Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

_____ _____

Deborah Estelle Mayrhofer Date

Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves:

Deviants in Post-Revolutionary French and American Novels

By

Deborah Estelle Mayrhofer
Doctor of Philosophy

Comparative Literature

_____

Candace Lang, Ph.D.
Advisor

_____

Cristine Levenduski, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____

Jonathan Prude, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Accepted:

_____

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

_____

Date

Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves:
Deviants in Post-Revolutionary French and American Novels

By

Deborah Estelle Mayrhofer
B.A., Wesleyan College, 2002

Advisor: Candace Lang, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature
2011

Abstract

Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves:
Deviants in Post-Revolutionary French and American Novels
By Deborah Estelle Mayrhofer

After the French and American revolutions in the late eighteenth century, citizens of both countries had to build an identity that rejected an established system of government—monarchy—that had dominated for centuries. This dissertation traces the role of the novel in the development of this new identity, in which the rejection of deviant figures would play a critical role in fostering national unity. In this dissertation, I show that the figure of the deviant in novels of the post-revolutionary period reveals an attempt to repress or reform the sexual, racial, and anarchic bodies that threaten national and social unity. The dissertation features readings of key late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century French and American novels. The first three chapters focus on the havoc wreaked on social and family structures by transgressive sexual bodies in the *Charlotte Temple, The Scarlet Letter* and *Power of Sympathy* in America, and *Adolphe, Madame Bovary* and *René* in France. The final two chapters focus on the racial other as the deviant figure in *The Algerine Captive* and *Edgar Huntly*, as well as *La Fille aux yeux d'or* and *Atala.*

Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves:
Deviants in Post-Revolutionary French and American Novels

By

Deborah Estelle Mayrhofer
B.A., Wesleyan College, 2002

Advisor: Candace Lang, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature
2011

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Candace Lang, my ever-supportive advisor. Throughout this long process, Candace provided thoughtful feedback and kind encouragement to keep writing.

I am indebted to Cristine Levenduski and Jonathan Prude for their thoughtful comments, which lent historical and literary depth to this dissertation.

The superpals provided good company and distraction along the way. Nobody can work on a dissertation all the time, and they provided plenty of reminders about that.

Finally, I am eternally grateful to Erin James for her support in this project, even when the distractions of a full-time job threatened to end the dissertation endeavor. She listened to many chapters about books she's never read while nodding encouragingly and cooking up something delicious. I love you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The assertions made in 1776 and 1789 that "all men are created equal"[1] and that "men are born and remain free and equal in rights"[2] set the standard for the aftermath of the American and French Revolutions; these statements were a promise that haunted successive governments. As with any governmental overthrow, the novelty of beginning soon wears off, leaving the victors with the task of setting up a government that will provide for the needs of its citizens without compromising the promises of the revolution. Etienne Balibar remarks, "There will thus be a permanent tension between the universally political signification of the 'rights of man' and the fact that their statement leaves it entirely up to 'practice'…to construct a politics of the rights of man."[3]

The greatest problem faced by the new governors was the basic unit of their government: the citizen. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg explains in *This Violent Empire*, "the citizen's rights and responsibilities in relation to his new republic, his fellow citizens, and his political representatives had to be delineated."[4] During the post-revolutionary era, maintaining the national body would require regulating citizen bodies. The compulsion to expose the inner motivations of citizen bodies was pervasive, even affecting legislation. Indeed, "the notion of 'conspiracy', of the threat of 'secret societies'" was "a popular political myth throughout the nineteenth century."[5] In 1790s America, for example, anti-alien acts proliferated, among them the Alien and Sedition Acts, the

---

[1] *Declaration of Independence*, 1776.
[2] *Déclarations des droits de l'homme et du citoyen de 1789*.
[3] Etienne Balibar, *Masses, Classes and Ideas*, trans., James Swenson (New York: Routledge, 1994), 50.
[4] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *This violent empire: the birth of an American national identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 2.
[5] Gaetano De Leonibus, "Conspiracy: An Aesthetic Value in Charles Maurras's Political System," in *Repression and Expression: Literary and social coding in nineteenth-century France*, ed. Carroll F. Coates (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 34.

Naturalization Act of 1798, the Alien Enemies Act, and the Alien Friends Act. As "the alien in America could not be discovered by physical appearance, genealogy, or any of the signs upon which nations traditionally could rely," the Sedition Act established "seditious" writings as markers of alien-ness.[6] France engaged in a similar project in 1789 to identify possible traitors by establishing the *comité de recherches*, which solicited denunciations. The committee "called upon the 'good citizens' to reveal to it all knowledge and information they might possess on plots against the public good."[7]

This obsession with conspiracy left its mark on the literature of the period, which both shaped and was shaped by the social and political pressures of the revolutionary-era. Indeed, the novels of the French and American post-revolutionary period provide an impressive array of atrocities: adultery, incest, seduction, white and black savages, and ungrateful guests. Conspiracy threatens both in the street and in the home, and the transgressors are often the people the protagonists trusted most. Mothers betray daughters, guests betray hosts, sons betray fathers, and lovers betray each other. Everyone, it seems, has become a stranger and a potential deviant. The consequences of failure to identify these deviants are dire: murder, suicide, duels, illegitimate offspring, mob violence, slave uprisings, insanity and abject poverty.

In the following chapters, I will show that the figure of the deviant in novels of the post-revolutionary period reveals an attempt to repress or reform the sexual, racial, and anarchic bodies that threaten national and social unity. Louis Chevalier and Charles

---

[6] Jared Gardner, *Master Plots: race and the founding of an American literature, 1787-1845* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 54.

[7] Colin Lucas, "The Theory and Practice of Denunciation in the French Revolution," *Journal of Modern History* (December 1996): 770.

Sellers have argued that primarily socio-economic changes caused much of the turmoil in the post-revolutionary period.[8] While I do not disagree with their analyses, I will show that a political tension directly linked to the revolutionary moment haunts the early nineteenth century novel in both France and America. This tension changes as the revolutions become a more distant memory: strangeness shifts from a controllable and external threat to an uncontrollable internal one as the century progresses, suggesting that the revolutionary moment opened, rather than closed Pandora's box. There are significant differences between the cultural understanding of revolution in France and America that must and will be addressed. Nevertheless, the primary objective of this dissertation is to tease out similarities in approaches to the deviant; it is my hypothesis that doing so will reveal a common post-revolutionary need to create outsiders in order to strengthen national unity.

***

The following chapters feature paired readings of key late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century French and American novels. This structure complements the overall organization of the dissertation, as the sections and chapters are organized by theme, rather than chronologically. Hence, for example, reading *Madame Bovary* and *The Scarlet Letter* together allows us to compare and contrast approaches to adultery in the French and American novel.

The goal of this study is to understand the novels of the post-revolutionary period in the context of the revolutionary event. Literature does not transcribe history literally,

[8] Louis Chevalier, *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle*, Civilisations et mentalités (Paris: Plon, 1969); Charles Grier Sellers, *The market revolution : Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

but rather incorporates it into a narrative with its own chronology and rules, so analyzing the intersection of literature and history must avoid a *roman-à-clef* style of interpretation.[9] I will therefore focus on traces of the revolutionary period in French and American literature, rather than direct translations of events. Frederic Jameson's explanation of reading habits in *The Political Unconscious* will prove a valuable tool in conducting this historicized analysis:

> We never really confront a text immediately, in all its freshness as a thing-in-itself. Rather, texts come before us as the always-already read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or—if the text is brand-new—through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive traditions...Interpretation is here construed as an essentially allegorical act, which consists in rewriting a given text in terms of a particular master code." [10]

Identifying these "master codes" in the post-revolutionary novels will be an important component of understanding how the reader perceived them.

Deviants, though considered outsiders, nevertheless remain an integral part of the social order. They are the outsiders that unite the insiders, as it were, and therefore contribute to national unity even as they threaten to undermine it. This concept is perhaps best understood through Derrida's analysis of the *parergon/ergon* in *Truth in Painting*. A

---

[9] Lawrence R. Schehr, *Figures of alterity: French realism and its others* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 7.

[10] Fredric Jameson, *The political unconscious / narrative as a socially symbolic act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 10.

parergon is, according to Derrida, something attached to, but outside the main work (*ergon*), that fills a lack in the work. This lack in the work, or, in our case the national body, is what makes a *parergon* different from a simple accessory. As Derrida explains, "It is not because [*parerga*] are detached but on the contrary because they are more difficult to detach and above all because without them, without their quasi-detachment, the lack on the inside of the work would appear….What constitutes them as *parerga* is not simply their exteriority as a surplus, it is the internal structural link which rivets them to the lack in the interior of the *ergon*.[11] As the book's title suggests, Derrida uses this term to analyze primarily paintings and other works of art; the following chapters will build upon the concept by applying it on two levels: to gain an understanding of the deviant as *parergon/ergon* both within the framework of the novel, and within a larger social context.

***

The first three chapters will focus on the havoc wreaked on social and family structures by transgressive sexual bodies. In the first chapter, entitled "Sex Education: Seduction in *Charlotte Temple* and *Adolphe*," I will show that such anti-seduction novels warn of two transgressive deviants: the seducer, and the seducee, with the seducee ultimately posing the greater risk to social order. The two books offer an interesting comparison; *Charlotte Temple* focuses on the role of the failed mother in creating a deviant child, while *Adolphe* focuses on the bad father.

In both Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* and in Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*,

[11] Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans., Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 59.

the absent parent pushes the child toward an independence that ultimately destroys his or her ability to function in society. The sexual deviance of the unfortunate protagonists then becomes a tool for controlling the readers' bodies. Rowson claims that the novel "may, I flatter myself...direct [young readers] through the various and unexpected evils that attend a young and unprotected woman in her first entrance into life."[12] The editor in the frame that precedes the story of Adolphe makes a similar assertion, deeming the publication of the manuscript "une leçon instructive...aux hommes" and "une histoire assez vraie de la misère du coeur humain."[13] These claims clearly speak to a cultural pressure to control the sexual body.

The second chapter, entitled "Bad Mothers: Adultery in *The Scarlet Letter* and *Madame Bovary*," explores the role of the deviant in the form of the bad mother. The chapter builds upon the preceding analysis of seduction, focusing on the nineteenth-century shift from seduction to adultery. I will argue that, as the family assumed a central position in the bourgeois power structure during the nineteenth century, the desiring bad mother threatened a society in which virtue and republican motherhood had become the cornerstone of social order.[14] Tony Tanner has argued that the bourgeois woman cannot be both wife and mistress because this "introduces an agonizing and irresolvable category-confusion into the individual and thence into society itself."[15] This chapter will analyze how Hawthorne and Flaubert incorporate and treat this corruptive sexuality in

---

[12] Rowson, *Charlotte Temple, a tale of truth* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), 35.
[13] Ibid., 121.
[14] Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic : intellect and ideology in revolutionary America* (New York: Norton, 1986).
[15] Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the novel: contract and transgression* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 12.

their respective novels.

Chapter three, entitled "Sympathy Unbound: Incest in *The Power of Sympathy* and *René*," will explore the role of the bad father in the novels of William Hill Brown and Chateaubriand, respectively. Julia Stern has shown persuasively that the emotional excess in post-revolutionary American novels is a form of "collective mourning over the violence of the Revolution."[16] Lynn Hunt makes a similar argument in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution,* in which she claims that "the story of the king's fall from his lofty position was intimately tied up with the fortunes of the ideal of the good father,"[17] and that the execution of the king deeply affected the French people. I will argue that the father, who haunts both books, figures an anxiety about "killing" the king, be it politically or literally.

Chapters four and five will focus on "savage bodies," or the racial other as the deviant figure. As the context for race issues differed so greatly between France and America, I will deviate from the general format of the dissertation by conducting separate readings of the French and American novels. While American novels focused primarily on the idea that race is a justification for disenfranchisement, French novels approached race in the framework of a tantalizing exoticism.

"Savage Citizens: *The Algerine Captive* and *Edgar Huntly*," will seek to understand the racial other as figured in the marginalized slave, Indian, and Irish, who

---

[16] Julia A. Stern, *The plight of feeling : sympathy and dissent in the early American novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[17] Lynn Avery Hunt, *The family romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 17.

threaten the fantasy of a racially hegemonic society.[18] I will argue that these two novels reveal the inherent instability of racial categories by positing and then repressing the possibility of the white savage—the white man made strange. Royall Tyler's *Algerine Captive* offers slavery as the guarantor of an abiding love for freedom—the makings of a good patriot. In Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*, two white men devolve into savages; yet, Brockden Brown represses the possibility of the white savage by removing him from society: Brockden Brown condemns the Irish man to the insane asylum, and allows the Anglo-Saxon to civilize the "adventure" by recounting it in a letter.

Nineteenth-century France, on the other hand, encountered racial otherness primarily through the exotic deviant. In the fifth chapter, entitled "Exotic Parerga: *La Fille aux yeux d'or* and *Atala*," I will argue that, for both Honoré de Balzac and Chateaubriand, the figure of the deviant functions as a parergon that proves to be central to hegemonic society even as it is excluded from that society.[19] Balzac exaggerates the other's difference: Paquita, the main female character, is a woman, the love slave of a lesbian, of Spanish descent and housed in a one-person harem. She is quintessentially non-Western and non-Parisian, and yet housed in the very center of Paris.

Chateaubriand's American Indians seem to live in a Rousseauean state of nature in *Atala*, and hardly appear threatening. Yet, Chateaubriand sentimentalizes the Indian's otherness to the point of erasure, and pointedly distinguishes between those tame Indians who have been civilized/Christianized, and those who have not. Moreover, as the book

---

[18] The fantasy of racial hegemony is discussed extensively in George M. Fredrickson, *The Black image in the white mind: the debate on Afro-American character and destiny, 1817-1914* (Scranton, Pa.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987).

[19] This argument will rely on Jacques Derrida's explanation of this concept in The Truth in Painting, 1987.

was written in 1801 by a former aristocrat, I will argue that the revolutionary moment, in which all French citizens became brothers and sisters to each other, marks this text. I will focus specifically on the text's depiction of the failed utopian existence, the dilatory effects of an unfilled (revolutionary) promise,[20] and the tension of incestuous love.

***

National identity was no more stable in the post-revolutionary period than it is today. The French and American people had to build on an identity that suddenly included the rejection of an established system of government—monarchy—that had dominated for centuries. No person born and raised in France or America had lived under any other system, and yet the people sought to fashion a new system to replace the failed one. With this fundamental historical break, it is not surprising that the much-read French and American novels of the period reflected an anxiety about this process of forging a new government. Without a monarch to serve as the focal point for the nation, something or someone else had to unite a disparate people. Enter, the novel. Still a relatively new form of literature, it was perfectly suited to resonate with the fears of the people. The following chapters trace the role of the novel in the development of this new identity, in which the rejection of deviant figures would play a critical role in fostering unity. God bless America, vive la France!

[20] Analysis inspired by Cathy Caruth's 2002 seminar Literature and Beginnings at Emory University and Jacques Derrida, "Declarations of Independence," *New Political Science* (Winter 1985-86).

WORKS CITED

Balibar, Etienne. *Masses, Classes and Ideas*. Translated by James Swenson. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Chevalier, Louis. *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle* Civilisations et mentalités. Paris: Plon, 1969.

Declaration of Independence. 1776.

Déclarations des droits de l'homme et du citoyen de 1789.

Derrida, Jacques. *The Truth in Painting*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Derrida, Jacques. "Declarations of Independence." *New Political Science* (Winter 1985-86): 7-15.

Fredrickson, George M. *The Black image in the white mind: the debate on Afro-American character and destiny, 1817-1914*. Scranton, Pa.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987.

Gardner, Jared. *Master Plots: race and the founding of an American literature, 1787-1845*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Hunt, Lynn Avery. *The family romance of the French Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Jameson, Fredric. *The political unconscious / narrative as a socially symbolic act*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981.

Kerber, Linda K. *Women of the Republic : intellect and ideology in revolutionary America*. New York: Norton, 1986.

Leonibus, Gaetano De. "Conspiracy: An Aesthetic Value in Charles Maurras's Political System." In *Repression and Expression: Literary and social coding in nineteenth-century France*, edited by Carroll F. Coates. New York: Peter Lang, 1996.

Lucas, Colin. "The Theory and Practice of Denunciation in the French Revolution." *Journal of Modern History* (December 1996): 768-785.

Rowson. *Charlotte Temple, a tale of truth*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964.

Schehr, Lawrence R. *Figures of alterity: French realism and its others*. Stanford:

Stanford University Press, 2003.

Sellers, Charles Grier. *The market revolution : Jacksonian America, 1815-1846*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. *This violent empire: the birth of an American national identity*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

Stern, Julia A. *The plight of feeling : sympathy and dissent in the early American novel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Tanner, Tony. *Adultery in the novel: contract and transgression*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981.

CHAPTER 1

MORAL GUARDIANSHIP IN *CHARLOTTE TEMPLE* AND *ADOLPHE*

Since the late eighteenth century, the role of parents has been two-fold: to provide both moral guidance and affection to their children, so that these offspring can become contributing members of society. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, American and French conduct books for parents provided guidance on how to raise their children to be good citizens. Novels, too, participated in this conversation and showed readers the consequences of deviant behavior. Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* and Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe* are two examples of a genre of books where especially sexual deviance—often in the form of pre- or extra-marital relations—resulted in unmitigated disaster. These novels were part of a multi-layered system of control designed to guard against socially unacceptable behavior. Advice manuals and sentimental novels directly addressed adolescent and adult readers.

In short, literature established itself as a parental figure. When parental guidance was absent or deficient, it could even serve as a substitute parent. While Rowson addresses *Charlotte Temple* to young readers in general, she especially hopes it will "be of service to some who are unfortunate as to have neither friends to advise, or understanding to direct them."[1] The novel as guide opens up the possibility that the parent alone may be an inadequate moral guardian. In *Charlotte Temple* and in *Adolphe*, Rowson and Constant are concerned with precisely this problem: in both novels, the absence of a model parent pushes the child toward an independence that ultimately destroys his or her ability to function in society. While sexual deviance is a catalyst in both *Charlotte Temple* and *Adolphe*, the ultimate tragedy is the resulting imbalance

[1] Rowson, *Charlotte Temple, a Tale of Truth* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), 35.

between individual desires and social norms.

***

Charlotte Temple was the *DaVinci Code* of its time. The novel's readership crossed class and gender lines; it was read by scullery maids and middle-class husbands alike.[2] Since its initial American publication in 1794, between 150,000 and 200,000 copies of *Charlotte Temple* have been printed.[3] In *Revolution and the Word*, Cathy Davidson describes the result of her request to see every copy of Charlotte Temple available at the American Antiquarian Society (AAS):

> Assembling all of the editions was an 'occasion' at AAS. I'll never forget the excited crowd of scholars and professional librarians who assembled around two book cards in which dozens of *Charlotte Temples* had been arranged in chronological order. At a glance, we were all seeing the history of the popular book in America—duodecimos, children's books, gilt-edged gift books, working-class story papers, even a scholarly edition.[4]

Indeed, not until the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did a novel published in America enjoy such a wide readership. The novel's unusual popularity suggests that the themes of this novel, more than many of the other sentimental novels published at the time, had a special significance for its American readers. It is striking that, while the book was originally published in Great Britain, only its American edition went through over two hundred republications, forty-two of them in the first twenty-six

---

[2] Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy : Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 63.

[3] Wendy Martin, "Profile: Susanna Rowson, Early American Novelist," *Women's Studies* 2, no. 1 (1974): 1-8.

[4] Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word : The Rise of the Novel in America*, Expanded ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 42.

years following its initial publication.

Rowson published *Charlotte Temple* during a period of national crisis, when many questioned the Republic's ability to survive political factionalism and political intrigue: “the revolution just over, a new government laboring to gain support and control, and all foundations seemingly left behind, fears of chaos, rootlessness, and abandonment dominated.”[5] During this period of uncertainty, the role of the citizen in the early Republic was continually in question. While questions of political enfranchisement and disenfranchisement generally focused on men, the Republican idea of a nation founded on virtue led to debates about the role of women in nation building. The ideal of the virtuous Republican coincided with a division of gender roles that placed men in the political sphere and women in the “moral and emotional spheres.”[6] Virtue, though it had political implications, was considered the dominion of women. Journals and newspapers of the late eighteenth-century reveal a lively debate about women's role in the Republic, but by the early 1790s, an increased conservatism toward women's roles had gained acceptance.[7] Indeed, Nancy Cott explains in *The Bonds of Womanhood* that the years between 1780 and 1830 were a period of “wide- and deep-ranging transformation, including the appearance of 'domesticity'.”[8] Virtuous women were hailed as the saviors of the nation—they were the Republican answer to male individualism and personal interest.

