic throughout, by the end, his pessimism about the state of culture and literature is more apparent. He believes, however, “owing to this book [...] that a very different state of things now exists” (805). He is optimistic that his novel has and can make a difference in the literary conditions of the new country. Throughout this novel, he has satirized various aspects of American life. His primary target, however, has been the state of American letters. He has satirized literature by ridiculing the efforts thus far and by his focus on Teague as an author. Much like Tyler, he has also satirized other professions as a parallel and has portrayed the Americans as being ridiculous. Like Tyler also, he does not want a return to the British – he wants this country to produce something that he considers worthy. While he appears to be focused on style, his discussions throughout bring to the forefront that he is struggling to define the American novel and what that novel should look like.

Like the other works in this study, the works in this chapter are also self-consciously working within the new tradition of this very new country. While the other works were actively exploring the nature of the novel, as in Chapter Three, or challenging the old tradition, as in

Chapter Four, the works in this chapter portrayed the desire for an American literary independence, along with a recognition that the efforts thus far were not fulfilling this need. These works also satirize various aspects of American culture, which further emphasizes the point. They were openly satirizing the contemporary tradition as it was being developed. These writers did not believe that fiction was inherently bad; they just did not believe the American attempts up to that point had achieved what they needed to achieve.

End Notes

¹ Robert Alter defines the picaresque novel as the “adventurous story of a rogue’s life, usually told in the first person; [...] its episodic account of wanderings, adversity, and ingenious role-playing incorporates a satiric view of society” (viii). Similar to the novels discussed in the earlier chapters and the way they stretch – almost beyond recognition – the boundaries of the classifications attempting to contain them, the novels in this chapter also expand the categories in which they have been placed by most critics. Because these novels, with the exception of *Female Quixotism*, do not resemble novels as we recognize them today or even many of the other novels written during this time, Cathy Davidson suggests that the novels classified as picaresque were less apt to raise the ire of novel opponents. She then moves on to a discussion of the picaresque as being a marginal form and clarifies that it is “marginal in the sense that it overflows its own ostensible boundaries” (*Revolution* 249) – a characteristic that some critics say is the essence of any genre. She acknowledges that classifying novels in this manner is inappropriate and adds that it is the “loosest subgenre of all, it hovers ever on the edge of a formalistic collapse under the burden of its own inclusiveness,” and that it is “closely related to the nonfictional travel narrative” (*Revolution* 249, 256). These accounts suggest that reading these novels only by the predetermined, predefined categories may not be the best way to approach them.

Both Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky and Davidson consider the picaresque as the elite form of the early American novels primarily because, as Davidson believes, the picaresque novel is the form most able to carry a political message. Davidson’s discussion of the picaresque novel includes the category’s limitations and touches on issues that I am dealing with in this study, but she never expands on them, as they are not her focus. For example, in referring to the form of the novel Davidson says, “By its very structure—or, more accurately, by its structurelessness—the picaresque allowed the early American novels numerous fictive possibilities. [...] it can evade both censure and censorship through its indeterminacy” (*Revolution* 248). The “censure and censorship” she is referring to is the early suspicion of the novel that has been discussed at length in previous chapters.

² Numerous plays and novels focusing on Algiers were published during this time to include *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania* (1787) by Peter Markoe, Susannah Rowson’s *Slave in Algiers* (1794), the anonymously published *Humanity in Algiers: or, The Story of Azem* (1801), and *The American Captive* (1812) by James Ellison. Recently Paul Baepler published *White Slaves*,

African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives that attempts to consolidate some of the narratives. Daniel Williams in his review of this anthology says that “in addition to the narratives there are a number of plays, poems, broadsides, novels, and tracts that made use of the basic trope of Americans held captive in north Africa” (317), attesting to the popularity of this subject.

³ A quick glance at any database reveals that the majority of studies on humor in American literature have focused on Mark Twain and the authors that come after him, with a scattering of short very specialized studies on some earlier works. Many critics, if they mention humor in the earlier works, generally only mention it as incidental. However, a few critics have analyzed the nature of satire in these works. George L. Roth analyzes satire during the time period of my studies and says that half of the satirical works during this time “deal with politics [...] but the rest survey critically a wide area of the American scene” such as education, religion, medical profession, law, inequality, and literature (399). He argues that the function of satire in America is unique and that its primary purpose is “to keep the new society free from the vices of the old world. [...]. The satirist, then, was not only a guardian of morals; he was a guardian of the Republic” (400).

⁴ Not only is *The Algerine Captive* self-reflexive because of its satire, but like *Tristram Shandy* and many other satirical novels, it employs other metafictional techniques. In addition to having a fictional character write the dedication and the preface, which is a significant self-reflexive technique, Tyler’s narrator also directly addresses his readers. He also includes epigraphs before every chapter including some from his own manuscripts, and since the book has a “fictional” author yet uses the “real” author’s manuscripts, this use is also self-reflexive. His epilogue from Shakespeare sets up the reader to focus on the writing of the story. This epilogue states “—By your patience/I will a round unvarnished tale deliver/Of my whole course.—” (1). Not only does this epigraph put the focus on writing, but as we later discover, it begins the irony, because we realize by the end of the novel that the “tale” is anything but “unvarnished.” I find it ironic that he uses Shakespeare as epigraph for the entire book when he does not want writers looking to England for inspiration. The irony deepens when we realize that every epigraph except for one by Jonathan Edwards and Tyler’s own are not American – as if to say no American work is worthy of being used as an epigraph. He prepares us for each chapter with short summaries that he calls “Argument[s]” and virtually each summary has a focus on writing or language with constant references to the author or references to what he is writing. At one point he loses his *Gradus ad Parnassum*, which is a thesaurus – a book of words, and while a minor part, it emphasizes that Tyler and Underhill are concerned with language and writing. Like Rowson and Brockden Brown who provide recipes for the sentimental and gothic novels in some of their writing, he includes what basically amounts to a recipe for a picaresque novel (119), calling attention to these types of novels and his understanding of what readers might have expected.

⁵ The novel is primarily studied for two diametrically opposite political views in varying degrees. The first group of scholars views it as an effusion of patriotic fervor that Underhill gained while being held in captivity. The other group views it as an indictment of the new Republic that Underhill comes to realize through his captivity. The first group of scholars includes G. Thomas Tanselle, Cathy Davidson, Michael T. Gilmore, Michele Bottalico, Joseph C. Schöpp, and Jorg

Thomas Richter. The other group includes John Engell, Edward Watts, Jennifer Margulis, and Sarah F. Wood. Both groups read parts of the novel as satirical or ironical, and both acknowledge the contradictory nature of the novel. Only when we focus on the humor and determine the purpose of the humor do the contradictory elements begin to coalesce into a coherent theme.

⁶ In Volume I, he is traveling and viewing the captivity of the Southern slaves as an outsider, and in Volume II, he is the captive but still allowed to travel occasionally, and he provides us with an account of those travels while also portraying his captivity. The entire work resembles a work that could have been produced had Sarah Kemble met Mary Rowlandson. Tyler appears to be playing with the form of the captivity and travel narrative along with various conventions of the early American novel. Part of the self-reflexivity in this novel also comes from Tyler blending multiple genres that has been noticed by some critics. For example, Robert Battistini says, “Tyler explored every generic register available” (19). Other critics have also commented on the multiple genres in play throughout the novel to the extent that it is referred to as a “comic confounding of genres” (Davidson and Davidson 75). While this blending has not gone unnoticed, it has also contributed to the contradictory readings of the novel.

⁷ The narrator’s name also invokes humor and should be a clue to the reader that we should not take him too seriously. Davidson, on the other hand, says, “The comedy in volume I results largely from the high seriousness with which the protagonist views himself” (*Revolution* 284). While a couple of critics have commented on the metaphorical nature of his name, they primarily give it a geographic meaning. For example, one of Robert Battistini’s primary arguments is that Tyler’s plot parallels the geography through which Underhill travels.

⁸ Jesse Bier deals with various topics in humor that include violence and racism and the psychology behind these types. Whether we agree or disagree with his reasoning, the fact remains that people laugh at such humor.

⁹ Foreigners sometimes would refer to the American president as “His Excellency,” but this title was never a legal one in our country except for a few governors. Some foreign diplomats were also referred to in this manner, but again, within our own country, our diplomats were not. Tyler seems to be placing emphasis on the hold that European culture had.

¹⁰ Per the timeline, if we base Underhill’s return with the year of publication, he left about the time *Power of Sympathy* was being published. This novel is generally credited as being the first America novel.