While attitudes towards women's roles in society and the family were getting

---

[5] Blythe Forcey, "Charlotte Temple and the End of Epistolarity," *American Literature* 63, no. 2 (1991): 225-241.

[6] Ruth H. Bloch, *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture, 1650-1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 49.

[7] Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters : The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, 1st ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), xv.

[8] Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood : "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 3.

more conservative, education for women increased in the postrevolutionary period.[9] In fact, according to Joel Perlmann and Dennis Shirley, literacy in New England "may well have been very prevalent among younger women closer to 1780 than to 1830."[10] The changing literary marketplace reflects this increase in female literacy, as a large number of books and journals were marketed specifically to women. These publications offered moral and religious advice to its female audience, with titles such as "The Young Ladies Parental Monitor," The Polite Lady; or, a course in Education," "A Mother's Advice to her Son and Daughter," "Letters to a Young Lady," among many others.[11] Much more popular than these overtly didactic guides, however, was the sentimental novel. William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy*, Hannah Foster's *The Coquette*, and Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* were among the more famous and earliest American exemplars, but American readers also enjoyed British publications such as Richardson's *Clarissa* and *Pamela*.[12]

When a literary genre enjoys extraordinary popularity in a certain time period, it suggests that the genre fulfills, as Julia Stern terms it, "cultural and psychological needs."[13] This was the case of the sentimental novel, whose stories of "virtue in distress" were very popular in the late eighteenth century.[14] Though often decried as evil, novel writers maintained that their stories of seduction were, in fact, moral guides for their

---

[9] Ibid.; Joel Perlmann and Dennis Shirley, "When Did New England Women Acquire Literacy?," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (1991): 50-67.
[10] Perlmann and Shirley: 51.
[11] While some of these writings were published earlier in England, the articles and books named here first appeared in America in the 1790s.
[12] These are only the most famous titles. Many more of these kinds of novels, as well as the picaresque and gothic novel, were read and shared by both male and female readers.
[13] Julia A. Stern, *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 31.
[14] Ibid.

female readers. [15] Rowson, for example, addresses this issue in all of her novels' prefaces. In *Mentoria* she writes, “true happiness can never be met with dissipation in folly”; in *Reuben and Rachel*, she says that her novel “was written with the design of...showing that not only evil itself, but the very appearance of evil is to be avoided.” In *Charlotte Temple,* she names her readers directly: “For the perusal of the young and thoughtless of the fair sex, this Tale of Truth is designed.”[16] Novel writers had not only the actions of their characters to account for, but also a deep-seated suspicion of the novel as a literary genre.

The sentimental novel both performed and incorporated the debates over virtue, women, and influence that dominated the national conversation in the 1790s. Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* is an important participant in this debate, as the novel questions republican philosophy by interrogating the influence of the Republican Mother, the implications of virtue for women, and the role of the sentimental novel.

Critics have long argued over why *Charlotte Temple* had such an impact on its American audience. The book's very popularity has remained inexplicable to its critics. Leslie Fiedler, author of *Love and Death in the American Novel*, devoted an entire section to explaining *Charlotte Temple*'s enduring popularity:

> To be sure, the popularity of *Charlotte* poses a real problem. Why a book which barely climbs above the lower limits of literacy, and which handles,

---

[15] Mary Sumner Benson, *Women in Eighteenth-Century America; a Study of Opinion and Social Usage*, ed. Faculty of political science of Columbia University, Studies in History Economics, and Public Law (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935); Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic : Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: Norton, 1986); Patricia Jewell McAlexander, "The Creation of the American Eve: The Cultural Dialogue on the Nature and Role of Women in Late-Eighteenth-Century America," *Early American Literature* 9, no. 3 (1975).

[16] Rowson; Susanna Rowson, *Mentoria; or the Young Lady's Friend* (Philadelphia: Printed for Robert Campbell, by Samuel Harrison Smith, 1794); Susanna Rowson, *Reuben and Rachel; or, Tales of Old Times* (London: Minerva-Press, for William Lane, 1799).

> without psychological acuteness or dramatic power, a handful of stereotyped characters in a situation already hopelessly banal by 1790, should have had more than two hundred editions and have survived among certain readers for a hundred and fifty years is a question that cannot be ignored.[17]

Fiedler resolves this dilemma by arguing that the lack of originality in *Charlotte Temple* actually contributed to its longevity because the novel serves as an archetype of the sentimental genre.[18]

Wendy Martin argues that the sentimental novel as a whole, and *Charlotte Temple* especially, benefited from the rise of a middle-class that allowed middle-class women to enjoy leisure pursuits such as reading. In other words, the sentimental novel was "a time filler."[19] Patricia McAlexander takes a more abstract approach. She says that the sentimental novel participated in and spread the "cult of passion," a movement that considered not rationality, but feelings as the source of virtue.[20] Julia Stern makes a similar case for emotion in *The Plight of Feeling*, as she maintains that *Charlotte Temple* is "based on a fantasy of unobstructed relations of sympathy" and that the novel "imagines, creates, and attempts to enfranchise a post-Revolutionary community linked by claims of universal compassion."[21] Marion Rust portrays *Charlotte Temple* as not a fantasy, but a nightmare that reveals "the fatal consequences of a woman's inability to want anything enough to motivate decisive action."[22] Blythe Forcey also argues for a

---

[17] Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Rev. ed. (New York: Stein and Day, 1982), 94.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Martin: 5.
[20] McAlexander: 259.
[21] Stern, 34.
[22] Marion Rust, "What's Wrong with Charlotte Temple?," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2003). http://www.historycooperative.org//journals/wm/60.1/rust.html (accessed 15 February 2007).

political reading of *Charlotte Temple*, as he maintains that the novel is a parable that reflects the early Republic's struggle for identity after a violent break from the "mother country."[23] Much of the recent scholarship on *Charlotte Temple* acknowledges that the novel occupies a liminal space between the private and public spheres, as its tale impacts private lives, but participates in a public discussion on nation-building, influence, and the novel.

Articles written on *Charlotte Temple* have addressed the novel's liminal position, the way it speaks to and for women, and the unequal relationship between the male seducer and the seduced woman. Most scholarship, however, has failed to address the way Rowson examines relationships between women both through and in this novel. At every step, Rowson reveals the way in which women can serve as impostors for the biological Republican mother, often with disastrous results for the young girls they lead astray. Late eighteenth-century American society considered virtuous, Republican mothers the saving grace of the nation; *Charlotte Temple* reveals the dark possibilities of this powerful Republican mother figure, whose influence can as easily ensure a woman's downfall as her success.

Readers can find the first mother-substitute in *Charlotte Temple* not in the beginning chapter, but in the preface; this first rival to the biological mother is, in fact, Susanna Rowson. The first line of the preface, "for the perusal of the young and thoughtless of the fair sex, this Tale of Truth is designed,"[24] establishes Rowson as a motherly, didactic narrator who offers this story as a warning to her girls. Indeed, Rowson makes little distinction between offering advice to her own daughters, and the

[23] Forcey: 227.
[24] Rowson, *Charlotte Temple, a Tale of Truth*, 35.

"daughters of misfortune" who read her book: "I may have Children of my own, said I, to whom this recital may be of use, and if to your own children, said Benevolence, why not to the many daughters of Misfortune who...are thrown on an unfeeling world."[25] From the first page, Rowson as narrator embraces the role of the Republican mother, offering herself especially to those unfortunate readers for whom this figure is somehow absent. Rowson is the Republican mother; her novel is the quintessential Republican text: "republican texts...were authored out of a belief that individual writers could participate in, and even guide, their society's negotiation of [complex social and political issues]."[26] Rowson's position as novelist places her in a position of influence not much different from that attributed to the mother.

This double role of mother and narrator explains Rowson's habit of interrupting the narrative to offer her opinion on the events unfolding in the novel. Blythe Forcey writes at length about this peculiarity in his essay, "Charlotte Temple and the End of Epistolarity," and explains that, without these continual interruptions, Rowson risks leading her young readers astray: "If Rowson had not intervened, Charlotte's simple, quiet voice could easily have been misread or ignored....Rowson, seeking to protect those 'daughters of misfortune' most likely to benefit from Charlotte's experience, must intervene to ensure that her message is effectively delivered."[27] In other words, without this strong narrator presence, Rowson would risk becoming a bad mother, instead of the model parent.

Rowson creates an imagined relationship between herself and her young readers'

---

[25] Ibid., 35.
[26] Grantland S. Rice, *The Transformation of Authorship in America* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 158.
[27] Forcey: 230.

biological mothers—the original Republican guardians of virtue. Rowson is alternately antagonistic and solicitous in addressing these mothers; either way, they are clearly an obstacle between herself and her "daughters." After a particularly favorable description of men in uniform, for example, Rowson addresses herself to the disapproving mother: "Now, my dear sober matron (if a sober matron should deign to turn over these pages before she trusts them to the eye of a darling daughter), let me entreat you not to put on a grave face and thrown down the book in a passion and declare 'tis enough to turn the heads of half the girls in England."[28] The line drips with sarcasm, as Rowson calls this mother a "dear" sober matron, but the term of endearment is clearly disingenuous, especially since Rowson questions whether a good mother would even "deign" to read her book. The address is so antagonistic that it seems intended to anger the guardian of virtue. At the same time, Rowson placates the mother by telling her that Rowson's description is supposed "to ridicule those romantic girls who foolishly imagine a red coat and silver epaulet constitute the fine gentleman."[29] In this second line, she abandons antagonism and instead guides the mother in a "correct" reading of the situation.

Rowson seems, however, to distrust even the efforts of this "sober matron," and after ridiculing the mother, steps in to provide her own interpretation of the novel directly to her young readers—and to offer herself as a "friend" (a new kind of relationship) while maintaining an essentially maternal role. She describes for these young women the benefits of virginity in romantic detail:

> Look, my dear friends, at yonder lovely Virgin, arrayed in a white robe devoid of ornament; behold the meekness of her countenance, the modesty

[28] Rowson, *Charlotte Temple, a Tale of Truth*, 59.
[29] Ibid., 59.

> of her gait; her handmaids are *Humility, Filial Piety, Conjugal Affection, Industry, and Benevolence*; her name is *Content;* she holds in her hand the cup of true felicity, and when once you have formed an intimate acquaintance with these her attendants, nay you must admit them as your bosom friends and chief counsellors, then, whatever may be your situation in life, the meek eyed Virgin will immediately take up her abode with you.[30]

Virginity, Rowson tells her readers, is the source of all future happiness for a young woman. The appeal she makes to her young girls does, however, differ from the argument the biological mother might make for virginity. Instead of focusing on the economic consequences of a lost virginity or the shame pre-marital pregnancy brings to the family, Rowson makes Virginity appealing by describing it in a language sure to appeal to young women—the language of romance.

Rowson establishes a relationship with her readers by using the seductive methods she rejects in her characters. Elizabeth Barnes has explained that, in sentimental novels, "the evocation of feeling becomes its own instrument of discipline, as readers' sympathies are employed in the service of modifying readers' behavior."[31] Rowson engages readers' sympathies by extolling the benefits of virtue and virginity, or by evoking the pathos of Charlotte's eventual abandonment.

Rowson inserts herself between the biological mother and her young, novel-reading daughter, suggesting that she doubts the ability of the Republican mother to exercise adequate control over her daughter. Linda Kerber has demonstrated that the

---

[30] Ibid.
[31] Barnes, 41.

Republican mother should instill virtue in her daughter, who is also a future Republican mother. A mother's inability to do so would imperil Republican virtue—the crux of national stability. *Charlotte Temple* depicts this failure on the part of the mother and the disastrous consequences for the daughters of the revolution. Without the support of her mother in resisting the emotional assaults from socially deviant seducers, the daughter is doomed to a life of deviance herself.

Lucy Temple is Charlotte's mother. Lucy Temple exhibits all the traits of the perfect wife and mother, but she fails to prevent her daughter's fall from grace. The example that Lucy sets as a young woman and a mother is exemplary: she is the ideally virtuous woman. In fact, Rowson's description of Lucy Temple mirrors the description of happy Virginity cited above:

> [Lucy] was fair as the lily, but sorrow had nipped the rose in her cheek before it was half blown. Her eyes were blue; and her hair, which was a light brown, was slightly confined under a plain muslin cap, tied round with a black ribbon; a white linen gown and plain lawn handkerchief composed the remainder of her dress; and in this simple attire she was more irresistibly charming to such a heart as Temple's than she would have been if adorned with all the splendour of a birth-right belle.[32]

Lucy is "fair," dressed in "simple attire"—a "white gown and plain lawn handkerchief." Everything about her appearance projects modesty and virtue. Compare this to Rowson's similar description of the Virgin ideal: "yonder lovely Virgin, arrayed in a white robe devoid of ornament; behold the meekness of her countenance, the modesty of her gait."[33]

---

[32] Rowson, *Charlotte Temple, a Tale of Truth*, 41.
[33] Ibid., 66.

Lucy Temple is the perfect woman because she maintains this Virginity until a socially appropriate marriage.

The quality that most clearly establishes Lucy Temple as a virtuous woman is her ability to resist seduction. When Lucy was a young woman, an unscrupulous upper-class suitor put financial pressure on Lucy's family because he wanted Lucy as a concubine: "with all the calmness of a cool, deliberate villain, he avowed his passion for Lucy, declared her situation in life would not permit him to marry her, but offered to release me immediately, and make any settlement on her, if George would persuade her to live, as he impiously termed it, a life of honour."[34] Lucy and her father refuse, of course, and both of them enter debtors' prison. This self-preservation seduces her future husband, Mr. Temple but dooms Charlotte, for whom this old method of preserving virtue is no match against the subtle seductions of Montraville.

The late eighteenth century specifically stressed the moral guidance a mother should provide: "parents were obligated to aid in the salvation of their children"[35]; in America, mother's most important to the new republic contributions were morality and patriotism.[36] Though Lucy Temple is a paragon of virtue herself, she fails to teach her child morality because Lucy's moral code is no longer adequate for the new generation of seducers that Charlotte encounters. Lucy had only to resist the financial temptation of an otherwise unsentimental man who did not profess to love her; Charlotte has to resist a seducer who tempts her through the language of love—a much more personal approach.

The setting of *Charlotte Temple* is England and America immediately before the American Revolution, as the seducer Montraville and his friend Belcour are British

[34] Ibid., 45.
[35] Cott, 85.
[36] Norton, 248.

soldiers traveling to the colonies to fight. Nevertheless, the relationships that Rowson presents in *Charlotte Temple* more accurately reflect the 1790s, when parental control over children was declining, seventy-five percent of white America was under the age of twenty-four and highly mobile, and illegitimacy rates reached "historic heights."[37] Statistics show a culture shift in courtship styles that must have caused quite a rift in the courting experiences of parents and their children. Within a generation, the mother provided a weak defense against a culture increasingly inclined towards alliances based on affection, rather than parental choice.[38] The novel also contributed something to this shift, as "romantic love and the romantic novel grew together after 1780."[39]

For our heroine, this shift means that Charlotte, schooled in her mother's moral code, has no defenses against these new enemies to virtue. They succeed because they are not the unscrupulous and socially distant noblemen that Lucy Temple resisted in her youth. Rather, Charlotte's seducers are men and women who profess genuinely to care for Charlotte—they create an alliance with her based primarily on affection. Montraville uses romantic language in his speeches to Charlotte because he understands the emotional impact they have on a young girl. As Rowson recounts, "Montraville was tender, eloquent, ardent, and yet respectful." His phrasing mimics that of poetry: "Will you not bless me by an assurance that when we are divided by a vast expanse of sea I shall not be forgotten?" His words play on Charlotte's fears: "when I leave my native land, perhaps a

---

[37] Ellen K. Rothman, "Sex and Self-Control: Middle Class Courtship in America, 1770-1870," in *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective*, ed. Michael Gordon (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 395.

[38] While the marriage between Lucy Temple and her husband is based on affection, such an alliance was clearly uncommon in Mrs. Temple's youth. Rowson spends a significant portion of her narrative detailing the senior Mr. Temple's attempts to convince his son to enter into an economically advantageous alliance. When his son refuses, he unsentimentally marries the woman himself.

[39] Carl N. Degler, *At Odds : Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (Oxford [Oxfordshire]: Oxford University Press, 1981), 16.

few short weeks may terminate my existence; the perils of the ocean—the dangers of war."[40] The moment of Charlotte's greatest challenge—deciding between Montraville and her parents—is also the moment of Montraville's most emotional appeal: "Cruel Charlotte!...If you disappoint my ardent hopes, by all that is sacred this hand shall put a period to my existence. I can not—will not live without you."[41] Having already established a relationship ostensibly based on affection, Montraville convinces Charlotte by appealing to her feelings.

Montraville makes quite an impression on Charlotte, but Charlotte's most effective seducer is a woman. Mademoiselle La Rue, the narrator explains to her readers, is a French woman who has lived "in open defiance of all moral and religious duties."[42] She is a governess at the ladies' academy Charlotte attends, and determined to lower Charlotte to her moral level. Rowson warns her readers that woman like Mademoiselle La Rue prey on innocent girls:

> Once a woman has stifled the sense of shame in her own bosom, when once she has lost sight of the basis on which reputation, honour, everything that should be dear to the female heart, rests, she grows hardened in guilt, and will spare no pains to bring down innocence and beauty to the shocking level with herself: and this proceeds from that diabolical spirit of envy.[43]

Throughout the story, La Rue uses sentimentality—an excess of emotion—to seduce Charlotte into misbehavior. In every encounter with La Rue, Charlotte is overwhelmed by

---

[40] Rowson, *Charlotte Temple, a Tale of Truth*, 71.
[41] Ibid., 82.
42 Rowson, 57.

[43] Rowson, *Charlotte Temple, a Tale of Truth*, 64.

the emotional appeal of La Rue's address. This is sentimentality gone awry, with the bad mother leading Charlotte ever closer to moral transgressions.

As a governess, La Rue has a potent influence on young women. She should serve as a mother-substitute while Charlotte is away from home and Charlotte's willingness to obey her suggest that she sees La Rue in this light. Instead, La Rue assumes the role of female seducer, a confusing change for Charlotte. When Charlotte says that the headmistress of the school will likely discover that La Rue and Charlotte spent an evening in the company of some ungentlemanly men, La Rue tells Charlotte, "it will be a very kind return for that partiality which led me to prefer you before any of the rest of the ladies; but perhaps it will give you pleasure...to see me deprived of bread." At the same time, Rowson explains, La Rue "let[s] fall some hypocritical tears."[44] Here, La Rue seduces Charlotte into condoning immoral behavior by playing on Charlotte's affections for La Rue and casting herself in a pitiful role that mirrors Montraville's words.

When Charlotte turns to her governess for advice on dealing with Montraville's advances, La Rue again uses affect to her advantage, this time employing ridicule. Charlotte determines to hand the love letter she received to her mother for inspection, but La Rue mocks her:

> Lord bless you, my dear girl! cried the teacher smiling, have you a mind to be in leading strings all your life time? Prithee open the letter, read it, and judge for yourself; if you shew it to your mother the consequence will be you will be taken from school, and a strict guard kept over you, so you will stand no chance of ever seeing the smart young officer again.[45]

[44] Ibid., 62.
[45] Ibid.

La Rue asks Charlotte if she wants to "be in leading strings" all her life to imply that Charlotte is allowing herself to be treated like a baby. The implication is that a teenage girl should want more independence. La Rue purposely inserts herself between Charlotte and Charlotte's mother by explaining that the mother poses a threat to Charlotte's freedom. La Rue simultaneously replaces the mother as confidante and downplays the role of the mother as protectress.

When Charlotte decides not to meet Montraville for a final time before he leaves for America, Mademoiselle La Rue uses pathos to convince Charlotte otherwise: "You will have the pleasure to reflect, that you have deceived the man who adores you, and whom in your heart you prefer to all other men, and that you are separated from him forever."[46] Mademoiselle La Rue portrays Charlotte as the seducer who has deceived Montraville.

La Rue adds to this assault on Charlotte's emotions by telling her that she will face the contempt and ridicule of her friends if she refuses to go: "You will bear the odium of having formed the resolution of eloping, and every girl of spirit will laugh at your want of fortitude to put it into execution, while prudes and fools will load you with reproach and contempt. You will have lost the confidence of your parents, incurred their anger, and the scoffs of the world."[47] In an admirably confounding argument, La Rue convinces Charlotte that, having already taken the first steps on a path to sin, Charlotte can only save her reputation by ruining it.