¹¹ This ancestor, Capt. Underhill, was a real person. Underhill also encounters two historical figures: Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine. Dennis argues that using this technique adds to Tyler’s attempts at creating an American novel: “Both Tyler and Hugh Henry Brackenridge, in *Modern Chivalry*, seem to blend history and fiction by portraying their principal characters in encounters with historical figures [...]. Such a tactic was not meant to call into question the legitimacy of history, but was rather meant to expand the territory of the novel as novel” (Dennis 75). Other critics, however, such as Linda Hutcheon claim that historical fiction is the most

metafictional of all fiction. The ironic and amusing part of his meeting Benjamin Franklin is that Franklin wrote satire himself, and Underhill facetiously refers to him as the “president of the state of Pennsylvania” (75). Underhill seems to go a little overboard in his praise, especially when he likely would have gotten the information from Franklin’s self-praising autobiography.

¹² The Fourth Commandment refers to keeping the Sabbath holy, providing additional amusement to a scene where the preacher and parishioners rush through the sermon and ceremony in order to get to the horse races.

¹³ Engell views Updike as “naïve spokesman for American ‘freedom’” and argues that the doctor is one of the “free” men in a “prominent role” in the novel (22). Other types of characters, according to Engell, are slaves and slave masters (20). He also characterizes this doctor as being “virtuous” (23) and working “for the good of others” (24).

¹⁴ A similar situation develops in *Modern Chivalry* with Teague, Capt. Farrago’s sidekick.

¹⁵ Only in captivity does his dead language come in handy for some real purpose because he is able to hold serious intellectual conversations with his captors and other Algerians because of his knowledge of the language.

¹⁶ From his description, the poem appears to be similar to Shakespeare’s Sonnet #130 “My Mistress’s Eyes are Nothing Like the Sun,” which has descriptions of his mistress that defy normal expectations of a love sonnet.

¹⁷ Jennifer Margulis makes a similar observation when she says that “Underhill clearly illustrates that his experience as an American school teacher is, if not worse, as bad as his later experiences in slavery” (20). She continues her argument by saying that “Tyler emphasizes the comparison between school teaching and physical slavery even further” (20), and then she provides the additional examples.

¹⁸ The narrator in other novels with this type of direct address assumes the reader understands the lesson being taught.

¹⁹ While the *Annals of American Literature* lists Lennox’s novel, most critics consider it to be a British novel in the picaresque tradition. *Female Quixotism* is referred to as a picaresque by most critics, including Davidson. Davidson, however, also discusses the ways that Dorcasina, the protagonist, does not fit the conventional characteristics of the picara and the ways the novel does not fit the normal picaresque, providing more reasons to read beyond the categories. According to Davidson, the novel goes against type because the “wildest act” Dorcasina, the picara, performs is to change her name, and she “never strays more than thirty miles” from home because “[h]er adventures are mostly in reading” (*Revolution* 274). The fact that the novel is not in first person also goes against the typical characteristics of the picaresque novel.

²⁰ While other critics may mention the affinity to *Don Quixote*, Josephine Donovan is virtually the only critic who discounts the connection to *Female Quixote*, saying that it is more closely aligned to *Don Quixote* because its “comic flavor is similar” (26).

²¹ Besides those mentioned, other critics who share Petter’s view that Tenney’s focus was as a warning against reading novels include Traister and Christopher Lukasik. These critics also refer to the fact that Tenney only wrote one novel as further evidence that she was against the novel form.

²² Sally Hoople has a similar idea: “Based upon prevailing attitudes toward the reading of novels, *Female Quixotism* displays a nationalism similar to the chauvinistic spirit of Royall Tyler’s *The Algerine Captive* and stresses the distorting effects of imported fiction upon immature North American minds” (4).

²³ She alludes several times to Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), which Nienkamp and Collins point out is “one of the most popular of the type of eighteenth century sentimental novels that Tenney ridicules” (327n8.36-37). A key adventure in the novel is derived from Tobias Smollet’s *Adventure of Roderick Random* (1748). In another reference to sentimental novelists, the compiler satirically says, “It would require the pen of Richardson to describe the ecstasy, and rapture of this meeting: but as mine pretends to no such powers, they shall be passed over in silence” (85). The reader knows – even if Dorcasina pretends not to – that O’Connor is a fake and any “ecstasy, and rapture” would only be on Dorcasina’s part. A scene is also included that appears to be mocking the tradition-rich story of Lady Godiva when Dorcasina loses her wig while riding horseback. She also includes several scenes of disguise and cross-dressing that are reminiscent of a Shakespearean comedy.

²⁴ Other critics include Sevda Caliskan who argues that the novel is mocking “social and cultural institutions” (25); Sharon M. Harris who says the novel is “exposing the realities of the new nation’s social order [...and] the failed sense of democracy” (“Use of the Carnavalesque” 213); Joseph Fichtelberg who calls the novel a “serious plea for a Federalist ethos” (361); and Wood who regards the novel as espousing “republican rhetoric” (198).

²⁵ Other critics who refer to the novel as “humorous” include Sevda Caliskan (26). Miecznikowski says the novel has its “comic moments” (39), and Sharon M. Harris says it has “comic spirit” (“Lost Boundaries” 216). While Traister calls the novel, “hilariously caricatured” (1), Donovan focuses on the author and calls Tenney a “comic genius” (26).

²⁶ Candace K. B. Matzke argues that the humor begins with the title page. Matzke argues, “Indeed, the burlesque begins even before the novel proper, as early as the title page and author’s preface” (88). Then she continues and makes a persuasive argument about what she finds humorous on the title page. In the Oxford version, the quote that Matzke references is the epigraph to Book I, Chapter 1.

²⁷ With only one exception, I have found that all critics are in general agreement that the compiler is male.

²⁸ Tenney again is using this character to emphasize her joke with Philander meaning someone who is a flirt and a wag being a joker or mischievous young man.

²⁹ In *Female Quixote*, Arabella has had a similar upbringing to Dorcasina and she, too, is highly influenced by the romances that she reads. At the end of the novel and numerous adventures, with the help of a clergyman and the patience of Glanville – a Lysander-like suitor, Arabella sees the error of her ways, gives up reading novels, and marries Glanville.

³⁰ Joseph F. Bartolomeo makes a very similar argument about the English, *Female Quixote*, comparing it to Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*.

³¹ Her last suitor is Seymour who is run out of town (311) much like Sanford in *The Coquette*. Seymour's words of "I shall be ruined" (Tenney 311) are similar to Sanford's also, who says, "I am undone" (Foster 164).

³² This motif of appearance versus reality mirrors the story about Tenney's contrived reaction to George Washington's death (Wood 164-65).

³³ Traister also says that the use is likely significant but has gone "unremarked" by critics (28n30).

³⁴ Irony and a touch of humor are provided in a military man getting an illness that is normally associated with children and horses. This ironic and humorous idea may only be as a result of modern-day usage since I am unsure of the associated connotation back then and have found no indications that it would have today's connotation.

³⁵ Many critics point to the following statement in *Modern Chivalry* as their primary evidence for their argument: "The great moral of this book is the evil of men seeking office for which they are not qualified" (611).

³⁶ The critics in this category include David Hirsch (1971), Joseph H. Harky (1971), Lynn Haims (1973), Lewis Leary (1975), Michael T. Gilmore (1978).

³⁷ The critics in this category include Barry K. Grant (1980), William W. Hoffa (1980), Emory Elliott (1982), Mark Patterson (1986), Cynthia Jordan (1989).

³⁸ Other instances in which Brackenridge directly refers to amusement includes when he repeats that he writes to amuse himself (156). Later he acknowledges that "[t]he truth is, this composition has more for its object than merely to amuse though that is an object" (411). He also says, "So far as respects my own taste, I read with great pleasure oftentimes, a book, which has not a single idea in it from beginning to end, except in the quotations. The only question that is made, will be, is the quotation from a good author; or does it amuse, or instruct" (654).

³⁹ Earlier, however, the captain says that the first thing Teague must consider is the narrator and whether it will be in first person or third person, and he explains in simple terms what that means

(354). He then says the next decision is whether it will be a “continued narrative, with chapters, or in the shape of a journal, or be cast in the way of letter. For all these modes of writing are used as best suits the traveller; or may be thought most pleasing to the reader” (354).