Charlotte's reaction demonstrates her total inability to respond to such deceptive language: "This eloquent harangue was given with such volubility, that Charlotte could

[46] Ibid., 81.
[47] Ibid., 80-81.

not find an opportunity to interrupt her, 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."[48] Mademoiselle La Rue's personality and words are so forceful and "eloquent" that Charlotte is overwhelmed. Moreover, even when she attempts to reply ideas are "so confused" by La Rue's argument that she cannot oppose it. La Rue is supposed to act as a mother figure; when the "mother" overwhelms Charlotte with her argument, the young girl can do little to resist a person who should be a moral guide.

The relationship between Charlotte and La Rue is unequal because Charlotte cannot read Mademoiselle La Rue. Her very innocence and good nature—those qualities which benefited Lucy Temple—are Charlotte's downfall. When La Rue accuses Charlotte of wanting her to be thrown out of the school, Rowson writes, "This [accusation] was touching Charlotte in the most vulnerable part: she rose from her seat, and taking Mademoiselle's hand--'You know, my dear La Rue,' said she, 'I love you too well to do anything that would injure you in my governess's opinion."[49] Charlotte fails to read La Rue's tears as "hypocritical" and self-serving, and sees only her distress. Similarly, when La Rue convinces her to read the first letter from Montraville, she fails to see that, as she reads, "Mademoiselle eyes the unsuspecting Charlotte...with a malignant pleasure."[50] Charlotte reacts to the emotional impact that La Rue's words have on her, without considering the French woman's motive. Charlotte's biological mother has not prepared her for the deceptions of this bad mother.

La Rue, on the other hand, is not affected by appeals to her emotions. She wields this power over both Charlotte and the man she marries on her way over to America, but

[48] Ibid., 81.
[49] Ibid., 64.
[50] Ibid., 64.

remains unmoved by Charlotte's final pleas for help. When Charlotte arrives at the New York home of Mademoiselle La Rue, the now-married Mrs. Crayton, even the doorman cannot resist her pleas: "he knew that his lady was engaged...yet there was something in her countenance that rather interested him in her favor." The narrator adds, "the tremulous accent, the tearful eye, must have moved any heart not composed of adamant. The man took the letter from the poor suppliant, and hastily ascended the staircase." A complete stranger cannot resist Charlotte's pitiful appearance, but Mrs. Crayton feels no such pangs: "Mrs. Crayton glanced her eye carelessly over the contents...Go tell the woman I can't do any thing in it. I'm sorry, but one can't relieve every body."[51] Even when Charlotte finally enters the room and begs for help on her knees, the narrator recounts, "the kneeling figure of Charlotte in her *affecting* situation might have moved the heart of a stoic to compassion; but Mrs. Crayton remained inflexible."[52] As the narrator points out, Charlotte's appeal should impact the affective part of Mrs. Crayton. Female virtue was to be, as Kerber has argued, the civilizing force of the republic. But La Rue is entirely devoid of any virtue, suggesting that a republic that relies on female virtue for stability is at risk of internal sabotage.

Not all women who propose themselves as substitute mothers in *Charlotte Temple* are bad. But they are an ineffective antidote to women like La Rue, who uses her role as mother-substitute to achieve her own ends. By the middle of the novel, Rowson introduces Mrs. Beauchamp, the American-based version of Lucy Temple. Mrs. Beauchamp, like Lucy Temple, is "mild and engaging," and a devoted wife with a "beloved husband." She prefers the country to the city and had "prevailed on her husband

[51] Ibid., 149.
[52] Ibid., 149. *Italics mine.*

to take a house a few miles from New York City."[53] While she lives in America, Mrs. Beauchamp is British like Lucy Temple. Indeed, Mrs. Beauchamp seems to be Rowson's alter ego in the novel. Rowson's description of Mrs. Beauchamp's concerns for Charlotte very much echo Rowson's own laments about girls without moral guides: "[Mrs. Beauchamp] saw the melancholy so conspicuous in her countenance, and her heart bled at the reflection, that perhaps deprived of honour, friends, all that was valuable in life, she was doomed to linger out a wretched existence in a strange land."[54] Mrs. Beauchamp considers Charlotte a girl in need of mothering, and she offers her mothering in the form of friendship. She tells her husband, "If I thought you would not blame me, I would pay her a visit, offer her my friendship, and endeavour to restore to her heart that peace she seems to have lost."[55] When she meets Charlotte, Mrs. Beauchamp tells her, "I flatter myself you will henceforth consider me as your friend."[56]

In this capacity—as a substitute for the Republican mother—Mrs. Beauchamp greatly resembles Rowson, who purports to play a similar role as a novelist. The book she writes is for the "young and thoughtless of the fairer sex," especially those who lack proper guidance. But even this good mother cannot save Charlotte from death. At the moment of Charlotte's greatest need, when she is near term and has been utterly abandoned by Montraville, Mrs. Beauchamp travels to Rhode Island with her husband. As was the case with Mrs. Temple, Mrs. Beauchamp is too distant from Charlotte to provide much guidance. By contrast, the novel written by Rowson does not suffer from the physical distance of the good mothers; it is easily transportable—a pocket mother

[53] Ibid., 111.
[54] Ibid., 111.
[55] Ibid., 112.
[56] Ibid., 115.

figure.

Deprived of this good Republican woman's advice, Charlotte turns first to a farmer's wife and then to Mrs. Crayton (La Rue) for help. Both reject her, and she ultimately gives birth in a "wretched bed, without hangings and but poorly supplied with covering."[57] Mrs. Beauchamp arrives from Rhode Island, but too late to save Charlotte. Rather improbably, Mr. Temple arrives from England, but only in time to watch her die in his arms. Montraville rediscovers Charlotte as well, but can only follow her funeral procession and beg forgiveness from Charlotte's father. Charlotte's mother remains in England, distant, perfect, and useless.

Virtue as a guiding light for American women, and America as a whole seems an enterprise doomed to fail. Charlotte's innocence inadequately prepares her for the male and female seducers she encounters. The virtue that benefited Lucy Temple and Mrs. Beauchamp has become a liability in Charlotte's generation. The novel *Charlotte Temple* offers a pessimistic portrayal of the Republican mother's ability to combat the traitors and villains threatening social harmony and the new generation of Republican women. The very power attributed to women's influence over the younger generation opened up the possibility of women using this power for bad.

***

If Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* is the tale of the ineffectual mother, Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe* is the tale of the ineffectual father. The novel is a case study of the tension between individual desires and social norms, with the father figures in *Adolphe* as the failed mediators between these two impulses.

After working on versions of *Adolphe* for almost a decade, Constant chose to

[57] Ibid., 155.

publish the novel during a particularly unbalanced moment in French history and in his own life.[58] The 100 Days of Napoleon's return had ended in defeat hardly a year before. Benjamin Constant, long an opponent of Napoleon, had compromised himself by supporting Napoleon during the 100 Days. In fact, he worked closely with the Emperor to write the *Acte additionel* and defended the Emperor in writings that "implicitly drew an analogy between the Bonapartism of the Hundred Days and the revolutionary spirit of '1792'."[59] After Napoleon's fall, Constant's Bonapartist alliances tarnished his reputation as a liberalist. At this moment of unrest, Constant felt compelled to publish *Adolphe*. It was an obsession even he could not quite explain: "having suffered myself to be drawn into the printing of a little novel which I realize in the present awful crisis of my country, I am somewhat ashamed to publish. I am nevertheless obliged to go on."[60]

This short, popular novel includes as much turmoil as the French political scene at the time of publication. Neither this fictional world, nor the political world, bode well for the French sons of the Revolution. In this 1816 story, the young Adolphe acquires a mistress, Ellénore. Plagued by guilt about his inability to love her, Adolphe can neither leave Ellénore, nor remain with her. Though he is supposed to work for his father, Adolphe continually asks for more time to remain with his dependent mistress. Adolphe's indulgent father and his father-substitutes repeatedly give in to Adolphe's demands for more freedom. Totally at liberty, Adolphe loses all liberty to Ellénore, even after her death: "il n'a fait aucun usage d'une liberté reconquise au prix de tant de douleurs et de

---

[58] Paul Delbouille, *Genèse, Structure Et Destin D'adolphe* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la faculté de philosophie et lettres de l'Université de Liège, 1971).

[59] Sudhir Hazareesingh, "Napoleonic Memory in Nineteenth-Century France: The Making of a Liberal Legend," *MLN* 120, no. 4 (2005): 754.

[60] J. Seznec, "Deux Lettres De Benjamin Constant Sur Adolphe Et Les Cent Jours," in *The French Mind; Studies in Honour of Gustave Rudler*, ed. Will Grayburn Moore et al.(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

tant de larmes."[61] Neither the freedom afforded by the father(s) nor the control exercised by Ellénore create the balanced individual who can successfully enter public life. Though Ellénore dies, Constant's narrator mourns the death of Adolphe's career as a contributing citizen most: "Adolphe a été puni de son caractère même, il n'a suivi aucune carrière utile."[62]

There are no events in the novel to situate the story within a historical framework. Rather, Adolphe's story takes place "the realm of the unparticularized human problem."[63] And yet, the novel's support for a balance between individual freedom and social control reflects Constant's political views, which were strongly influenced by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era. Especially in his later writings, finding the balance between the individual and society shaped the development of what Constant termed "liberalism." According to Sudhir Hazareensingh, liberalism's objective was "to 'finish' the Revolution by creating a stable political system embedded in a comprehensive system of laws."[64] Constant's liberalism was an ideology based on stability. In *Ecrits Politiques*, Constant writes, "J'ai défendu quarante ans le même principe, liberté en tout...: et par liberté, j'entends le triomphe de l'individualité, tant sur l'autorité qui voudrait gouverner par le despotisme, que sur les masses qui réclament le droit d'asservir la minorité à la majorité." While Constant grants liberty to the individual, he immediately qualifies this liberty: "la majorité a [le droit] de contraindre la minorité á respecter l'ordre."[65] In other words, the freedom of the individual and the demands of social order must be balanced.

---

[61] Benjamin Constant, *Adolphe* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1965), 179.
[62] Ibid., 182.
[63] Edward D. Sullivan, "Constraint and Expansion in Benjamin Constant's "Adolphe"," *The French Review* 32, no. 4 (1959): 293.
[64] Hazareesingh: 749.
[65] Benjamin Constant, "Melanges De Litterature Et De Politique (1829)," in *Ecrits Politiques*, ed. Marcel Gauchet(Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

Even during the French Revolution, Constant's support for the Republic was tempered by his concerns about the revolutionaries' dismissal of public opinion and historical tradition, two factors that he believed balanced revolutionary fervor.[66]

Considered within the framework of this lifelong political ideology, *Adolphe* depicts the role of the social will in mediating between too much freedom and too much control. Constant's repeated references to social influences in *Adolphe* suggest that he was aware of the "politics" of interpersonal relationships. In the preface to the second edition of *Adolphe*, Constant both dismisses and acknowledges the importance of social relations. While he claims to privilege the individual, Constant is unable to decide whether *Adolphe* demonstrates the inherent danger of seduction or the unhappy consequences of social meddling. Constant writes, "Indépendamment de ces liaisons établies que la société tolère et condamne, il y a dans la simple habitude d'emprunter le langage de l'amour, et de se donner ou de faire naître en d'autres des émotions de coeur passagères, un danger qui n'a pas été suffisamment apprécie jusqu'ici."[67] In this sentence, Constant introduces "society" as a meddling social body and insists that the real danger is the seducer's borrowed "language of love." Constant also says that he does not care about "la rigeur des jugements publics" or "la malveillance de cette société implacable."[68] In the same preface he writes, "la société, désapprobratice et dédaigneuse, aurait versé tous ses venins sur l'affection que son aveu n'eût pas sanctionné."[69] Society as a controlling social body occupies a troubled space and continues to do so throughout the novel proper.

The structure of the novel insists on and anticipates social involvement through

---

[66] K. Steven Vincent, "Benjamin Constant, the French Revolution, and the Origins of French Romantic Liberalism," *French Historical Studies* 23, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 623.
[67] Constant, *Adolphe*, 35.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., 41.

the reading public. The structure of the novel allows the readers to become a disapproving witness to deviance, while distancing readers from the characters themselves. Constant does this by including a frame story that explains the circumstances of the novel's publication. According to the frame, *Adolphe* is the abandoned (or lost) memoir of Adolphe himself. The "editor" of the book had the manuscript sent to him by mistake after spending several weeks in an Italian inn with another traveler—presumed to be Adolphe. The manuscript formed part of a collection of documents found after both travelers had left the inn: "je reçus, à Naples, une lettre de l'hôte de Cerenza, avec une cassette trouvée. . . . Elle renfermait beaucoup de lettres..., un portrait de femme et un cahier contenant l'anecdote ou l'histoire qu'on va lire."[70] Since the editor has no way of contacting the other traveler, he keeps the manuscript for years, finally deciding to publish it.

Before the editor receives the manuscript, it first passes from the person who finds it, to the innkeeper, and to the postman. The memoir then travels from the editor to a friend of his who recommends to the editor that it be published: "Vous devriez, monsieur, publier cette anecdote. Elle ne peut désormais blesser personne, et ne serait pas, à mon avis, sans utilité."[71] An outsider, the editor, decides to publish the story of Adolphe, intending it as "une leçon instructive...aux hommes" and "une histoire assez vraie de la misère du coeur humain."[72] Found by strangers, read by strangers, judged by strangers, *Adolphe* is from the beginning the concern and property of society, which chooses to publish and publicize a private story. Moreover, the representatives of society who recommend its publication—the editor and a friend of the editor—consider its publication

[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., 178.
[72] Ibid., 181.

as socially beneficial. As the editor points out in a letter to his acquaintance, readers of *Adolphe* will learn that "le caractère, la fermeté, la fidélité, la bonté, sont les dons qu'il faut demander au ciel."[73] The readers participate in this act of social norming by becoming the audience intended by the "éditeur." It is for them that the story should prove useful.

The main story continues this emphasis on the reader's participation by establishing a strong relationship between the didactic narrator and the reader. In his analysis of the "narrataire" in *Adolphe*, John T. Booker writes, "there are a number of passages where the use of a 'nous' would seem to invite the participation of a *narrataire* and which in fact relate Adolphe's personal conduct to what he sees as general patterns of human behavior."[74] Remarking, for example, upon the pressure society places upon each individual, the narrator in Adolphe writes, "[La société] pèse tellement sur *nous*, son influence sourde est tellement puissante, qu'elle ne tarde pas à *nous* façonner d'après le moule universel."[75] Including the reader in these assertions establishes a kind of dialogue, or relationship between the narrator and the "narrataire." But this approach also distances the reader from the deviant Adolphe and Ellénore; the narrator repeatedly breaks the "fourth wall" by directly addressing the reader. He thereby prevents the reader from becoming absorbed in the story and identifying with the characters, rather than against the characters.

The novel becomes a kind of *discours*, a form of communication that Emile Benveniste defines as "tout énonciation supposant un locuteur et un auditeur, et chez le

---

[73] Ibid.
[74] John T. Booker, "The Implied Narrataire in Adolphe," *The French Review* 51, no. 5 (1978): 669.
[75] Constant, *Adolphe*, 59.

premier l'intention d'influencer l'autre en quelque manière."[76] Gerald Prince's definition of *narration* also proves useful here, as he explicitly extends the concept of "narration" to written works: "toute narration, qu'elle soit orale ou écrite...présuppose...un narrataire."[77] To influence the other is precisely the goal of *Adolphe*, a novel with which Constant warns readers, "c'est ne pas commencer de telles liaisons qu'il faut pour le bonheur de la vie; quand on est entré dans cette route, on n'a plus que le choix des maux."[78] Advice and maxims such as these create an entire community of *narrataire*s who are invited to respond to and learn from the trials of the deviant Adolphe and Ellénore.

From the anecdotes of contemporary reactions to the novel, it appears that reactions to Adolphe's story ranged from anguish to revolt. The duc de Broglie recounts in a journal entry from 1815 how a group of Constant's acquaintances—and Constant himself—reacted to a reading of the novel:

> A la fin, [Constant] ne put la contenir: il éclata en sanglots; la contagion gagna la réunion tout entière, elle-même fort émue; ce ne fut que pleurs et gemissements; puis, tout à coup...les sanglots devenus convulsif tournèrent en éclats de rire nerveux et insurmontables.[79]

This rather extreme reaction appears to be an instance of group hysteria. The narrataires react as a unit—as a community—to *Adolphe*. Other listeners react with anger to Adolphe, as Constant recounts in his own diary on February 24, 1807: "Lu mon roman à Mme de Coigny. Effet bizarre de cet ouvrage sur elle. Revolte contre le héros." In May of the same year, Constant writes, "Lu mon roman à Fauriel. Effet bizarre de cet ouvrage sur

---

[76] Emile Benveniste, *Problèmes De Linguistique Générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 242.
[77] Gerald Prince, "Introduction a L'etude Du Narrataire," *Poetique* 14, no. (1973): 178.
[78] Constant, *Adolphe*, 41.
[79] Cited in Delbouille, 388.

lui. Il est donc impossible de faire comprendre mon caractère."[80] In both of the cases Constant recounts in this diary, the readers react against the characters, rather than identifying with them. Though Constant expresses some confusion with this reaction, his own narrator, as illustrated above, sets the stage for this distancing from Adolphe and Ellénore.

One of the key figures in Adolphe is the emotionally distant father. "Je trouvais dans mon père, non pas un censeur, mais un observateur froid et caustique…. Je ne me souviens pas, pendant mes dix-huit premières années, d'avoir eu jamais un entretien d'une heure avec lui."[81] This father should be the link between Adolphe and social norms, but can only guide Adolphe at a distance: "ses lettres étaient affectueuses, pleines de conseils, raisonnables et sensibles; mais à peine étions-nous en présence l'un de l'autre qu'il y avait en lui quelque chose de contraint que je ne pouvais m'expliquer."[82] Not surprisingly, this strained relationship is a major influence on Adolphe's social development:

> Aussi timide que lui, mais plus agité, parce que j'étais plus jeune, je m'accoutumai à renfermer en moi-même tout ce que j'éprouvais, à ne former que des plans solitaires, à ne compter que sur moi pour leur exécution, à considérer les avis, l'intérêt, l'assistance, et jusqu'à la seule présence des autres comme une gêne et comme une obstacle."[83]

The father's emotional frigidness develops Adolphe's individual character without the mitigating considerations for social norms and expectations. He can no longer conceive

---

[80] Ibid., 35.
[81] Constant, *Adolphe*, 52.
[82] Ibid., 53.
[83] Ibid.

of himself in relation to other people.

Carol Mossman has argued that "how the Son is to inherit from the Father" is a central question in *Adolphe*.[84] While Mossman discusses a financial inheritance, the question of inheritance also has a more ominous side. In *Adolphe,* the son instead inherits from his father the disturbed interpersonal behavior that will doom Ellénore. The father should serve as Adolphe's moral guide. But Adolphe's father is especially immoral in questions of love: "J'avais, dans la maison de mon père, adopté sur les femmes un système assez immoral. Mon père, bien qu'il observât strictement les convenances extérieures, se permettait assez fréquemment des propos légers sur les liaisons d'amours."[85] With this failed father as model, Adolphe never learns how to love in a socially acceptable way—the sins of the father become the downfall of the son.

While Adolphe makes all the right moves in courting Ellénore, he considers her a project, admitting to his reader, "Elle m'occupait sans cesse: je formai mille projets; j'inventais mille moyens de conquête."[86] But, as Adolphe confesses, "ma timidité me quittait dès que je m'éloignais d'Ellénore."[87] Unable to relate to women—or, for that matter, to people in general—Ellénore becomes a concept to Adolphe whose actual presence confounds his fantasies of seduction. Even after Adolphe succeeds in seducing Ellénore, their relationship remains non-reciprocal. Ellénore loves him, but Adolphe does not love Ellénore. Instead, she becomes a relationship that Adolphe must manage.

Relationships require taking on a responsibility toward the other. This is an idea that Adolphe rejects, but of which Constant was very conscious. According to Edward

---

[84] Carol A. Mossman, *Politics and Narratives of Birth Gynocolonization from Rousseau to Zola*,, Cambridge Studies in French ; 41 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 82.
[85] Constant, *Adolphe*, 62.
[86] Ibid., 69.
[87] Ibid.