⁴⁰ This poem is an example of multiple genres being presented in the text by Brackenridge and his narrator. This “find” is noteworthy because he says, “I know it will immediately be surmised by some, that the whole is fiction, and that I myself have written this poem, and that the story of any author, &c. is an invention to make it the more interesting to the reader, and to keep myself out of sight and behind the curtain” (173). This self-reflexive technique is very common and was employed by Washington Irving in his Knickerbocker tales and much later writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne. He continues by saying, “many writers of fictitious works, in order to given them an air of truth and reality; or to delight the reader by relating some accidental manner of coming at what was nearly lost, invent tales of finding shreds and scraps of compositions” (173).

⁴¹ At a later time, he refers to the text as a “biography” (492), and directly refers to his fictional character when he says, “Were it not that the Captain had enjoined on me to continue his story when he delivered his papers into my hand, I believe I should not have taken up the pen again. But I must go through with it, and complete the history, which I hope to comprise in another volume” (463-464). These instances are all evidence of his mockery toward this kind of writing.

⁴² They also wear a badge with a bald eagle that represents the American cause.

Conclusion. Self-Reflexivity: A Reconsideration both Now and in the Future

The standing of early American novels in our literary histories has improved since the early literary histories by critics such as Henri Petter, Richard Chase, and Fred Pattee were written. This increase in interest in the literature of that time is evident in the new literary histories being published by authors such as Davidson and others and by reprints of numerous novels from that period. This project is an attempt to continue that reassessment by focusing on the self-reflexivity in these early novels.

During the early days of the new republic, the novel was still an emerging genre of literature. Whether the origins of the novel were in England with Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson, as many critics argue, or whether the actual origins are in America with Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative providing the impetus, as Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse argue, is not important in this study. What is important is that in the early days of the new republic, America was busy fighting for its political independence and did not appear to worry much about its intellectual and artistic creations. This began to shift, however, during the framing of the Constitution when intellectual and artistic concerns became an issue, and prominent writers during this time were experimenting with fiction and fictional techniques. The writers of this time were working within this emerging literary tradition that was beginning to focus on American themes and concerns. They felt that the English influence on American literature was too strong and were trying to create works that embodied American characters, settings, and themes at the same as they were attempting to define these very fictional attributes.

Volumes of literary histories have accounted for the difficulties that faced writers during the early days of the new Republic. The questions that arise from the myriad of difficulties and the censure of novels became the focus of this study. This study focused on the self-reflexivity

that these novels all have in common as an attempt to provide an explanation for their attempts at writing in the face of this opposition. This study also focused on the way these authors approached this censure less defensively than is commonly presumed. I have argued that these issues can be addressed by analyzing the writers' own words about writing: theoretical, prefatory, and within the fiction.

I have looked at these authors not as poor imitators of a prior tradition or as forerunners to any other groups. My study looks at these authors' attempts to work within a literary tradition that was still in its infancy. In other words, these authors were not just creating literature; they were experimenting with form and self-consciously creating works that had the new country as their focus. I also explored the function and effect of the self-consciousness of these writers – a self-consciousness that includes narratives within narratives, references to the work being produced in prefaces and in the work itself, metaphors for the novel within the work, and interrupting narrators that address the reader. Many critics assert that the self-consciousness exhibited in these works results from an inferiority complex. I try to demonstrate that this phenomenon is not a result of an inferiority complex but rather a purposeful rhetorical move during this time of American literary development. While Jared Gardner does not focus on self-reflexivity, he argues, as I do, for a more encompassing view of these early works:

[I]t has long been a truism that literature of the early national period constitutes the 'prehistory' to the fully developed national literary culture in the United States: the American Renaissance. [...], [but] I have been suspicious of claims that necessarily relegate the works that preceded the 'founding' of a 'truly' American literature to the status of failed, if interesting curiosities or experiments. (*Master Plots* xi)

Returning to my Janus analogy in Chapter One brings up the question of what is at stake in how we look at our literary history in general and the writing of the early American period in particular, both now and in the future. While she is referring to *Modern Chivalry* in particular, a

comment by Darlene Unrue is illustrative of all these works within this new country: “*Modern Chivalry* looks to both America’s past and future, and more than any other literary work of its time exhibits the richness of the eighteenth-century American experience that encompassed the confusion and cross-purposes existing at all levels of the emerging nation” (272).