Sullivan, "Benjamin Constant, as a political observer, was peculiarly conscious of the connotations of the word liberty and recognized that liberty involves responsibility."[88] Sullivan claims that Adolphe's "abdication of responsibility" also has political relevance. The more available Ellénore makes herself and the more liberty Adolphe has to remain with her, the more oppressive Adolphe's responsibilities appear. When Ellénore leaves her longtime partner and tells Adolphe, "tout est rompu...je suis parfaitement libre,"[89] Adolphe is horrified. Now that both Ellénore and Adolphe are entirely free to pursue their deviant relationship, the responsibility of maintaining this relationship becomes too much for Adolphe.

At the same time, Adolphe and Ellénore are beset by outsiders, who take on the social norming that Adolphe's father has neglected. Adolphe is inundated with reprobations: "quelques amis de mon père m'adressèrent des représentations sérieuses" and with unwanted congratulations: "les jeunes gens...me félicitèrent de ma conquête et me promirent de m'imiter."[90] He must also consider the power of public opinion and laments his inability to control it: "Je suis convaincu que, si j'avais eu de l'amour pour Ellénore, j'aurais ramené l'opinion sur elle et sur moi....Mais je n'étais qu'un homme faible, reconnaissant, et dominé."[91] If only Adolphe truly loved Ellénore, he believes, perhaps he could influence social opinion. Adolphe sways constantly between his guilt over seducing Ellénore and his desire to escape public pressure. As Annaliese Wernli asserts in her study of Constant's liberty and spiritualism, "on voit déjà que, ne pouvant jamais se décider pour ou contre elle, il sera condamné à osciller perpetuellement entre

[88] Sullivan: 298.
[89] Constant, *Adolphe*, 99.
[90] Ibid., 102.
[91] Ibid.

deux rôles, la société et Ellénore, c'est à dire, l'intérêt bien entendu et le sentiment intime."[92] Whether with Ellénore or with society, Adolphe has lost his coveted liberty. Adolphe pursued Ellénore to assert his individual liberty and ended up losing that liberty altogether.

Adolphe's concerns about public opinion—and his realization that it is inescapable—paralyze him: "[Ellénore] souffrait de la solitude, elle rougissait de la société. Ah! Sans doute j'aurais dû la consoler; j'aurais dû la serrer contre mon coeur, lui dire: 'Vivons l'un pour l'autre, oublions des hommes qui nous méconnaissent, soyons heureux de notre seule estime et de notre seul amour'."[93] As Adolphe soon realizes, and as the narrator points out repeatedly, it is impossible to live happily in a relationship uniformly condemned by society. The social pressure to conform is simply too strong: "Cette société d'ailleurs n'a rien à en craindre. Elle pèse tellement sur nous, son influence sourde est tellement puissante, qu'elle ne tarde pas à nous façonner d'après le moule universel."[94] The influence of society seeps into the most intimate relationships and forces everyone to conform to the "moule universel," the universal mold.

What starts as a novel develops into a philosophical treatise on the relationship between the individual and society. According to Adolphe the philosopher, the will of the many can influence even a man's free will: "Les lois de la société sont plus fortes que les volontés des hommes; les sentiments les plus impérieux se brisent contre la fatalité des circonstances. En vain l'on s'obstine à ne consulter que son coeur; on est condamné tôt ou

[92] Annaliese Wernli, *Le Théme De La Liberté Dans L'itinéraire Spirituel De Benjamin Constant* (Zurich: Juris Druck & Verlag, 1968), 84.
[93] Constant, *Adolphe*, 103.
[94] Ibid., 59.

tard à écouter la raison."[95] "La raison" is always in harmony with social opinion; the heart, on the other hand, is the dominion of the individual.

The imbalance between head and heart, society and individual, is Ellénore's downfall. Unlike Adolphe, she places a blind faith in the power of the heart to overcome social rules. Perhaps because she had once succeeded in this endeavor in her relationship with comte de P***, Ellénore believes that she can repeat her defiance with Adolphe. She is mistaken. The wealth of the count meant that his friends and acquaintances felt compelled to acknowledge Ellénore because of their *social* relationship with the count. The end of Ellénore's relationship with the comte de P*** also means the end of such respect: "Deux parentes de M. de P***, qu'il avait forcées par son ascendant à se lier avec elle, mirent le plus grand éclat dans leur rupture."[96] Adolphe has no similar social connections or wealth, and so cannot offer Ellénore the same protections. While Ellénore's relationship with the comte was one of dependance, she and Adolphe are "dans une parfaite égalité."[97]

This "parfaite égalité" renders Ellénore incapable of seeing her actions in a social context. As Adolphe explains, "Le malheur d'Ellénore prouve que le sentiment le plus passionné ne saurait lutter contre l'ordre des choses. La société est trop puissante, elle se reproduit sous trop de formes, elle mêle trop d'amertumes à l'amour qu'elle n'a pas sanctionné."[98] Social demands will always win out over the individual desires of a woman. The carefully maintained strictures of social interaction ensure that the relationships society will tolerate are tempered by their impact on the community.

---

[95] Ibid., 119.
[96] Ibid., 103.
[97] Ibid., 92.
[98] Ibid., 178.

Adolphe provides an interesting study on the consequences of social isolation. Ellénore professes that she only wants to be with Adolphe; when he was courting her, Adolphe professed that he could not live without Ellénore for more than a few hours. Now, both have what they professed to want—each other. Unfortunately, this means that they have no one else. Ellénore and Adolphe's former social circle effectively shuns the couple and isolates them from the social interaction that may have saved their relationship. Thrown together without relief, united now in their very isolation, the couple must find a way to relate outside of social paramaters. The result is disastrous. Ellénore and Adolphe turn on each other. The absence of other relationships lends an exaggerated importance to their relations, and renders both entirely unhappy. Adolphe recounts, "Ellénore, nous dissimulions l'un avec l'autre....Nous nous prodiguions de caresses, nous parlions d'amour; mais nous parlions d'amour de peur de nous parler d'autre chose."[99] With love as the only acceptable topic, love becomes a distraction, not a feeling.

Constant predicted in his political writings that such single-mindedness could prove disastrous. In "Des Réactions Politiques," he writes, "il n'est pas dans la nature d'un gouvernement de suivre toujours la ligne des principes, en marchant contre l'opinion. L'isolement le rendrait forcément sombre, égoïste, et ambitieux. Obligé de fermer l'oreille à la voix publique, il l'ouvrirait bientôt à celle de son intérêt particulier."[100] Constant's political warning here engages precisely the problem Adolphe and Ellénore encounter in their private relationship: by closing themselves off to public opinion, they become "sombre," "égoïste" and victims to their special interests.

---

[99] Ibid., 104.

[100] Benjamin Constant, *De La Force Du Gouvernement Actuel De La France Et De La Nécessité De S'y Rallier ; Des Réactions Politiques ; Des Effets De La Terreur* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 116.

When Adolphe follows Ellénore to Poland, his father writes a letter of introduction to the baron de T***, who serves as a father figure to Adolphe. Adolphe's own father writes that he will not challenge "l'indépendance que vous avez toujours su défendre avec succès contre votre père." The baron, on the other hand, is more authoritative: "Je lis dans votre âme, malgré vous et mieux que vous; vous n'êtes plus amoureux de la femme qui vous domine et qui vous traîne après elle; si vous l'aimiez encore, vous ne seriez pas venu chez moi. Vous saviez que votre père m'avait écrit; il vous était aisé de prévoir ce que j'avais à vous dire."[101] The baron speaks as the mouthpiece of the father and yet better than the father. Whereas the father falls silent each time Adolphe approaches him, the baron broaches the subject of Ellénore every time Adolphe visits. As Constant predicts in his political writings, public opinion underscores the baron's most effective arguments. When Adolphe defends Ellénore, the baron replies, "ce sont des nuances que l'opinion n'approfondit pas. Les faits sont publics; en m'empêchant de les rappeler, pensez-vous les détruire?"[102] The baron makes clear that public opinion is out of Adolphe's control. He cannot shape public opinion; it, however, can shape him.

This social influence is in fact the primary catalyst at the end of the novel. Ellénore discovers a letter that Adolphe wrote to his friend the baron de T*** in which Adolphe promises to end his relationship with Ellénore. The letter was Adolphe's attempt to delay his promise to the baron de T***, but as Adolphe explains, "L'oeil indifférent de M. de T*** avait facilement démêlé dans ces protestations réitérées à chaque ligne

[101] Constant, *Adolphe*, 131.
[102] Ibid., 130.

l'irrésolution que je déguisais et les ruses de ma propre incertitude."[103] Jeannine Jallat explains that the baron's interference destroys the isolated existence Adolphe has created: "This indirect speech of society, so long contained in the margins of the text...is, of course, the speech of true custom. That in chapter IX it should attain the status of evenemential speech, indicates the deteriorization of Adolphe's universe."[104] While Adolphe had managed to marginalize public opinion for much of the novel, it seeps in nonetheless. The baron, disapproving representative of social order, ultimately frees Adolphe from Ellénore.

One could argue that Adolphe caused Ellénore's death with his letter, but the role of the baron de T*** greatly complicates this assertion. Adolphe writes the letter to the baron de T***, but it is the baron who sends it to Ellénore in order to force a separation. The baron de T*** acts throughout the novel as a stand-in for social conventions. His decision to send Adolphe's letter to Ellénore is part of the all-powerful will of society to which Adolphe has alluded throughout the novel. Ultimately, the social will eliminates the deviant Ellénore and encourages its prodigal son to return to a more traditional path.

While society punishes Ellénore for her transgressions, society punishes Adolphe for his indecision. Adolphe tells himself repeatedly that his relationship with Ellénore prevents him from doing something great with his life. If only he could bring himself to leave her, he thinks, he could have a stellar career. This is not what comes to pass after Ellénore dies. Freed from his obligations to her, Adolphe is even less able to act. As the increasingly didactic narrator explains, "J'aurais déviné qu'Adolphe a été puni de son caractère même, qu'il n'a suivi aucune route fixe, rempli aucune carrière utile, qu'il a

---

[103] Ibid., 164.
[104] Jeannine Jallat, "Adolphe, La Parole Et L'autre," *Littérature* (May 1971): 79.

consumé ses facultés sans autre direction que le caprice, sans autre force que l'irritation."[105] Even after Ellénore's death, Adolphe cannot escape Ellénore's thrall. He wanders the earth, fails to begin a career, and ultimately dies alone, reduced to having his life story told by those he most abhorred—strangers.

***

Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe* and Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* both appeared during a time of crisis. Constant chose to publish *Adolphe* in 1816, hardly a year after Napoleon's fall at Waterloo; Rowson published *Charlotte Temple* in 1794, a year marked by the Whiskey Rebellion and political unrest that pitted Federalists against Republicans. Twenty-two years and an ocean separate the events in France and America, and yet internal strife characterizes both 1794 and 1816. In 1816 France and 1794 America, individual desires were pitted against the common good. Political stewardship was in transition: in France, Napoleon's return during the 100 Days and his subsequent fall undermined the authority of Louis XVIII. In America, Federalists and Republicans regarded each other with deep suspicion and drifted ever away further from the ideal of "selfless elite acting in the national public interest."[106]

In the midst of this political turmoil, *Adolphe* and *Charlotte Temple*, two novels about the social consequences of deviant individuals, attracted a wide and varied readership. Though ostensibly concerned with the tragic story of a few individuals, these novels resonated with a reading public steeped in crisis. In fact, Constant and Rowson address this reading public directly, offering these tragedies as an antidote to the unhealthy relationships that abound in society. Rowson tells her readers, "I could wish

---

[105] Constant, *Adolphe*, 182.
[106] James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic : The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 34.

my fair readers to consider [*Charlotte Temple*] as not merely the effusion of Fancy, but as reality."[107] Through the fictional editor, Constant tells his readers that, though he rejects simple moralizing, he does hope that the book will teach that "le caractère, la fermeté, la fidélité, la bonté, sont les dons qu'il faut demander au ciel."[108]

This control is popularized and disseminated by society itself. A national identity relies on a fundamental binary, in which those who belong to the nation and those who do not must remain absolutely separate. The nation defines itself against social deviants and thereby establishes itself as a community united against these outsiders. *Adolphe* and *Charlotte Temple* proved popular in 1816 and 1794 because they helped strengthen national identity with their portrayal of social deviance; the readers crying over Charlotte Temple, Adolphe, and Ellénore were united in their *non*-affiliation with these socially unacceptable characters.

In both of these novels, moreover, the characters' stories amount to a forced public confession. Adolphe wrote his private memoir to record his wrongs against Ellénore, but made no moves to share his story with anyone. Charlotte Temple is written in the third person, and therefore relates the private tragedy of persons who had no idea their story would be publicized. In both cases, an outsider decides that publicizing the story will prove beneficial to the public. While these are fictional characters, the very structure of the story underscores the meddling of the "editor" who decides for a public confession. In her introduction to *Charlotte Temple*, Rowson even acknowledges the disenfranchisement of the characters: "The principal characters in this little tale are now

[107] Rowson, *Charlotte Temple, a Tale of Truth*, 35.
[108] Constant, *Adolphe*, 181.

consigned to the silent tomb: it can therefore hurt the feelings of no one."[109] The editor in *Adolphe* also writes that he decided to publish the manuscript because "elle ne peut offenser ni compremettre personne."[110] With the editor serving as intermediary in both *Charlotte Temple* and *Adolphe*, the characters *are confessed*. The personal tragedies of Charlotte, Adolphe and Ellénore become a "life lesson" that will, hopefully, prevent a real member of society from similarly deviant behavior. As the reader finishes the final chapter of these novels, she can return to the real world and society secure in the knowledge that she is not Charlotte, not Adolphe, and not Ellénore.

[109] Rowson, *Charlotte Temple, a Tale of Truth*, 35.
[110] Constant, *Adolphe*, 49.

WORKS CITED

Barnes, Elizabeth. *States of Sympathy : Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Benson, Mary Sumner. *Women in Eighteenth-Century America; a Study of Opinion and Social Usage* Studies in History Economics, and Public Law, Edited by Faculty of political science of Columbia University. New York: Columbia University Press, 1935.

Benveniste, Emile. *Problèmes De Linguistique Générale*. Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

Bloch, Ruth H. *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture, 1650-1800*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Booker, John T. "The Implied Narrataire in Adolphe." *The French Review* 51, no. 5 (1978): 666-673.

Constant, Benjamin. *Adolphe*. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1965.

Constant, Benjamin. *De La Force Du Gouvernement Actuel De La France Et De La Nécessité De S'y Rallier ; Des Réactions Politiques ; Des Effets De La Terreur*. Paris: Flammarion, 1988.

Constant, Benjamin. "Melanges De Litterature Et De Politique (1829)." In *Ecrits Politiques*, edited by Marcel Gauchet, 623. Paris: Gallimard, 1997.

Cott, Nancy F. *The Bonds of Womanhood : "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*. 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

Davidson, Cathy N. *Revolution and the Word : The Rise of the Novel in America*. Expanded ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Degler, Carl N. *At Odds : Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present*. Oxford [Oxfordshire]: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Delbouille, Paul. *Genèse, Structure Et Destin D'adolphe*. Paris: Bibliothèque de la faculté de philosophie et lettres de l'Université de Liège, 1971.

Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. Rev. ed. New York: Stein and Day, 1982.

Forcey, Blythe. "Charlotte Temple and the End of Epistolarity." *American Literature* 63, no. 2 (1991): 225-241.

Hazareesingh, Sudhir. "Napoleonic Memory in Nineteenth-Century France: The Making of a Liberal Legend." *MLN* 120, no. 4 (2005): 747-773.

Jallat, Jeannine. "Adolphe, La Parole Et L'autre." *Littérature* (May 1971): 71-88.

Kerber, Linda K. *Women of the Republic : Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*. New York: Norton, 1986.

Martin, Wendy. "Profile: Susanna Rowson, Early American Novelist." *Women's Studies* 2, no. 1 (1974): 1-8.

McAlexander, Patricia Jewell. "The Creation of the American Eve: The Cultural Dialogue on the Nature and Role of Women in Late-Eighteenth-Century America." *Early American Literature* 9, no. 3 (1975): 252-66.

Mossman, Carol A. *Politics and Narratives of Birth Gynocolonization from Rousseau to Zola,* Cambridge Studies in French ; 41. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Norton, Mary Beth. *Liberty's Daughters : The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*. 1st ed. Boston: Little, Brown, 1980.

Perlmann, Joel, and Dennis Shirley. "When Did New England Women Acquire Literacy?" *The William and Mary Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (1991): 50-67.

Prince, Gerald. "Introduction a L'etude Du Narrataire." *Poetique* 14 (1973): 178-96.

Rice, Grantland S. *The Transformation of Authorship in America*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Rothman, Ellen K. "Sex and Self-Control: Middle Class Courtship in America, 1770-1870." In *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective*, edited by Michael Gordon 395. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983.

Rowson. *Charlotte Temple, a Tale of Truth*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964.

Rowson, Susanna. *Mentoria; or the Young Lady's Friend*. Philadelphia: Printed for Robert Campbell, by Samuel Harrison Smith, 1794.

Rowson, Susanna. *Reuben and Rachel; or, Tales of Old Times*. London: Minerva-Press, for William Lane, 1799.

Rust, Marion. "What's Wrong with Charlotte Temple?" *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2003). http://www.historycooperative.org//journals/wm/60.1/rust.html [accessed 15 February 2007].

Seznec, J. "Deux Lettres De Benjamin Constant Sur Adolphe Et Les Cent Jours." In *The French Mind; Studies in Honour of Gustave Rudler*, edited by Will Grayburn Moore, Gustave Rudler, Rhoda Sutherland and Enid Starkie, viii, 360 p. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.

Sharp, James Roger. *American Politics in the Early Republic : The New Nation in Crisis*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

Stern, Julia A. *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Sullivan, Edward D. "Constraint and Expansion in Benjamin Constant's "Adolphe"." *The French Review* 32, no. 4 (1959): 293-299.

Vincent, K. Steven. "Benjamin Constant, the French Revolution, and the Origins of French Romantic Liberalism." *French Historical Studies* 23, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 607-637.

Wernli, Annaliese. *Le Théme De La Liberté Dans L'itinéraire Spirituel De Benjamin Constant*. Zurich: Juris Druck & Verlag, 1968.

CHAPTER 2

THE FAMILY AND THE KING IN *THE POWER OF SYMPATHY* AND *RENÉ*

As we have seen in previous chapters, both men and women can become deviant figures that threaten the social order. Whether married or not, young or old, the actions of even a single person can undermine the social structure for generations. These deviant figures also allow the readers to unite against this enemy to society. The pre-revolutionary period in America and France added a new development to the question of deviance: by the latter half of the eighteenth century, even the monarch could be considered a sexual and political deviant. This leap was revolutionary long before the first shot was fired. The people gave themselves permission to judge the political and moral fitness of the king, and did so in pamphlets, cartoons, newspapers and novels. For the first time, the monarch was not above the conventions of social mores, but held to these same unwritten laws. And once held to these social expectations, neither George III nor Louis XVI acquitted themselves well in the eyes of the public because of their political and personal decisions.

In both America and France, the king had long been considered the father of the country. But the eighteenth century had seen a shift in expectations for the father, from a man who exercised absolute authority, to a man who listened to his family. In short, a good father.[1] This change in expectations for the father, coupled with a decreased acceptance of deviance in the king, led to disaster. Once the king had proven to be a bad father, he lost the support of his people and revolution became possible. Novels played an important role in generating support for these political and social changes. After the

[1] Lynn Avery Hunt, *The family romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

revolutionary event, they further chronicled the anxieties of two nations who had wanted a good father, rejected the bad father, and now had no father at all.

Two works stand out in this post-revolutionary moment: *The Power of Sympathy* (1789) by William Hill Brown and *René* (1801) by Chateaubriand. These novels appear well after the revolutionary event in which the nation rejected the father/king. As such, they do not work to label the king as a deviant father. Rather, these two novels help their readers understand the post-revolutionary world, in which the search for a new father begins. But in both cases, the message seems post-apocalyptic, rather than hopeful: the absence of the father—good or bad—results in even greater deviance from social and sexual norms and disaster for the sons of the revolution.