In this study, I have suggested that today’s critics, when they discuss self-reflexivity (if at all), focus on different aspects or effects than I have. I have analyzed the way these authors engaged the debate raging about this genre in ways not generally assumed. These authors were exploring the nature of this novel and its place in this new literary tradition. These authors were very conscious of the earlier tradition and were self-consciously reworking this tradition because they believed that being in a new country with new people, new settings, and new themes called for a new literature to reflect these new conditions. These authors were also concerned that other American authors (and other American cultural leaders) were not doing enough or were not doing it well enough to integrate this newness. These arguments lead to one over-riding conclusion: the authors in post-Revolutionary America were representative authors that self-consciously attempted to create and define works that fit within the new tradition. These authors were striving towards developing this American literature at the same time they were struggling with it. They had no name for it yet; they had no school of literary theory developed yet. They were wandering in a new wilderness, as we see it figured in one of the novels, much like what the country was doing at the same time in other fields of discourse: the debates over the Constitution, the form of government, and the participation of the people.

Many critics focus on the political aspects of these novels, and these novels do have political implications and dimensions; however, I do not believe these arguments take into account everything these authors were doing, such as working self-consciously with American

characters, settings, and themes, pleading for a solidarity with their readers, and embracing the fictionality of the novels. Other critics direct more of their attention to the cultural aspect of these novels. Yes, these authors were creating cultural documents that reflect the times in which they lived; however, these authors were doing more than creating cultural artifacts. They were each exploring the new literary tradition that was developing in different ways. Some authors are actually exploring the nature and characteristics of these novels through the writing of self-reflexive novels. Some authors are self-consciously adapting traditional forms in unique ways, and some authors are using humor in order to reflect on what is happening within this new tradition. This study is different in that no one has done any full-length study of self-reflexivity in early American novels, and no one has done any extended analysis of the self-reflexive moments in specific works. The studies that do mention self-reflexivity in early American works speak of it in more general terms rather than analyzing any specific works.

After my first chapter explained this argument in some detail, Chapter 2 focused on prefaces to analyze the above issues. Prefaces are inherently self-reflexive and, according to the research discussed in this chapter, “control” the reading of the entire text. I discussed the way these authors self-consciously responded to the opposition to novels in more nuanced ways and less defensively than is generally acknowledged. I discussed the way these authors show a wide range of literary knowledge, including an understanding of and employment of other literary elements and a familiarity with literary standards that move beyond a focus on plot that is always based on a verifiable event. I also discussed the way these authors plead for a sympathetic understanding and attempt to create a bond of common identity between the character and the reader, more than they preach a didactic and judgmental moral to the reader. Lastly, I argued that the authors in my study embrace the novel form in spite of much opposition to the novel during

that time. These prefaces also reveal a self-conscious awareness of writing within this new tradition, as their focus is on American subjects, stories, characters, which they believe needed this form. The remaining chapters explored many of these same issues in the novels themselves.

In Chapter 3, I looked at three novels that are self-consciously about novel writing in the new country and the opposition to novel writing. Brown explores the question of whether novels are inherently bad as some critics of the time maintained, especially their contention that novels tell lies. He also explores metaphorically the unique wilderness of the emerging American novel through a focus on a literal wilderness. As discussed in Chapter 2, what we learn after analyzing these novels is Brown's sense that the American story is unique, is new, and requires a new form – the American novel, which is beginning to emerge in the new nation.

Chapter 4 focused on early American novels that in many ways fit within the tradition of the sentimental novel. The chapter explored these same issues of novel writing in the new country and the opposition to the novel, but the self-reflexive moments explored here reveal that while these novels in many ways fit within the sentimental novel tradition, they also challenge that tradition from within through adaptations of character, plot, and theme to explore characters as a literary element, to embrace a solidarity among readers, and to focus on a theme of language and writing rather than present a didactic moral. I also examined the ways these authors embrace their fiction as the best form in which to tell their stories.

Chapter 5 explored the humor that is revealed by the self-reflexivity and the explicit commentary these authors make about the state of literature as it develops within the new country. While the authors studied in my earlier chapters are trying in different ways to work within this developing tradition to create novels that are part of the American culture, the authors in this chapter do not find these efforts to be very successful. They comment on the state of the

literature and find it lacking, especially in its attempts to be an American literature – much like many of the critics of the time and later. They are not opposed to the novel form as many contemporary critics of the time were. Instead, they are poking fun at the feeble, uncertain attempts at creating an American novel and using humor and satire, which is inherently self-reflexive, to make their point.