***

The seduction novel was wildly popular in post-revolutionary America, with stories featuring seduction published both as books and as serials or short stories in literary magazines. In fact, between 1789 and 1796, one journal, *The Massachusetts Magazine*, published over 100 literary pieces on seduction.[2] The phenomenon was so pronounced that William Hill Brown, author of what is often considered the first American novel, *The Power of Sympathy*, wrote retrospectively in 1807, "There is one truth concerning novels, which is in our time pretty well established; none I presume will controvert the authenticity of my remark, that the foundation of these elegant fabricks is laid on the passion of love."[3] Even word usage changed to accommodate this obsession

[2] Leonard Tennenhouse, "Libertine America," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11, no. 3 (1999): 6.
[3] William Hill Brown, *Ira and Isabella: Or, The Natural Children. A Novel, Founded in Fiction. A Posthumous Work.* (Boston: Published by Belcher and Armstrong, 1807), preface.

with strong emotion—the term "sentiment," which had previously denoted an opinion, changed in the eighteenth century to denote emotion.[4]

At the same time as the seduction novel gained in popularity, the American reading public was growing at a rapid pace. The percentage of circulating library catalogues—the main source of reading materials for many Americans—grew precipitously between 1765 and 1800.[5] As the editor of *New York Magazine* would write in 1797, "This is a novel-reading age."[6] The popularity of novels was also a source of contention; newspaper articles and advice books regularly featured dire warnings against novel-reading; indeed, even novels, such as *The Power of Sympathy*, included cautionary commentary about novels: "In Novels which *expose* no particular Vice, and which *recommend* no particular Virtue, the fair Reader, though she may find amusement, must finish them without being impressed with any particular idea: So that if they are harmless, they are not beneficial."[7] Linda Kerber has suggested that the strong passions that dominated novels were the target of these attacks.[8]

The reading public and the popularity of seduction novels grew alongside a tumultuous political period in American history—the post-revolutionary creation of a government, culminating in the adoption and ratification of the United States Constitution from 1787 to 1790. The debate for and against a strong national government was led by

---

[4] Ruth H. Bloch, "Changing Conceptions of Sexuality and Romance in Eighteenth-Century America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2003): paragraph 34.
[5] Robert B. Winans, "The Growth of a Novel-Reading Public in Late Eighteenth-Century America," *Early American Literature* 9, no. 3 (1975): 271-272.
[6] Quoted in Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the word: the rise of the novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 36.
[7] William Hill Brown, ed. *The power of sympathy*, ed. William S. Kable (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969), 5.
[8] Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic : intellect and ideology in revolutionary America* (New York: Norton, 1986), 241.

Federalists and anti-Federalists, with Federalists supporting a centralized government and anti-Federalists supporting a system that located power primarily in the states.

One concern—the return of an aristocracy—was a central theme in the Federalist/anti-Federalist debate. One anti-Federalist wrote in 1787 that Adams' proposed three-branch framework for government "is a most daring attempt to establish a despotic aristocracy among freemen that the world has ever witnessed."[9] The debate continued in a similar vein during the ratifying conventions, with anti-Federalist William Lenoir telling his audience at the 1789 North Carolina Ratifying Convention, "I shall not enter into the minutiae of this system, but I conceive, whatever may have been the intention of its framers, that it leads to a most dangerous aristocracy."[10] The claim was so pervasive that Hamilton, Jay, and Madison addressed it in *The Federalist* papers, writing "the jealous adversary of the Constitution will probably content himself with repeating that, a senate appointed not immediately by the people, and for the term of six years, must gradually acquire a dangerous preëminence in the government, and finally transform it into a dangerous aristocracy."[11]

With an aristocratic model clearly unacceptable, the Constitutional debates still had to answer this question: In order to keep the country from slipping into chaos, to whom should we grant the power to govern and how should this power be used? To quote Hamilton in "Federalist No. 1," the answer to this question concerned "nothing less than the existence of the Union, the safety and welfare of the parts of which it is composed,

---

[9] Anti-Federalist Arguments from Pennsylvania, ed. Anonymous, in the Annals of American History, http://america.eb.com/america/article?articleId=385401&query=anti-federalist (accessed December 5, 2009).

[10] William Lenoir, "The Interest of the Few and the Liberties of the People," in *The Debates in the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution*, ed. Jonathon Elliot (Philadelphia: 1861).

[11] "The Federalist No. 63," in *The Federalist: A Commentary on the Constitution of the United States, Being a Collection of Essays Written in Support of the Constitution Agreed Upon September 17, 1787 by the Federal Convention*, ed. Henry Cabot Lodge (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1889), 397.

the fate of an empire in many respects the most interesting in the world."[12] The absence of a clear model of governance created a space for discussion, one in which the framers of the Constitution, lesser-known Federalist and anti-Federalists, and the people at large had both a stake and, to different degrees, a voice. The thousands of articles in America's newspapers for and against the proposed government from 1787 to 1790 attest to the involvement of the American public in this debate, both as contributors and as readers. A search in *America's Historical Newspapers* for the terms "Federalist," "anti-Federalist" or "Constitution" in America's historical newspapers returns over 13,700 mentions from 1784 to 1789.

Another literary space for participating in the national debate was the popular novel. Cathy Davidson has argued in *Revolution and the Word* that the novel served as "a political and cultural forum" that allowed the reader to be "present at the conversation" and American writers to "express their own vision of a developing nation."[13] As mentioned early in this chapter, the novel and the readership for novels were widespread in America. It seems improbable that the novel—one of the primary literary forms of the time—and politics should have remained entirely disconnected during these tumultuous Constitutional debates. America's sixth President, John Adams, hinted at the possibility that the novel can help clarify the political when he wrote, "Democracy is Lovelace and the people are Clarissa. The artful villain will pursue the innocent lovely girl to her ruin and her death."[14] In Adams' eyes, the quintessential seduction story is a political

---

[12] Alexander Hamilton, "The Federalist No. 1," in *The Federalist: a commentary on the Constitution of the United States, being a Collection of Essays Written in Support of the Constitution Agreed Upon September 17, 1787 by the Federal Convention*, ed. Henry Cabot Lodge (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1889).
[13] Davidson, 52 and 10-11
[14] Quoted in Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and pilgrims: the American revolution against patriarchal authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 237.

allegory. Seduction is not simply a threat to a few unfortunate women, but a threat to the stability of the country as a whole.

The British novel *Clarissa*, published 50 years before the height of the Constitutional debates, is a convenient, though anachronistic allegory for the political tumult of Adams' time. But Adams could well have chosen an American novel of his own time to express his political anxieties in fictional terms. Indeed, while literary critics have differed over the particulars of the issues addressed in early American novels—citing alternately sexual, political, cultural, and familial themes as primary in these novels, and sometimes all of these at once—a common thread unites the literary criticism concerning early post-revolutionary American literature: anxiety. Karen Ann Weyler contends in *Intricate Relations* that "fiction gave these writers a forum through which they could express their anxieties about a multitude of issues,"[15] going on to cite at least eight social, sexual and financial sources of anxiety for the eighteenth-century writer. In *Libertine America*, Leonard Tennenhouse names class status as a source of anxiety: "The seduction stories so popular during the early republic offered American readership experiments in imagining just who could marry whom, thus new ways of reproducing class distinctions."[16] Elizabeth Barnes has argued that "Sentimental literature—including political, philosophical, and fictional texts—is to a certain extent a response to the cultural anxieties present in the question of patriarchal authority."[17]

There is a plethora of early American sentimental and seduction novels from which to choose, including the previously discussed *Charlotte Temple*, but I will focus on

---

[15] Karen Ann Weyler, *Intricate relations : sexual and economic desire in American fiction, 1789-1814* (Iowa City: Unversity of Iowa Press, 2004), 184.
[16] Tennenhouse: 6.
[17] Elizabeth Barnes, "Affecting Relations: Pedagogy, Patriarchy, and the Politics of Sympathy," *American Literary History* 8, no. 4 (1996): 599.

America's first novel, *The Power of Sympathy*, which combines many of the themes of the period. Moreover, the novel was published in 1789 at the height of the Constitutional debates—a period that forced Americans to confront the changing location of power and influence. Elizabeth Barnes has touched on this topic in *States of Sympathy,* writing, "The portrayal of a father's sexual transgression and its unfortunate consequences in *The Power of Sympathy* makes tangible the problem of paternal influence in postrevolutionary politics."[18] The *Power of Sympathy*, however, features not one but five father models, not all of them sexual transgressors. I would argue instead that the novel treats not just the consequences of paternal sexual influence, but the consequences of both weak and strong (paternal) influence and power more generally. With the king—the tyrant-father—removed, the Republic must find a new model of governance, new father(s) for the sons of the Revolution. As *The Power of Sympathy* suggests, there is reason for the fathers of our country to be anxious: the nature of paternal power dooms or benefits the generations that follow.

The Power of Sympathy does not, in most respects, differ significantly from other sentimental novels of the time. The trope of using family as a political model, for example, serves more to ally the novel with other literature of its time, than to distinguish it: "Brown's sentimental novel reveals its affiliation with other revolutionary works and with eighteenth-century patterns of thought and articulation that tend to depict social and political agendas in personal or familial terms."[19] The libertine—represented in *The Power of Sympathy* by both the older and younger Harrington—is also a common plot device: the libertine "was used in American stories to break up the traditional patriarchal

[18] Elizabeth Barnes, *States of sympathy: seduction and democracy in the American novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 36.
[19] Barnes: 597.

family in a way that ushered in a new family based on mutual consent."[20] And marriage is more than once depicted as the antidote to aristocratic principles: "Revolutionary-era writers hold up the loving partnership of man and wife in opposition to patriarchal dominion as the republican model for social and political relationships."[21] Even incest, the most scandalous theme in *The Power of Sympathy*, is not unique to this novel: "The earliest American novelists expressed no literal fear of wide-spread incest, but rather a fear of the dreadful condition incest symbolizes: the absence of a well-defined social system."[22] *The Power of Sympathy* is unique in that it uses all these common themes—family, libertinism, marriage, and incest—to focus the reader relentlessly on the father; not just one father, but many fathers, in an effort to identify the father-model that can save the next generation from self-destruction.

The Power of Sympathy examines the excesses of paternal relations, but like the political debaters of the time, abandons the aristocratic model almost immediately. In letter 19 (fairly early in a novel with 65 letters), Harriot recounts the story of Ophelia and her father. Ophelia has been seduced by her brother-in-law, Martin, and has given birth to a child. Ophelia's father is furious and insists that Ophelia confront Martin, but "Ophelia exercised all her powers to prevent it; she entreated her father to consent to her desire, but her tears and intreaties were in vain."[23] Unable to prevent her father from exerting his will in the matter, she can only prevent the meeting by committing suicide: "she clasped

---

[20] Tennenhouse: 6.
[21] Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife," *William and Mary Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1987): 689.
[22] Anne Dalke, "Original Vice: The Policitical Implications of Incest in the Early American Novel," *Early American Literature* 23, no. 2 (1988): 188.
[23] Brown, ed., 63.

her mother's hand, and raising her eye to heaven, was only heard to articulate "LET MY CRIME BE FORGOTTEN WITH MY NAME. O FATAL! FATAL POISON!" [24]

Ophelia is the victim in the story, but she is not its focus. The authoritarian father—Shepherd—is the focus of the story. A shepherd cares for his flock in an effort to prevent them from straying; when they have strayed, he finds them and returns them to the fold. Not so, Ophelia's father. As the drama unfolds, the narrator returns to Shepherd repeatedly to offer an implied criticism of the authoritarian paternal model. When Ophelia gives birth, the first to react is the father: "This event was a severe mortification to the proud spirit of *Shepherd*, the father of *Ophelia*. His resentment to his daughter was implacable and his revenge of the injury from *Martin* not to be satiated."[25] When Martin abandons Ophelia, the narrator underscores Ophelia's inability to turn to her father for help: "There was no one whom she durst implore by the tender name of father."[26] When she commits suicide, Ophelia's mother cries as expected, but the father stands out in his mute grief: "At this crisis entered the father—he was mute—he beheld his daughter struggling with the pangs of dissolution—he was dumb with grief and astonishment."[27]

The story further underscores the dangers of the aristocratic model by articulating the cause of Ophelia's death clearly for the reader—in the framework of a legal argument. When Shepherd "charge[s] *Martin* with the seduction and murder of his daughter," Martin replies by presenting his "arguments…in answer to *Shepherd*."[28] He then lays out the facts of the case in a summary that emphasizes at every point the mistakes of the autocratic father:

---

[24] Ibid., 65.
[25] Ibid., 61.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 64.
[28] Ibid., 67-68.

> He reminded *Shepherd* of his obstinacy in *persisting* in an explanatory meeting, and refusing to grant *Ophelia's* request in suffering the affair to subside—"Your proud spirit," said he, "would not hearken to the gentle remonstrance of your daughter—your heart was closed to every conciliatory proposition….Had you been as willing to receive her, as she to return to you, happy would it have been for both; but your pride was the cause of additional calamities.[29]

In the equivalent of a closing argument, Martin concludes, "you cannot accuse me as the immediate cause of Ophelia's death; the facts are as I have stated them—and thus was a straying, but penitent child, driven to despair and suicide by a severe use of paternal power."30 In a further nod to the question of power, Harriot provides her own analysis of the case. She begins by denying an opinion on the matter—"How far parental authority may be extended is a question which I shall not determine"—but needs only the space of a paragraph to offer a cohesive political argument for tolerant paternalism: "Happy the parents, who have bestowed upon their children such an education, as will enable them, by a principle of mediocrity, to govern them without extorting obedience, and to reclaim them without exercising severity."[31] In the eighteenth century, the term mediocrity meant "the quality or condition of being intermediate between two extremes."[32] A less autocratic system, it seems, is the preferred alternative to the authoritarian model.

To that end, the novel explores, only a few letters later, a model of weakened paternalism in the story of Fidelia and her father. The story once again concerns the

---

[29] Ibid., 69.
[30] Ibid., 69-70.
[31] Ibid., 70.
[32] "Mediocrity," *OED Online* (March 2011). http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/view/Entry/115742?redirectedFrom=mediocrity.

theme of seduction, and also ends tragically for the young lovers. Fidelia and Henry are happily engaged when a would-be seducer, Williams, abducts Fidelia. Not knowing that Fidelia has been rescued, Henry drowns himself. When Fidelia hears of Henry's death, she loses her mind and returns to a childlike state that renders her unable to participate meaningfully in society. Fidelia's mother cannot bear Henry's death and Fidelia's insanity—she dies shortly after Henry. Fidelia's father has lost his wife, his daughter, and his future son-in-law—and any hope of finding support in his old age. He remains to tell the story of his family's tragedy.

This is the story of Fidelia's seduction, but as with Ophelia, the role of the men is central to the story. In direct opposition to Ophelia's overbearing father, both Henry and Fidelia's father react weakly to the seducer's threats. When Williams "singles out *Fidelia*," Henry's reaction is far from autocratic; instead of expressing his anger over the seducer's intrusion, "the unhappy youth becomes melancholy—he sickens with jealousy."[33] Even when directly confronted by violence on the part of Williams, Henry does not exercise the power due a soon-to-be husband: "*Fidelia* suddenly disappears—*Williams*—the ungrateful *Williams*—betrays her to a carriage he had prepared, and she is hurried off. *Henry* stands astonished—wild with grief and dismay, he appears senseless and confounded."[34] Contrast this with Ophelia's father, who pursues Ophelia's seducer despite Ophelia's protestations. Henry simply "stands astonished," giving way to emotions ("wild with grief and dismay") but declining to act. In fact, it is not he, but a group of unnamed friends who ultimately rescue Fidelia: "The young men, enraged at the insult, arm themselves and pursue the robber—they overtake him—*Williams* is wounded

[33] Brown, ed., 83.
[34] Ibid.

in the scuffle, and is carried away bleeding by his servant."[35] The confrontation depicted in this scene (men arming themselves, pursuing Williams, engaging in a scuffle, and wounding the seducer) stands in stark contrast to Henry's inaction. While the young men confront William, Henry "is seized by despair, and urged forward by the torments of disappointed love, he plunges into the river—to close his sorrows with his life."[36] Henry confronts no one but himself—committing suicide as the ultimate powerless act.

Fidelia's father also remains inactive throughout the story—with disastrous results. Never even provided with a name, Fidelia's father does not appear in the story until after Henry's death. He does not protect his daughter from Williams, nor does he assist in her rescue. The vignettes he recounts of happier days with his daughter suggest a tolerant, loving father: "Formerly as I sat in this place—in the mild shade of the evening—when I had returned from my labour and took *Fidelia* on my knee, how often have I rendered thanks to Heaven for the happiness I enjoyed, and implored his power to make my child such another as *Charlotte*….I feel a consolation in tracing to you a feeble sketch of the happy times that are passed."[37] Yet this model of fatherhood has no place in the current state of affairs, as even the father seems to understand: "he delighted to dwell on what his child had been—he thought of those times—and he sighed when he contrasted them with the present."[38] As with Henry, the words in these paragraphs highlight a lack of paternal power. The past tense prevails here, suggesting inaction in the present; the father dwells on past emotions, telling his listeners about "happiness," "consolation," and "delight"; only one verb addresses the present situation ("sighed");

[35] Ibid., 84.
[36] Ibid., 84.
[37] Ibid., 86.
[38] Ibid.

and the only person invested with any power is God ("implored his power to make my child such another as Charlotte").

Indeed, the actions of Fidelia's father are so utterly foreign to the paternalistic model, that even Fidelia does not recognize him as a father: "In her disordered state," continued he, "she knows me not as a father—I spread my morsel before her and she flies from it—she forgets the sound of my voice—she is no longer unto me as a daughter."[39] The model of the weak father has proven disastrous, ultimately destroying the familial structure altogether. With the locus of power absent, the daughter cannot recognize her own father; the father, in turn, no longer recognizes his daughter as the obedient child she once was.

The final words of the father perhaps best illustrate the consequences of weakened paternal power: "'They have taken away my staff'—continued he, raising a look of imploring mercy to Heaven, while a trembling tear rolled from his swollen eye, 'They have taken away my staff in my old age.'"[40] While the source of the tragedy is clearly the seducer Williams, the father chooses not to name Williams directly; instead, he uses the vague pronoun "they," which names no one in particular as the source of the tragedy. Moreover, the father laments not the loss of his daughter in particular, but the support that this daughter represented ("my staff in my old age"). In this paternal model, the father mourns the daughter's lost power to support *him*.

The stories of Ophelia and Fidelia illustrate the effects of a paternal model that is either too strong or too weak. In both cases, tragedy ensues and the family disintegrates. Within the context of the political turmoil of 1789, in which the consequences of a strong

[39] Ibid., 86.
[40] Ibid., 87.

or weak central government were the topic of heated debates and would determine the strength of a nation, the fates of Ophelia and Fidelia seem particularly ominous. The disintegration of both families in the face of paternal models that occupy the extremes of the power spectrum suggests that balanced power is the key to ensuring familial and national unity.

Yet the model of the benevolent father with which Brown presents his readers offers little solace. Reverend Holmes, who rescues the pregnant and abandoned Maria, comes too late to prevent the incestuous love that forms the central tragedy of *The Power of Sympathy*. Maria is the woman that Mr. Harrington, Sr. seduced in his youth; she is also the mother of Harriot, Mr. Harrington's unacknowledged daughter. Maria lost her own father prior to her encounter with the elder Harrington; she recalls, "We lived happily together in the days of my father, but when it pleased Providence to remove him, we no longer asserted our pretentions to that rank of life which our straitened finances were unable to continue—A young woman in no eligible circumstances, has much to apprehend from the solicitations of a man of affluence."[41] Without her father's wealth and protection, Maria has nothing to shield her from the advances of a seducer like Harrington, Sr. The result is predictable: Maria becomes pregnant by the married Harrington, Sr., who abandons her once he discovers her condition: "He left me abruptly, and I saw nothing of him after."[42]

Pregnant and alone, Maria is in desperate need of protection, which she finds in the benevolent figure of the Reverend Holmes. At first, the story seems to suggest that this father figure, a much-needed guide to Maria, is enough to head off tragedy. When the

[41] Ibid., 109.
[42] Ibid., 111.

Reverend Holmes discovers the identity of Maria's seducer, he writes to Harrington, Sr., "You have had a criminal connexion with Miss Fawcet—you have turned her upon the world inhumanely—but chance—rather let me say Providence, hath directed her footsteps to my dwelling, where she is kindly entertained, and will be so, as long as she remains in this wilderness world."[43] Rev. Holmes provides the balanced use of power that Ophelia and Fidelia's fathers did not provide. While he confronts the seducer, as Fidelia's father failed to do, he also accepts and cares for the ruined girl, as Ophelia's father failed to do. He serves both as a conscience and role model, writing to Harrington, Sr., "Surely, my friend, it is a duty incumbent on us by the ties of humanity and fellow feeling, and by the duty imposed on us by our holy religion, equally to extend the hand of relief to *all the necessitous*—however they may be circumstanced in the great family of mankind."[44] These words are an argument for unity and for a social framework in which power offers relief to the needy, rather than punishment for their crimes. While this model certainly seems the moderate answer to the extremes of paternal models in the stories of Ophelia and Fidelia, Maria's fate suggests otherwise. She laments the shame brought on her family, "And have I not cause for this severe anguish, at once the sorrow and disgrace of my family? –Alas, my poor mother!" Maria also realizes that her actions doom her daughter to similar disgrace: "But what will become of my poor helpless infant, when its mother lies forgotten in the grave?" As with Ophelia and Fidelia, the end result of her seduction is death—despite the care of Reverend Holmes and his family, "The disorder of *Maria* was fatal and rapid."[45] The benevolent father offered Maria some consolation in her final days, but has failed to prevent the disintegration of a family that

[43] Ibid., 114.
[44] Ibid., 115.
[45] Ibid., 124.

began with the death of Maria's father and ends with the birth of a child that is wholly outside any family structure.

It seems then, that Reverend Holmes is not the answer to the paternal power conundrum. In fact, his forgiving actions (taking in Maria and caring for her child) further the tragic chain of events that will ultimately end in the incestuous love of Harrington and Harriot. The tragedy that started with the death of the original father—Maria's father—continues through the charitable actions of Maria's substitute father, Reverend Holmes, and comes to fruition in the absence of Harriot's father, Harrington, Sr.

While the fathers of Ophelia and Fidelia, and the Reverend Holmes, offer isolated examples of failed paternalistic models that do not bode well for the new republic, the primary focus of *The Power of Sympathy* is on the effects of the adultery committed by Harrington Sr. The libertine, or the rake, is a familiar character in early American novels. His sexual freedom is a threat to the stable American family[46]; in early American novels, families that confront a rake are almost invariably destroyed—a particularly discouraging outcome, considering that the novels of the period "tend to depict social and politic agendas in personal or familial terms."[47]

Harrington, Sr. is such a libertine. Analyses of *The Power of Sympathy* have focused on the sexual misconduct of the elder Harrington and its consequences as the main concern in the novel.[48] While the adultery of Harrington Sr. is certainly a catalyst, the act itself forms only a small part of the story. *The Power of Sympathy* illustrates failed

---

[46] Gareth Evans, "Rakes, Coquettes and Republican Patriarchs: Class, Gender and Nation in Early American Sentimental Fiction," *Canadian Review of American Studies/Revue Canadienne d'Etudes Americaines* 25, no. 3 (1995). See also, Tennenhouse.
[47] Barnes: 597.
[48] Ibid. See also, Tennenhouse. See also, Dalke.

paternalistic models through the fathers of Ophelia and Fidelia, as well as Reverend Holmes; the elder Harrington presents a new model, more destructive even than these earlier examples—he is the absent father.

While Harrington, Sr. seduces a woman in his youth, the succeeding events suggest that it is his absence, rather than his actions that lead to incest. As we shall see, this absence allows for an intergenerational shift from an aristocratic model to a republican model that ends in disaster.

The younger Harrington begins his seduction of Harriot very much in the aristocratic vein—much as his father did with the unfortunate Maria. Indeed, Harriot's situation mirrors that of her mother: she is fatherless, impoverished, beautiful, and in love with Harrington. Harrington understands that a lack of family is Harriot's weaknesses, as an early letter to his friend Worthy illustrates: "I suppose you will be ready to ask, why, if I love *Harriot*, I do not marry her…But who shall I marry? That is the question. *Harriot* has no father—no mother—neither is there aunt, cousin, or kindred of any degree who claim any kind of relationship to her."[49] As the offspring of an illicit relationship, Harriot's family has disintegrated and the younger Harrington therefore has no compunction about seducing a woman who is completely outside any familial framework. Moreover, the lack of family renders her essentially classless; without a family connection, Harriot lives with the upper class Mrs. Francis, but has no formal claim to this wealthy society. This condition places her squarely in the republican model, which strives to dismantle the class-conscious framework in which Harrington, Sr. and his son still operate. Harrington is acutely aware of the implications of Harriot's status. He continues in his letter to Worthy, "I am not so much of a republican as formally to

[49] Brown, ed., 12.

wed any person of this class. How laughable would my conduct appear….To be heard openly acknowledging for my bosom companion, any daughter of the democratic empire of virtue!" [50] Harrington may consider himself a grown man, but he is still very much under the influence of his father's beliefs.

Harriot, however, refuses to let her position outside the family condemn her to her mother's fate, thereby breaking the chain of seduction and achieving somewhat of a coup d'état in Harrington's political leanings. She does so by appealing not to Harrington's ideas about class, but to his morality. Harriot tells him, "Is the crime of dependence to be expiated by the sacrifice of virtue? And because I am a poor, unfortunate girl, must the little I have be taken from me?"[51] By portraying seduction as a theft, Harriot makes seduction a question of morality and honor, rather than class. This appeal works particularly well with Harriot, whose aristocratic beliefs would place a strong emphasis on personal honor. Indeed, Harrington's response casts his decision to stop his seduction as a question of honor: "I bow to the all-conquering force of Harriot's eloquence—and what is the consequence?—I am now determined to continue my address on a principle the most just, and the most honourable."[52] The result is a complete and sudden shift in Harrington's philosophy, from one structured around unequal power to one that celebrates shared power as the ideal. As Harrington writes, "Inequality among mankind is a foe to our happiness—it even affects our little parties of pleasure….For this reason I like a democratical better than any kind of government." [53] In another letter to Worthy,

[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid., 17.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 53.

Harrington draws on Biblical references to highlight the importance of democratic, shared power:

> Away, ye seekers of power—ye boasters of wealth—ye are the Levite and the Pharisee, who restrain the hand of charity from the indigent, and turn with indignation from the way-worn son of misery: But Sensibility is the good Samaritan, who taketh him by the hand, and consoleth him, and poureth wine and oil into his wounds. [54]

Harrington here assumes the antiquated words (ye, taketh, consoleth) and winding sentences reminiscent of the King James version of the Bible. With this rhetorical style, Harrington essentially casts himself as a prophet for democracy, spreading the good news of equality. The aristocrat has turned democrat.

The abrupt change in Harrington's political change is seismic—it changes for him his entire philosophy on human relations. The new philosophy expressed in Harrington's letters—which mention Harriot not as the sole reason, but primarily as a catalyst in this conversion to democracy—applies to all mankind. In this sense, the change in Harrington very much mirrors the change in American politics after the revolution. When the English king relinquished his claim to America, the new country had to fill this power vacuum with a new political framework. Harrington's reaction to this new horizon is at first hopeful, leading him to write, "Peace and tranquility are before me; the prospect is fair and promising as the gilded dawn of a summer's day,"[55] but as both he and the nation discover, democracy brings its own complexities.

---

[54] Ibid., 105.
[55] Ibid., 50.

Harrington's conversion to more democratic principles highlights the tension between the father, who has continued to operate on aristocratic principles, and the son, who embraces a new social framework. Indeed, when Harrington tells his friend Worthy of his engagement to Harriot, the friend replies, "I advise you to gain your father's approbation before you proceed so far as to be unable to return. A contrary step might terminate in the utter ruin of you both."[56] Despite Harrington's new world view, the aristocratic authority of the father hovers over Harrington throughout the novel, threatening to return him to his former self. Harrington repeatedly reminds himself that his father's opposition to early marriage is very strong: he writes to Worthy, "*after lightning comes the thunder*: my father is mortally averse to making any matrimonial engagement at so early a period"[57] and adds in another letter, "I have had a conversation with my father on the subject of early marriages, but to no purpose."[58] Indeed, the encounter with his father leaves him temporarily defeated and resolved once again to follow his father's aristocratic framework: "One must be adept to argue with him….I am too much chagrined to write you even the heads of our conversation. I now stand upon my old ground."[59] The debate with this father leads Harrington to doubt his democratic principles in favor of the aristocratic framework in which he has long operated. Even the anonymous writer who informs Harrington of his incestuous love for Harriot reinforces the strong paternal framework by presenting the father's prohibition as a stronger argument against the marriage than incest: "Harriot must not be your wife. You know your father is averse to your early connecting yourself in marriage to any woman. The

[56] Ibid., 23.
[57] Ibid., 18.
[58] Ibid., 23-24.
[59] Ibid.

duty we owe a parent is sacred, but this is not the only barrier to your marriage. The ties of consanguinity prevent it: she is your *sister*."[60] The writer prioritizes Harrington's duty to his father with incest a secondary consideration.

The ensuing tragedy is not caused solely by the father's aristocratic philosophy or solely by the son's conversion to more democratic principles. Rather, incest (almost) occurs precisely because of the *difference* in the political framework of father and son. Without a political conversion that leads Harrington to proclaim, "Inequality among mankind is a foe to our happiness," incest would have been avoided without the father's intervention—an aristocratically minded Harrington would never have deigned to marry someone like Harriot, as Harrington himself explains early in the story. Had the father adopted republican principles, he would not have abandoned Harriot's mother so readily: "The *éclat* of my companions gratifying my vanity and increasing the gale of passion, I became insensibly hurried down the stream of dissipation."[61] When Harrington, Sr. impregnates Maria, he determines that "*Maria* must be sacrificed to the happiness of *Amelia* [the wife of Harrington, Sr.]."[62] An essentially political disagreement between father and son leads to the total disintegration of the family and death.

Elizabeth Barnes has said that post-Revolutionary politics—and by extension post-Revolutionary literature—grappled with "the nature and location of authority."[63] The disaster that ensues in *Power of Sympathy* when the political views of Harrington and Harrington, Sr. diverge, suggests political disunity as another source of anxiety. With

[60] Ibid., 136-137.
[61] Ibid., 119.
[62] Ibid., 121.
[63] Barnes: 597.

more than one political framework competing for dominance in the 1780s, the consequences of disunity could indeed be social and political disintegration.

Even more disturbing, the weakness of Harrington Sr. at the moment when his son most needs strength, erases any lingering hope that the father can emerge to save and unite this family. Confronted with the need to reveal the incest to his son, the father writes, "My heart failed me! Twenty times have I attempted to break the matter to my son—and twenty times have I returned from the task—I have engaged a friend to acquaint him how nearly connected he already is with his love."[64] Unable to face his own son, he asks someone outside the family to convey the news. In fact, wracked by guilt, the Harrington, Sr. creates a father figure for himself to guide him. In a scene reminiscent of Dante's *Inferno*, Harrington, Sr. literally dreams up a paternal guide who provides him with the guidance that he should be providing to Harrington. When the father needs a father, the son suffers.

While Harriot dies in some sense of natural causes—succumbing to a delirium brought on by her broken heart—Harrington commits suicide. By taking his own life, Harrington attempts to regain some control over a life that has been utterly destroyed by the father. Harrington's last letter to Worthy suggests that committing suicide is the only act in which he controls his own fate and the only act of which he can be sure that he will be the first witness. In recounting his last meeting with his father and a friend of the family, he writes, "perhaps they did not imagine this was the last time they were to behold me."[65] Harrington's last letter is peppered with protest; he makes his last stand and nearly every phrase is a refusal. He tells Worthy, "I thank you for all your good

[64] Brown, ed., 135.
[65] Ibid., 177.

advice—it comes too late." He confirms his resolve to die by writing to Harriot, "I hasten to overtake thee. My resolution is not to be diverted—is not to be shaken—I will not be afraid—I am inexorable." Harrington's recounts his last visit with his sister, and implies that he is now deaf to outside influences: "She mentioned the name of *Worthy*, but my thoughts were differently engaged. She repeated your name, but I took no heed of it."[66] Without the mitigating influence of his father, friend, or fiancée, Harrington commits suicide.

Harrington's suicide has implications beyond the story line—it also speaks directly to an anxiety about the boundaries of autonomy and authority in the new republic. As Richard Bell explains, "Because it embodied the growing tensions between collective organization and the individual in the new republic, suicide stood at the center of debates about the proper reach of public and parental authority and the limits of personal autonomy.[67] By committing suicide Harrington confirms precisely this failed parental authority. As the novel illustrates, the consequence of familial—and by extension political—disharmony is self-destruction[68]; the enemy from within is more powerful than the enemy from without.

The Power of Sympathy appeared in the midst of the contentious Constitutional Debates, a period rife with political discord. The idea that personal virtue would unite the republic had begun to fade away, to be replaced by a more cynical view of the self-interest as the guiding principle of men.[69] This was a particularly troubling shift in

---

[66] Ibid., 177-78.
[67] Richard Bell, "The Double Guilt of Dueling: The Stain of Suicide in Anti-Dueling Rhetoric in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 387.
[68] Richard Bell writes in "Double Guilt" that "anxiety about both personal and political self-destruction drove public discourse within the newly United States." ibid., 385.
[69] Bernard Bailyn, *The ideological origins of the American Revolution*, Enl. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 376. See also, Gordon S. Wood, *The creation of the*

perspective for a country that tied its existence so directly to the people: "No government, Americans told themselves over and over, had ever before so completely set its roots in the sentiments and aims of its citizens."[70] A lack of virtue opens the possibility that country's greatest threat may be internal—from "unruly body of constituents"[71] who destroy themselves and the country through their actions. Whether it is the destructive anger of a father against his seduced daughter, as in the case of Ophelia; the weakness of a father confronted with his daughter's would-be seducer, as in the case of Fidelia; or the unrestrained sexuality of a father who is himself the seducer, as in the case of Harrington, the greatest threat to the family, and by extension the country, is from within.

***

As in the United States, France was in a state of transition during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Beginning with the French Revolution, which included the execution of Louis XVI in 1792, the French government was in constant turmoil until well into the nineteenth century. The First Republic, which lasted 12 years before Napoleon Bonaparte claimed the throne, saw one leader after another toppled by the violence of the revolution. Robespierre was executed without trial in 1794; Paul Barras, one of the most prominent leaders of the Directory, was toppled by a coup in 1799 after having previously arranged for the downfall of other Directors. The French Consulate that was established afterward ostensibly included three Consuls—Napoleon Bonaparte, Jean Jacques Régis de Cambacérès and Charles-François Lebrun, duc de

---

American Republic, 1776-1787 (Chapel Hill: Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Va., 1969), 610-611.

[70] Wood, 612.

[71] Bell: 385.

Plaisance—but by 1800 Bonaparte had been designated First Consul with veto power of the other two and in 1804, he crowned himself Emperor.

Lynn Hunt has argued that this political upheaval and its aftermath were influenced by a deep-seated connection between the figure of the king and the figure of the father: "The French had a kind of collective political unconscious that was structured by narratives of family relations…. Most Europeans in the eighteenth century thought of their rulers as fathers and of the nations as families writ large"[72] This concept of the king as father survived even the French Revolution. In his eulogy for Louis XVIII, Chateaubriand would recount the king's ascension to the throne after Napoleon's: "Un peuple encore tout ému, tout enivré de la gloire des armes, vit avec surprise un vieux Français exile venir se placer naturellement à sa tête, comme un père qui, après une longue absence, rentre dans sa famillle, ne supposant pas qu'on puisse lui contester son autorité."[73] Chateaubriand wrote this sentence in 1824; clearly, the father-king dynamic found an audience among the French people long after the guillotining of Louis XVI.

With the death of the king, the French people freed themselves of a thousand years of monarchy, but without the centralizing authority of the king, what would keep the nation—and the family—from disintegrating? This question and the turmoil of the French Revolution did not go unnoticed in French literature. Victor Hugo would write about the French Revolution extensively in his last book, *Quatre-Vingt Treize*. The Revolution frequently figures in Balzac's novels, both through oblique and direct references. In *Le Colonel Chabert, Le Père Goriot*, and *Eugénie Grandet* for example, the French Revolution has led to the characters' current situation but is not the focus of

[72] Hunt, xiii-xiv.
[73] François-René vicomte de Chateaubriand, "Le roi est mort, vive le roi," (Paris: Normant pére, 1824), 13.

the story. In other novels, notably *Les Chouans*, the French Revolution figures explicitly and is a major catalyst for the events in the novel. Later, Stendhal would continue to reference the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period in books like *Le Rouge et le Noir*. And the writings of René de Chateaubriand, especially the novella *René*, relate the trauma of the French Revolution through the eyes of a grieving and nostalgic protagonist.

As in the United States, the recurring themes in popular novels provide a glimpse of French readers' interests. In the first half of the nineteenth century, many novels that allude to the French Revolution have one outcome in common: the actions precipitated by the French Revolution directly or indirectly lead to the destruction of the family. Colonel Chabert returns from war to find his place at the head of the family usurped; both Père Goriot and the father of Eugénie Grandet profited from the Revolution, but their wealth destroys the family. But one of the earliest widely read novels to explore the connection between the death of the king and the disintegration of the family is Chateaubriand's *René*.

This short novella has not stood the test of time as a popular work, but at the time of its publication, it created a sensation. *René* and its counterpart *Atala* catapulted Chateaubriand to fame and provided him with privileges of which other former aristocrats only dreamed—notably, having his name removed from the list émigrés prohibited from re-entering France.[74] Due to the many restrictions on publishing during the post-revolutionary period, French writers did not produce many notable works in the 1790s. But *Génie du Christianisme* (1802), which includes *Atala* and *René*, represents a turning point in French literature. *René* was one of the earliest novels to capture the

[74] John R. Williams, "François-René de Chateaubriand," in *Nineteenth century French fiction writers: romanticism and realism, 1800-1860*, ed. Catharine Savage Brosman, Dictionary of literary biography (Detroit: Gale Research, 1992), 82.

"spiritual frustration that would shortly be called the *mal du siècle*." It was also the first book to gain a large French readership by treating this subject.[75]

Much as in America at the time, novel reading created a community of readers. As Charlotte Daniels explains in *Subverting the Family Romance*, "Novels facilitated the creation of a shared set of intensely private emotional patterns that, while seemingly deeply personal …actually existed in dialectic relation to the new public systems of production and exchange."[76] This held especially true for the most popular novels, which found a large readership. Since literacy was higher in areas with large populations (like Paris), these private readers found many close neighbors experiencing the same emotions. Daniels writes, "Novels constituted a privileged locus for the study of the emergence of modern models of identity in their relation to larger social and economic realities."[77] In other words, the combination of a large readership and a relatively small number of shared books allowed novels to have a major influence on how the French readership viewed and understood French identity.

And yet, at first read, *René* does not seem to have been that innovative. The novel has incest as a major theme, but so did many eighteenth-century novels. What sets *René* apart is that Chateaubriand approaches this topic—and the rest of the novel—from a nineteenth-century point of view. While eighteenth-century novels may have treated incest almost indulgently, for Chateaubriand, the incestuous feelings between René and his sister Amélie are a symptom of deep problems in the family and the need to return to

---

[75] Ibid., 79.
[76] Charlotte Daniels, *Subverting the family romance : women writers, kinship structures, and the early French novel* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2000), 8.
[77] Ibid., 9.

morality and order.[78] Indeed, Chateaubriand makes the social, didactic role of *René* explicit in *Génie du Christianisme,* where he writes, "Afin d'inspirer plus d'éloignement pour ces reveries criminelles, l'auteur a pensé qu'il devait prendre la punition de René dans le cercle de malheurs épouvantables, qui appartiennent moins à l'individu qu'à la famille de l'homme."[79] René's problems serve as a warning for the family of man. The novel *René* blurs the lines between father as family man and father as king, with neither concept offering the centralizing, guiding figure that René seeks—with severe consequences.

In the half century before the publication of *René*, the figure of the father had undergone significant transformations. While pre-1760 novels featured fathers who were often tyrannical, the novels in the latter half of the eighteenth century introduced the concept of the "good father. This shift also had political implications; Lynn Hunt has argued that the good father model "fatally undermined absolutist royal authority" [80] because this model did not tolerate tyrannical rule. Even in the first years of the Revolution, this good father model prevailed, with revolutionaries hesitating to execute the king with the "hope of finding the good father."[81] A famous engraving of the 1790 Festival of Federation well illustrates this desire: in the picture, Louis XVI is shown preparing the festival grounds alongside the people. And yet, the engravings from this festival already show another shift in the paternal role. As Hunt explains, "few ordinary family scenes appear in the engravings of the Festival of Federation…. The engravings of

---

[78] Martin Neumann, *Das Inzesttabu im Spiegel der französischen Erzählliteratur des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Bonn: Romanistischer Verlag, 1991), 237.
[79] François-René de Chateaubriand, "Défense du Génie du Christianisme," in *Oeuvres complètes de Chateaubriand* (Paris: Acamédia, 1997).
[80] Hunt, 25.
[81] Ibid., 44-45.

the Festival of Federation thus portray the new individual-state relationship envisioned by the liberal ideology that was taking root through the legislation of the Constituent Assembly…The fathers as fathers are politically absent."[82] Within half a century, the father goes from being a central figure to the nation, to being "politically absent." At the same time, the country undergoes a massive political upheaval that has not yet ended when Chateaubriand introduces the fatherless René.