I have challenged the way we currently view early American novels – not only as individual texts but also as a group that forms a canon. In order to effectively challenge the current views, I explored what the current views are and the implications of those current views. This study brings up additional questions. Are the texts in my study truly representative or are they aberrations? Per the *Annals*, numerous novels were published during this time frame. While I have not studied every novel on this list, other novels exhibit these same rhetorical moves. Gilbert Imlay's and Isaac Mitchell's novel, mentioned only briefly in Chapter 2, could have been included as part of the more in-depth discussions. Other authors within my study have other novels that do not contradict these findings and could have been included. The works that were chosen were used primarily because they were easily accessible in fairly new editions, were fairly (to very) popular during their time, and provided a balanced coverage of the three dominant categories – sentimental, gothic, picaresque – as used by most critics.

While I used these categories as an organizing strategy, I do not believe future discussions of these works is best served by keeping them in these categories or by continually using the categories as the primary reason to study them. What happens when we rely too heavily on these categories, as I have discussed and as Keith Fudge has argued, is that we tend to focus on the ways the works' characteristics are similar to or different from the seemingly stable characteristics of the category. This tendency causes works to be left out when they have

characteristics that cannot be accounted for or seem not to be executed very well, but it also makes some works such as *Ormond* and *Wieland* difficult to classify, as attested by numerous critics. However, the novel by definition expands its boundaries and is constantly pushing against itself, and as many critics acknowledge, “the novel is the sole genre that continues to develop” (Bahktin 3). This inclination would indicate that categories must be flexible and cannot be defined by a stable set of characteristics.

Other questions could also follow this study that may be worth pursuing. Were Brown and Brackenridge (and possibly the others) elitists who believed that literature should instruct and that only certain readers should be their audience? Or were they truly positing a literature for “Tom, Dick, and Harry” (*Modern Chivalry* 471) as suggested by Brackenridge? Do these particular questions matter in light of the popularity of the novel at the time and the continued popularity of this form? Other questions that were addressed only peripherally include gender, class, education, culture, and nation building. Are there other aesthetic or generic issues that come to light with a focus on self-reflexivity? What about the works prior to this time period? Do the introspective works of the Puritans influence the self-reflexivity in these novels? What about the time period immediately following the post-Revolutionary era? Washington Irving – our first author able to make a living with his writing – wrote works that were very self-reflexive, but Catherine Sedgwick’s works written during the same time frame were not so much so. Does the use of self-reflexivity in novels diminish or change until the post-modernists come on the literary scene? Does this self-reflexivity begin to operate differently? What we know is that looking at the self-reflexive moves provides new ways of viewing all these novels, which can then in turn provide new ways of viewing all the works during this time. These views, in turn, put a different face on the literary tradition of this country.

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Vita

Susie Scifres Kuilan was born in 1996 and is the daughter of Darryl and Ila Scifres and Doris and Warren (Buck) Rogers. She graduated from Camden-Fairview High School in 1984. In 1988, she received a Bachelor of Arts in mass media communications from Henderson State University in Arkadelphia, Arkansas. Upon graduation, she entered the United States Army as Private First Class and upon graduation from Basic Training, she was sent to Officer Candidate School, where she received her commission as a Second Lieutenant in 1989. She left active service in 1991 and entered the United States Army Reserves in 1992.

Upon leaving the military service, she began a teaching career, teaching high school at Leesville High School in Leesville, Louisiana. After a year of teaching in Louisiana, she moved to Utah and returned to school to get her teaching credentials in English, speech, and reading, which she completed in 1994. She taught junior high school in Utah for five years.

She returned to Louisiana in 1999 and enrolled in Northwestern State University where she earned a Master of Arts in English with a specialization in Southern Culture and Southern Literature in 2000. While working on her master's degree, she worked as a graduate assistant, teaching several remedial and freshmen composition courses. She also worked as an editorial assistant on several book-length publications.

She began work on her doctoral degree in English in August 2001 at Louisiana State University – a process that was interrupted by a deployment to Iraq in April 2005. She has numerous publications in various encyclopedias and collections and co-edited a new edition of *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin with Suzanne Disheroon, Barbara Ewell, and Pamela Menke that is forthcoming in 2010. She is a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army Reserves and is currently

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