René arrives into a family that begins disintegrating at the moment of his birth. Yet, René does not mourn the loss of his mother, which he mentions factually by telling his interlocutors, "J'ai coûté la vie à ma mère en venant au monde; j'ai été tiré de son sein avec le fer."[83] Rather, he mourns his father long before his father's death: "J'avais un frère que mon père bénit, parce qu'il voyait en lui son fils aîné. Pour moi, livré de bonne heure à des mains étrangères, je fus élevé loin du toit paternel."[84] As the younger and less favored son, René has almost no contact with his father and his account reflects this distance. The reader never learns the name of the father or the brother. René refers to the "toit paternel," giving the impression that René thinks of the estate as his father's dwelling, but not as a home. The distance between father and son prevents any real attachment and, as a result, René is "timide et contraint devant [s]on père."[85]

René's first chance at paternal reconciliation is at the moment of the father's death: "Cependant mon père fut atteint d'une maladie qui le conduisit en peu de jours au tombeau. Il expira dans mes bras. J'appris a connaître la mort sur les lèvres de celui qui

---

[82] Ibid., 46.
[83] François-René de Chateaubriand, *René*, ed. Denis A. Canal, Classiques Larousse (Paris: Larousse-Bordas, 1802; reprint, 1996), 34.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 35.

m'avait donné la vie. Cette impression fut grande; elle dure encore."[86] This experience was a powerful one for René ("cette impression fut grande"), but almost entirely one-sided. The dying father offers no words of reconciliation, which René would surely have cherished. While René finally gets to hold his father ("il expira dans mes bras"), his father does not hold him in return.

The father's burial—with only René in attendance—underscores the finality of René's loss: "J'accompagnai mon père à son dernier asile; la terre se reforma sur sa dépouille; l'éternité et l'oubli le pressèrent de tout leur poids: le soir meme l'indifférent passait sur sa tombe; hors pur sa fille et pour son fils, c'était déjà comme s'il n'avait jamais été."[87] It is telling that René does not mourn anything specific about his father; rather, he seems to mourn loss itself—the idea that any person could cease to exist in the world and in memory ("c'était déjà comme s'il n'avait jamais été"). And yet, this loss also allows René to create an image of his father that is far superior to the actual man; rather than resenting his father for the distance between them, René now mourns a man who never existed.[88] As René tells his listeners, "la famille de l'homme n'est que d'un jour; le soufflé de Dieu la disperse comme une fume. À peine le fils connaît-il le père, le père le fils, le frère la soeur, la soeur le frère!"[89] Once again, this loss is non-specific, with René mourning "le père"—the concept of the good father—not "mon père."

The father as family man has wholly failed René. Even the "toit paternel" no longer offers a refuge: "il fallut quitter le toit paternel, devenu l'héritage de mon frère."[90]

---

[86] Ibid., 36.
[87] Ibid., 37.
[88] Jean-Marie Roulin, *Chateaubriand, l'exil et la gloire: du roman familial à l'identité littéraire dans l'oeuvre de Chateaubriand*, Bibliothèque de littérature moderne, vol. 26 (Paris: H. Champion Ed., 1994), 34.
[89] Chateaubriand, 66.
[90] Ibid., 37.

In response, René travels across Europe, guided by a singular mission. He seeks out the realms of great former kings. The connection between the loss of the father and the search for kings has not gone unnoticed by others. Respaut writes, "Ainsi nous assistons a un enchaînement de departs vers de pays étrangers…dont la description dans sa diversité apparente ne semble que souligner leur resemblance une succession de departs qui precede une série de retours vers ce qu'il appelle plus tard sa 'terre natale'."[91] Roulin, in his analysis connects the kings and the father even more explicitly: "Située peu après la mort de son pères et les pensées qu'elle a provoquées en René, cette expedition vers les tombeaux et cette réflexion sur les rois morts renvoient à un voyage vers le père et à une meditation sur son impossible resurrection."[92]

But what this commentary doesn't seem to capture is the terror of forgetting the father/king that seems to haunt René. This fear seems to suggest that the ultimate disaster is not losing the father figure; rather, the disaster is forgetting this lynchpin to the family and society. René's first destinations are the ancient kingdoms of Rome and Greece—places where the empires themselves have turned to dust: "Je visitai d'abord les peoples qui ne sont plus: je m'en allai m'asseyant sur les debris de Rome et de la Grèce, pays de forte et d'ingénieuse mémorie, où les palais sont ensevelis dans la poudre, et les mausolées des rois cachés sous les ronces."[93] In these places, a "brin d'herbe percent souvent le marbre…de ces tombeaux"; these blades of grass push through the marble tombs that must have seemed eternal when they were first constructed and herald the day when all traces of these kingdoms will be gone. Like René's own father, of whom he

[91] Michele Respaut, "Rene: Confession, Repetition, Revelation," *The French Review* 57, no. 1 (1983): 16.
[92] Roulin, 86.
[93] Chateaubriand, 39-40.

said, “l’éternité et l’oubli le pressèrent de tout leur poids,” these kings will ultimately be forgotten and are powerless to prevent this outcome.

René’s next destination is one with a more recent history—England. Here he views another marble monument—the statue of James II pointing to the place where the English Parliament had Charles I beheaded.[94] The reference to Charles I is particularly apt, as the Parliament based his trial and execution on the premise that Charles I was a political deviant. The charges read against him at the trial claim, “All which wicked designs, wars, and evil practices of him, the said Charles Stuart, have been, and are carried on for the advancement and upholding of a personal interest of will, power, and pretended prerogative to himself and his family, against the public interest, common right, liberty, justice, and peace of the people of this nation, by and from whom he was entrusted as aforesaid.”[95] According to the charges, the actions of Charles I are “wicked” and “evil.” Moreover, he acts “against the public interest” and is therefore deviating from social expectations. Charles I became possible because he was deemed a bad king.

Bad king or no, the absence of a king is a severe trauma, and one that James II, the son of Charles I chose to commemorate. He erected this statue to prevent the English people from forgetting his father’s death. But when René asks the workers loafing around the monument if they know its significance, he is shocked by the result: “les uns purent à peine me le dire, les autres ignoraient la catastrophe qu’il retraçait. Rien ne m’a plus donné la juste mesure des événements de la vie, et du peu que nous sommes….Le temps

---

[94] Ibid., 41.
[95] William Cobbett, "The Manner of the Trial of Charles Stuart, King of England," in *Cobbett's complete collection of state trials and proceedings for high treason and other crimes and misdemeanors from the earliest period to the present time* (London: R. Bagshaw, 1809).

à fait un pas, et la face de la terre a été renouvelée!"[96] Father and son were both kings, yet both the death of Charles I and his son's efforts to commemorate it are now forgotten. They are erased from the national memory and a foreigner—René—remains to bear witness to this loss, as he did for his own father.

Without the father as a defining role, the parameters of social relationships threaten to dissolve and even a deviance as taboo as incest becomes possible. Indeed, even before the father's death, René's estrangement from his father lays the groundwork for tragedy: "Timide et contraint devant mon père, je ne trouvais l'aise et le contentement qu'auprès de ma soeur Amélie. Une douce conformité d'humeur et de goûts m'unissait étroitement à cette soeur."[97] This affinity for his sister seems innocent enough, but soon becomes less so. Over the course of several pages in the novel, René's description of his relationship with Amélie—and her letter to him—become increasingly suggestive of sexual tension between brother and sister. At the same time, he complains of a "surabondance de vie" (vie is a double-entendre for life and sperm); René is, in essence, oversexed but without parents to guide him.

Recounting his sister's return after a long absence, René tells his listeners, "Pour bien sentir…quels furent mes premiers transports en revoyant Amélie, il faut vous figurer que c'était la seule personne au monde que j'eusse aimée, que tous mes sentiments venaient confondre en elle….Je reçus Amélie dans un sorte d'extase de coeur."[98] He is "transported" with happiness on her return, describes Amélie as his only love, and receives her with "ecstasy"—sexually suggestive words that would be more appropriate for the reunion of two lovers in a romance novel than for a brother and sister.

---

[96] Chateaubriand, 42.
[97] Ibid., 54.
[98] Ibid., 56.

During their reunion, Amélie covers René's face with kisses, prompting him to recount, "c'était presqu'une mère, c'était quelque chose de plus tendre."[99] René has no memory of his mother—again, he must conceptualize a mother's love. His sister fails to fill this role, entering instead into a relationship with René that is "plus tendre." In describing their life together, René's description becomes increasingly suggestive of romantic love: "Nous fûmes plus d'un mois à nous accoutumer à l'enchantement d'être ensemble. Quand le matin, au lieu de me trouver seul, j'entendais la voix de ma soeur, j'éprouvais un tressaillement de joie et de bonheur. Amélie avait reçu de la nature quelque chose de divin; son âme avait les memes grâces que son corps."[100] Without the experience of living in a family, René seems unable to distinguish between familial affection and sexual attraction. The phrases he uses (tressaillement de joie, enchantement d'être ensemble) and his references to Amélie's graceful body, are the words of a lover, not a brother.

Amélie, too, seems unable to separate sisterly love and sexual desire. In her "dear John" letter to René, she outlines the ideal woman for him, only to cast herself in the role: "Et quelle est la femme qui ne chercherait pas à vous render heureux! L'ardeur de votre âme, la beauté de votre génie, votre air noble et passioné…Ah! Avec quelles délices ne te présserait-elle pas dans ses bras et sur son coeur! …. Elle serait toute amour, toute innocence devant toi; tu croirais retrouver une soeur."[101] Nearly every sentence of this letter contains a sexually suggestive word (ardeur, beauté, passion, délices) that is only mildly toned down by the phrase surrounding it (e.g., ardeur de votre âme). Amélie outlines for René a devoted wife, and then connects this description to herself by

[99] Ibid., 57.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.

finishing with "tu croirais retrouver une soeur." The line between sister and lover does indeed seem faint.

The absence of a father who can provide structure to this relationship, coupled with unmet sexual desires, creates the opportunity for a relationship that undermines the very foundations of family. As Houria Bouchenafa explains in his analysis of incest in European literature, "l'ultime transgression sexuelle que représente la philadelphie debouche sur une crime, un bouleversement tragique englobant l'individu, le couple, la famille, la société dans des interactions conflictuelles."[102] Amélie and René may have eyes only for each other, but the transgression they almost commit threatens society as a whole. The deviance from social norms of these two siblings has greater implications. In *René,* Chateaubriand blurs the lines between the father and the king after a historical moment when those two terms had, for the first time, become distinct from each other. René's failed search for both fathers and kings connects his individual turmoil to political turmoil. The incestuous feelings between Amélie and René forebode both individual and political tragedy.

In order to escape the temptation of incest, Amélie commits religious suicide by entering a convent. Yet even in burying her desires, her efforts are thwarted by the absence of a legitimate father. The ceremony for admitting Amélie to the nunnery is a macabre combination of a wedding and a funeral; Amélie must say her vows so that she can become dead to the world: "Amélie n'avait point encore pronconcé ses voeux; et pour mourir au monde, il fallait qu'elle passât à travers le tombeau."[103] Because she is marrying Christ, Amélie needs a father to give her away. In the absence of her real father,

---

[102] Houria Bouchenafa, *Mon amour, ma soeur : l'imaginaire de l'inceste frère-soeur dans la littérature européenne à la fin du XIXe siècle : essai* (Paris: Harmattan, 2004), 139.
[103] Chateaubriand, 70.

she tells her brother, "si votre projet est de paraître à l'autel le jour de ma profession, daignez m'y server de père; ce role est le seul digne de votre courage, le seul qui convienne à notre amitié et à mon repos."[104] Even in arranging for her own "burial," Amélie cannot resist requesting her brother's presence; without a real father to give definition to this paternal role, René slips into a new, familial relationship with Amélie and with the same consequences. At the moment that her father is to give her away, Amélie nearly faints with desire not for her new husband (God), but for her father/brother: "On vient alors me chercher, pour remplir les fonctions paternelle. Au bruit de mes pas chancelants dans le sanctuaire, Amélie est prête à défaillir."[105] The sound of René's approaching footsteps is enough to weaken his sister.

Indeed, it is at this moment that Amélie finally confesses her desire to René, making him her confessor, her father, and her brother: "Tout à coup un murmure confus sort de dessous le voile sepulchral; je m'incline, et ces paroles épouvantables (que je fus le seul à entendre) viennent me frapper mon oreille: 'Dieu de miséricorde, fais que je ne me relève jamais de cette couche funèbre, et comble de tes biens un frère qui n'a point partagé ma criminelle passion!'."[106] Amélie confesses her desire to God and to René; René's very physical response to this confession betrays his own inability to separate brotherly affection from sexually charged interactions: "À ces mots échappés du cercueil…je me laisse tomber sur la linceul de la mort, je presse ma soeur dans mes bras, je m'écrie: 'Chaste épouse de Jésus-Christ, reçois mes derniers embrassements à travers les glaces du trépas et les profondeurs de l'éternité, qui te sépare déjà de ton frère!'."[107]

---

[104] Ibid., 66.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid., 71.
[107] Ibid.

René literally throws himself on his sister, takes her in his arms, and asks her to accept his last kisses before she dies to the world—not an ideal way to approach someone who has just confessed a "criminelle passion" for you.

Amélie has adopted God as her father, but René still wanders alone in the world. The lack of a father drives René and he soon travels to America, where he substitutes his biological father with two father figures: Chactas, an American Indian who serves as his adopted father, and Father Souël, a missionary priest. According to Jean-Marie Roulin, Chactas and Souël "offrent une voie royale pour retrouver le père charnel…ils représentent chacun une face, la bienveillance et la sévérité."[108] Together, these father figures offer René a substitute that far exceeds the attention he received from his biological father.

Yet, these fathers also fail to provide the structure that René craves. After René recounts his story, "Chactas pressait René dans ses bras; le vieillard pleurait. 'Mon enfant,' dit-il à son fils, 'je voudrais que le père Aubry fût ici'."[109] The phrase is remarkable because Chactas, a venerable old man, points to another man as the person who could support René (and Chactas) in this time of need. The choice of père Aubry is particularly significant, as this man was a failed father figure to Chactas in Chateaubriand's *Atala*. Père Aubry failed to prevent Atala, the intended wife of Chactas, from committing suicide before the priest could clarify a misunderstanding.

Father Souël takes a more severe approach, but also effectively withdraws from the fatherly role in which René seeks to place him: "Jusqu'alors, le père Souël, sans proférer une parole, avait écouté d'un air austere l'histoire de René…'Rien,' dit-il au

[108] Roulin, 37.
[109] Chateaubriand, 79.

frère d'Amélie, 'rien ne mérite, dans cette histoire, la pitié qu'on vous montre ici." He adds, "La solitude est mauvaise à celui qui n'y vit pas avec Dieu."[110] Instead of offering René pity, père Souël recalls René to society and to God, the father. Without this heavenly father to provide him company and structure in his solitude, being alone will only further disturb René. Even alone, man needs a father figure to prevent him from disintegrating. Like Chactas, père Souël also withdraws himself from the paternal role and points instead to God.

René dies along with his adopted fathers in a massacre of the Indians by the French. René and his fathers are murdered by René's own countrymen, who would later kill their own king for his deviance. The final sentence of the novel brings together the themes of forgetting, remembrance, and father-kings: "On montre encore un rocher où il allait s'asseoir au soleil couchant."[111] As with Charles I first, murdered by his countrymen, someone still points to the empty spot where René once existed. René mourned the absence of the fathers; with René gone, this mourning falls to the French readers, who remain the sole, fatherless witnesses of a great (political) loss.

***

William Hill Brown and René de Chateaubriand both wrote their novels after the revolutionary moment had passed, but while the ensuing turmoil still gripped the country. Written during this post-revolutionary window, the *Power of Sympathy* and *René* share a remarkable number of themes: romance, tragic deaths, family dysfunction, absent mothers, failed fathers, intergenerational guilt and incest. While the threat of incest is perhaps the most discussed in analyses of both stories, this sexual deviance is only a

[110] Ibid., 80.
[111] Ibid., 81.

symptom of a greater dysfunction—the absence of the father, which fundamentally undermines the social and political structure.

In America, King George III became labeled as a bad father, while George Washington and other leaders of the revolution became heralded as good fathers.[112] Given these labels, following the "good father" seems an obvious choice. In revolutionary France, the French established a remarkably similar narrative in which the failure of King Louis XVI to assume the role of the good father increasingly undermined his authority and justified a rebellion on the grounds that the king was a bad father. Revolution in France and America had become possible because it became possible in the latter half of the eighteenth century to extend the accusation of deviance to the king himself. In both countries, these narratives were played out in virtually every medium: engravings, cartoons, paintings, short stories, poems, news articles, speeches, and novels. These monarchs became the deviant figures against which the people could—and did—unite. And in both countries, these narratives resulted in nothing less than a total political reorganization.

The Power of Sympathy and *René* do not participate in the characterization of the king/father as a deviant. That work has already been done. Rather, these two novels examine the post-revolutionary world in which the search for a new father begins. Neither novel offers much hope for the future, however; in both cases, the absence of the father—good or bad—results in even greater deviance from social and sexual norms and disaster for the sons of the revolution.

---

[112] Hunt, 73.

WORKS CITED

Anti-Federalist Arguments from Pennsylvania. http://america.eb.com/america/article?articleId=385401&query=anti-federalist.

Bailyn, Bernard. *The ideological origins of the American Revolution*. Enl. ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992.

Barnes, Elizabeth. "Affecting Relations: Pedagogy, Patriarchy, and the Politics of Sympathy." *American Literary History* 8, no. 4 (1996): 597-614.

Barnes, Elizabeth. *States of sympathy: seduction and democracy in the American novel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Bell, Richard. "The Double Guilt of Dueling: The Stain of Suicide in Anti-Dueling Rhetoric in the Early Republic." *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 383-410.

Bloch, Ruth H. "Changing Conceptions of Sexuality and Romance in Eighteenth-Century America." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2003): 13-42.

Bouchenafa, Houria. *Mon amour, ma soeur : l'imaginaire de l'inceste frère-soeur dans la littérature européenne à la fin du XIXe siècle : essai*. Paris: Harmattan, 2004.

Brown, William Hill. *Ira and Isabella: Or, The Natural Children. A Novel, Founded in Fiction. A Posthumous Work.* Boston: Published by Belcher and Armstrong, 1807.

Brown, William Hill, ed. *The power of sympathy*. Edited by William S. Kable. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969.

Chateaubriand, François-René de. *René* Classiques Larousse, Edited by Denis A. Canal. Paris: Larousse-Bordas, 1802. Reprint, 1996.

Chateaubriand, François-René de. "Défense du Génie du Christianisme." In *Oeuvres complètes de Chateaubriand*, 2, 207-306. Paris: Acamédia, 1997.

Chateaubriand, François-René vicomte de. "Le roi est mort, vive le roi." Paris: Normant pére, 1824.

Chateaubriand, François-René vicomte de. *René*, Edited by Armand Weil. Paris: E. Droz, 1935.

Cobbett, William. "The Manner of the Trial of Charles Stuart, King of England." In *Cobbett's complete collection of state trials and proceedings for high treason and*

other crimes and misdemeanors from the earliest period to the present time 4, 1071-1072. London: R. Bagshaw, 1809.

Dalke, Anne. "Original Vice: The Policitical Implications of Incest in the Early American Novel." *Early American Literature* 23, no. 2 (1988): 188-201.

Daniels, Charlotte. *Subverting the family romance : women writers, kinship structures, and the early French novel*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2000.

Davidson, Cathy N. *Revolution and the word: the rise of the novel in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Evans, Gareth. "Rakes, Coquettes and Republican Patriarchs: Class, Gender and Nation in Early American Sentimental Fiction." *Canadian Review of American Studies/Revue Canadienne d'Etudes Americaines* 25, no. 3 (1995): 41-62.

"The Federalist No. 63." In *The Federalist: A Commentary on the Constitution of the United States, Being a Collection of Essays Written in Support of the Constitution Agreed Upon September 17, 1787 by the Federal Convention*, edited by Henry Cabot Lodge, 391-400. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1889.

Fliegelman, Jay. *Prodigals and pilgrims: the American revolution against patriarchal authority, 1750-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Hamilton, Alexander. "The Federalist No. 1." In *The Federalist: a commentary on the Constitution of the United States, being a Collection of Essays Written in Support of the Constitution Agreed Upon September 17, 1787 by the Federal Convention*, edited by Henry Cabot Lodge, 3-7. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1889.

Hunt, Lynn Avery. *The family romance of the French Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Kerber, Linda K. *Women of the Republic : intellect and ideology in revolutionary America*. New York: Norton, 1986.

Lenoir, William. "The Interest of the Few and the Liberties of the People." In *The Debates in the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution*, edited by Jonathon Elliot, IV, 201-206. Philadelphia, 1861.

Lewis, Jan. "The Republican Wife." *William and Mary Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1987): 689-721.

"Mediocrity." *OED Online* (March 2011). http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/view/Entry/115742?redirectedFrom=mediocrity.

Neumann, Martin. *Das Inzesttabu im Spiegel der französischen Erzählliteratur des 18. Jahrhunderts*. Bonn: Romanistischer Verlag, 1991.

Respaut, Michele. "Rene: Confession, Repetition, Revelation." *The French Review* 57, no. 1 (1983): 14-19.

Roulin, Jean-Marie. *Chateaubriand, l'exil et la gloire: du roman familial à l'identité littéraire dans l'oeuvre de Chateaubriand*. Vol. 26 Bibliothèque de littérature moderne. Paris: H. Champion Ed., 1994.

Tennenhouse, Leonard. "Libertine America." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11, no. 3 (1999): 1-28.

Weyler, Karen Ann. *Intricate relations : sexual and economic desire in American fiction, 1789-1814*. Iowa City: Unversity of Iowa Press, 2004.

Williams, John R. "François-René de Chateaubriand." In *Nineteenth century French fiction writers: romanticism and realism, 1800-1860*, edited by Catharine Savage Brosman, 72-89. Detroit: Gale Research, 1992.

Winans, Robert B. "The Growth of a Novel-Reading Public in Late Eighteenth-Century America." *Early American Literature* 9, no. 3 (1975): 267-75.

Wood, Gordon S. *The creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*. Chapel Hill: Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Va., 1969.

CHAPTER 3

MORAL BANKRUPTCY IN *MADAME BOVARY* AND *THE SCARLET LETTER*

The language of the nineteenth century was one influenced by economics. While debt and paper money had existed even in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a complex economic system based on these two instruments did not exist cohesively until the nineteenth century. In both France and the United States, the impact of these monetary changes went far beyond the economic sector; the literature of the time, too, both adopted and interrogated the new system. François Vatin has observed that "La question économique est au coeur des interrogations sociales du XIXème siècle," adding, "dans ce contexte de diffusion généralisée d'une representation économique du monde, la literature ne peut faire exception."[1] In the United States, too, literature allowed writers to express and acknowledge the anxieties of a reading public now expected to negotiate a financial system that seemed to guarantee either great wealth or utter ruin: "the vulnerability of the domestic sphere to the economic machinations of unregulated men…remains a preoccupation of the novel."[2] In both France and the United States, literature voiced an anxiety about the pervasive influence of economics on social relations.

The vocabulary of this nineteenth-century economic system—production, consumption, credit, and debt—appears in the literature of the period to describe not only financial transactions, but also human interactions. William Gallois, writing about Zola, observes, "Capitalism…describes the economic structure of modernity, though this

---

[1] François Vatin, "Introduction," in *Économie et littérature : France et Grande-Bretagne, 1815-1848*, ed. Nicole Edelman and François Vatin (Paris: Le Manuscrit, 2007), 11-13.
[2] Karen A. Weyler, *Intricate Relations: Sexual and Economic Desire in American Fiction, 1784-1814* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004), 186.

includes far more than capital itself, extending to the organization of government and human relations as they are mediated by capital."[3] Vatin echoes this argument, writing, "Les relations entre les hommes, mais aussi les cosmos naturel lui mêmes sont pensés dans les termes de l'économie politique, comme des processus d'échange, d'arbitrage, de production, et de consommation."[4] In the United States, the economy expanded rapidly during the long nineteenth century, shifting from an agricultural and mercantile model to an industrial model that completely changed the structure of the American economy.[5] At the same time, the Bank War of 1836 pitted paper money and hard money advocates in the United States against each other and raised troubling questions about the rise of the wealthy at the expense of the middle and working classes: "Men living by the issue and circulation of paper money produced nothing; they added nothing to the national income; yet, they flourished and grew wealthy. Their prosperity, it was argued, must be stolen from the proceeds of productive labor."[6]

This anxiety, both in France and the United States stems from the potential for disaster that these new systems entail. With an almost limitless potential for debt, an uninformed or naïve participant in this new economy could bring utter ruin to the family. Considering the new dangers inherent in this world of public exchange, it is unsurprising that the division between the public and private spheres gains strength in the early nineteenth century. The wife's central place is increasingly the home, where she is shielded from the turmoil of the public sphere: in France, she was the "femme de foyer";

---

[3] William Gallois, *Zola: The History of Capitalism* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000), 89.
[4] Vatin, 13.
[5] Robert E. Gallman, "Economic Growth and Structural Change in the Long Nineteenth Century," in *The Cambridge economic history of the United States*, ed. Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman (Cambridge [England] ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 55.
[6] Arthur M. Schlesinger, "The Bank War," in *Issues in American economic history*, ed. Gerald D. Nash (Boston: Heath, 1964).

in the United States, the "angel of the house."[7] Because of the prospect of financial ruin for those who dealt in the public sphere, the "angel of the house" was as much prevented from acting in the economic sphere as she was protected from it.

The separation of the public and private sphere was more an ideal than an actuality, however, with the wife often deeply invested in her husband's economic interactions outside the home. In fact, Elizabeth Langland has argued in "Nobody's Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel," that,

> the presiding hearth angel of Victorian social myth, actually performed a more significant and extensive economic and political function than is usually perceived. The prevailing ideology regarded the house as a haven, a private domain opposed to the public sphere of commerce, but the house and its mistress in fact served as a significant adjunct to a man's business endeavors. Whereas husbands earned the money, wives had the important task of administering the funds to acquire or maintain social and political status.[8]

While the husband earns the income, the wife has at least some involvement in household expenses. As such, the wife shares the power to secure or ruin the family's financial well-being. With this much monetary responsibility in the hands of the wife—the center of the home and family—an economically deviant wife could destroy the family unit from the inside. The disaster would arrive not in the form of a seducer, as in the first chapter, but

---

[7] Philip Nord, "Republican Politics and the Bourgeois Interior in Mid-Nineteenth-Century France," in *Home and Its Dislocations in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Suzanne Nash (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 193.

[8] Elizabeth Langland, "Nobody's Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel," *PMLA* 107, no. 2 (March 1992): 290-304.

in the form of a creditor seeking repayment for the financial infidelities of the wife. Debt, not sex, could prove the ultimate ruin of the nineteenth-century family.

Discussing the varying approaches to this scenario in both French and American nineteenth-century literature would be a project too large for this chapter, so I will reference two books—Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*—to explore the role of literature in addressing social anxiety about debt and credit. Both of these novels make ample use of economic terms to discuss not just financial transactions, but also the social relationships that determine the fate of the characters. *Madame Bovary* offers a direct example of the devastating effect that debt can have on the family. *The Scarlet Letter*, with its Puritan setting and theological focus, seems at first glance far removed from nineteenth-century economic concerns. Yet this setting and focus allow Hawthorne to explore the ramifications of social debt to both the family and the community.

***

Written in 1856, *Madame Bovary* was published during the economic expansion that characterized the reign of Napoleon III. The court celebrated a return to luxury and so did those who could afford it—and those who could not. According to Philip Nord, "mid-century republicans liked to bemoan the sorry state of French womanhood. The fault was laid squarely at the door of Louis-Napoleon's wife Eugénie, a 'clothes-mad coquette' with a taste for excessive 'luxury'. The Empress made a cult of Marie-Antoinette but lacked all sense of proportion."[9] The Empress lived in an eighteenth-century inspired fantasy, even reviving the *paniers* worn by women in the court of Louis

[9] Nord, 196.

XVI in the form of the *crinoline*. This fashion soon appeared throughout France and beyond.

Considering the predilections of France's leading lady, it is fitting that *Madame Bovary* chronicles the consequences of eighteenth-century fantasies lived out in a nineteenth-century, proto-capitalistic world. Despite Madame Bovary's desire to live above the fiscal realities of her life as a wife, mother, and lover, the relationships in which she engages participate in both a monetary and sexual economy that is firmly rooted in the nineteenth century world. Tracing the exchange of money and sex in *Madame Bovary* reveals a startling fact: by introducing a third party into the marriage economy, Emma Bovary initiates a steady flow of money and sexual power from Charles, through Leon and Rodolphe, and finally into the pockets of the usurer Lheureux. In other words, *Madame Bovary* does not condemn adultery as a sexual misstep, but as an economic miscalculation whose consequences for the bourgeois family are far-reaching and tragic.

Though Emma commits adultery in search of love, the tragedy of the story is that Emma is incapable of love. The sentimental novels of her youth have created a *fata morgana* of love that taunts her, yet remains always out of reach. In these novels, "Ce n'étaient qu'amours, amants, amantes, dames persécutées s'évanouissant dans des pavillons solitaires…troubles du cœur, serments, sanglots, larmes et baisers."[10] These are novels where emotional extremes—agony and tears—are the currency of everyday exchanges. The real-life relationships Emma experiences in comparison, with both her husband and her lovers, cannot sustain this level of emotion, and are therefore doomed to failure.

---

[10] Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* (Paris: Flammarion, 1986), 96.

Emma believes that she seeks pure love, even waiting for it to arrive after marriage as if love were a wedding gift:

> Avant qu'elle se mariât, elle avait cru avoir de l'amour ; mais le bonheur qui aurait dû résulter de cet amour n'étant pas venu, il fallait qu'elle se fût trompée, songeait-elle. Et Emma cherchait à savoir ce que l'on entendait au juste dans la vie par les mots de *félicité*, de *passion* et d'*ivresse*, qui lui avaient paru si beaux dans les livres.[11]

Marriage does not bring Emma the *passion* and *félicité* that she expected—which, in her mind, "should have" (aurait dû) resulted. This choice phrase, "aurait dû," contains within it the cause for Emma's perpetual unhappiness. The infinitive of *dû* is *devoir*, meaning an obligation or a debt. Charles does not provide Emma with the benefits she expected from marriage—*félicité, passion,* and *ivresse*—and he has therefore not made good on an obligation. In Emma's mind, her marriage is an unpaid debt from which only Charles has received a benefit. Tony Tanner has explained in *Adultery in the Novel* that bourgeois marriage was fundamentally a relationship centered on property.[12] In this sense, marriage is a relationship in which women have an exchange value in the form of dowries and a production value in the form of children. Emma has provided both of these to Charles; he has provided nothing she values in return.

Emma's doomed marriage and her other failed relationships reveal the underlying economic concerns of all Emma's relationships. Margaret S. Clark and Judson Mills have written extensively about the differences between relationships based on love (communal relationships) and those based on economics (exchange relationships). According to Mills

---

[11] Ibid., 94.
[12] Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the novel: contract and transgression* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 15.

and Clark, communal relationships are usually between friends and family, where "concern for the other's welfare" forms the basis of the relationships. Each person provides "benefits" to the other based on need or simply to please the other, but not with the expectation of an equal and immediate benefit in return.[13] In exchange relationships, on the other hand, the participants give benefits "with the expectation of receiving benefits of comparable value in return."[14] Accepting a benefit "incurs a debt or an obligation to return a comparable benefit."[15] Emma's unfulfilled desires turn every communal relationship into an exchange relationship.

When Emma and Charles marry, Charles enters into a communal relationship with a woman he adores, while Emma enters into an exchange relationship with a man she hopes will save her from monotony. Charles gives Emma benefits that he believes will make her happy: "Son mari, sachant qu'elle aimait à se promener en voiture, trouva un *boc* d'occasion"[16] and finds his own happiness in the mere presence of Emma: "Il était donc heureux et sans souci de rien au monde. Un repas en tête à tête, une promenade le soir sur la grande route, un geste de sa main sur ses bandeaux…composaient maintenant la continuité de son bonheur."[17] While communal and exchange relationships are not as discrete as Mills and Clark describe them, Charles's motivations do seem to originate from a real love for Emma, rather than an expected benefit in return for a gift.

---

[13] Margaret S. Clark and Judson Mills, "Communal Relationships and Exchange Relationships: Controversies and Research," in *Theoretical frameworks for personal relationships*, ed. Ralph Erber and Robin Gilmour (Hilldale, N.J.: L. Erlbaum, 1994), 29.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Flaubert, 92.
[17] Ibid.

Charles's great miscalculation is believing that these gifts and his devotion make Emma happy. They do not, and Charles therefore continually fails to repay the obligation he incurred when he married Emma :

> Ce qui l'exaspérait, c'est que Charles n'avait pas l'air de se douter de son supplice. La conviction ou il était de la rendre heureuse lui semblait une insulte imbécile, et sa sécurité là-dessus de l'ingratitude. Pour qui donc était-elle sage ? N'était-il pas, lui, l'obstacle à toute félicité, la cause de toute misère, et comme l'ardillon pointu de cette courroie complexe qui la bouclait de tous côtés?[18]

As Emma's exasperation shows, not only has Charles failed to repay his original debt to Emma, but this debt continues to accrue with every passing day, as Emma becomes increasingly miserable in her marriage. Charles, in other words, provides no exchange value: "Elle aurait voulut que ce nom de Bovary, qui était le sien, fût illustre, le voir étalé chez des libraires, répété dans les journaux, connu par toute la France."[19] Charles cannot even provide this indirect benefit, however, and therefore remains incapable of providing Emma with an exchange she would consider fair. Emma considers her marriage fraudulent, a "wrongful or criminal deception" that resulted in "personal gain" for Charles, but not for her.

Charles's inability to recognize that he makes Emma unhappy is his most costly mistake. Deprived of the benefits that she would consider a fair exchange for her marriage to Charles, Emma begins to repay herself with the material goods that she considers the closest approximation to the benefits she expected from marriage : "Une

[18] Ibid., 73.
[19] Ibid., 122.

femme qui s'était imposée de si grands sacrifices pouvait bien se passer des fantaisies. Elle s'acheta un prie-Dieu gothique… ; elle écrivit à Rouen, afin d'avoir une robe en cachemire bleu ; elle choisit, chez Lheureux, la plus belle de ses écharpes."[20] Emma feels that she has made great sacrifices in her marriage. Since she views her relationship as an exchange relationship, she becomes increasingly unhappy when she does not see returns on these sacrifices. In buying the "prie-Dieu gothique," the "robe en cachemire bleu" and the "écharpes" from Lheureux, Emma attempts to provide herself with the material goods she associates with her novels.

Emma sees no distinction between the artifacts of luxury that surround the sentimental lovers in her novels and the lovers themselves:

> "Elle confondait, dans son désir, les sensualités de luxe avec les joies du cœur, l'élégance des habitudes et les délicatesses du sentiment…..Les soupirs au clair de lune, des longues étreintes, les larmes qui coulent sur les mains qu'on abandonne, toutes les fièvres de la chair et les langueurs de la tendresse ne se séparaient donc pas du balcon des grands châteaux qui sont pleins de loisirs, d'un boudoir à stores de soie avec un tapis bien épais, des jardinières remplies, un lit monté sur une estrade, ni du scintillement des pierres précieuses et des aiguillettes de la livrée.[21]

Emma believes that love and passion can only happen in the right environment. Without the "grand château" and the "boudoir à stores de soie," love cannot exist. In Emma's world, material goods become the currency of love exchanges. For Emma, passion increases in value along with the materials goods that surround it. But Emma lives in a

[20] Ibid., 190.
[21] Ibid., 119-120.

small home in a country village, and in her value system, these humble surroundings forestall love altogether: "Alors, les appétits de la chair, les convoitises d'argent et les mélancolies de la passion, tout se confondit dans une même souffrance…; elle s'irritait d'un plat mal servi ou d'une porte entrebâillée, gémissait du velours qu'elle n'avait pas, du bonheur qui lui manquait, de ses rêves trop hauts, *de sa maison trop étroite*.[22] Desire for love and desire for wealth have become the same impulse for Emma. She therefore values Charles's love as much as she values his home—very little indeed.

The most striking example of Charles's inability to provide Emma with the excitement, money, and fame that would compensate her for entering into the marriage contract, is Charles's attempt to cure Hippolyte's club foot. With only some medical journals to guide him, Charles endeavors an ambitious surgery on Hyppolyte's foot after much convincing by both his wife and the pharmacist, Homais. If successful, he could build a reputation and a fortune as a doctor who specializes in curing club feet. For Emma, convincing her husband to attempt this surgery is an investment in her own future from which she hopes to reap very tangible rewards: "quelle satisfaction pour elle que de l'avoir engagé à une démarche d'où sa réputation et sa fortune se trouveraient accrues."[23] The evening after Charles performs the surgery, Emma feels the effects of love inspired by the promise of material gains: "La soirée fut charmante, pleine de causeries, de rêves en commun. Ils parlèrent de leur fortune future, d'améliorations à introduire dans leur ménage."[24] For once, Charles has managed to provide Emma with an equal exchange. Notably, this turn of events allows Emma to recognize Charles as a participating member in "leur ménage," the seat of the marriage exchange.

---

[22] Ibid., 173.
[23] Ibid., 242.
[24] Ibid.

The surgery is a disaster. Charles not only fails to gain fortune but in fact diminishes his fortune, both in reputation and in actual monies, by calling in a more experienced doctor, paying for Hippolyte's care and buying him a prosthetic leg after Hippolyte loses his to gangrene. Emma's confidence in Charles has proved a failure; notably, Emma's humiliation at Charles's failure stems not so much from his failures as a surgeon, as it does from her failure to identify a bad investment: "Emma…ne partageait pas son humiliation, elle ne éprouvait une autre : c'était de s'être imaginé qu'un pareil homme pût valoir quelque chose, comme si vingt fois déjà elle n'avait pas suffisamment aperçu sa médiocrité."[25] Despite having inside information on her potential investment, Emma failed to see the risks of trusting her dreams of fortune to Charles.

Much as Emma would like to deny it, her fortunes are tied to Charles. Her social value rises and diminishes with his : "Car il était là, tout tranquillement, et sans même se douter que le ridicule de son nom allait désormais la salir comme lui."[26] Even worse, "Elle avait fait des efforts pour l'aimer, et elle s'était repentie, en pleurant d'avoir cédé à un autre."[27] In exchange for the expected return on her investment in Charles, Emma had paid her dues by trying to love him and repenting her affair with Rodolphe. In Emma's world of exchange, these sacrificial acts were payment for Charles's expected fame. Charles has once again failed to repay these benefits, putting him further into debt.

Emma's anger at this perceived fraud goes to the heart of the marriage contract. In the nineteenth century marriage contract, the wife agrees to be virtuous, thereby ensuring the moral and economical stability of the family. As Fuchs and Thompson have

[25] Ibid., 252.
[26] Ibid., 253.
[27] Ibid.

explained, the nineteenth century wife occupied a central place in the concept of the virtuous family:

> According to the ideology of domesticity, men and women had different functions in society; they operated in separate spheres. The female, or private sphere, was the realm of the home and family. It was characterized by nurturing, morality, and *virtue*. Europeans believed women were designed to bear and raise children, to teach these children to be *moral* citizens, and to provide a comforting and regenerative atmosphere in the home.[28]

Virtue and morality are the determinants of a woman's value; they are the currency that she brings with her into marriage. The wife receives in exchange the monetary benefits of the public sphere provided by her husband. Charles reduces his fortunes and humiliates himself in the public sphere. Here therefore fails to meet the terms of the marriage contract and, in Emma's eyes, cannot expect to benefit from her virtue in return. Emma repents having fulfilled her side of the marriage contract: "Elle se repentit, comme d'un crime, de sa vertu passée, et ce qui en restait encore s'écroulait sous les coups furieux de son orgueil. Elle se délectait dans toutes les ironies mauvaises de l'adultère triomphant."[29] The dues she has already paid Charles with her previous virtue now seem excessive, since he has provided no equal benefit in exchange.

Charles, however, remains unaware of his debts, and as a result, they begin to multiply exponentially. Charles views his failure to cure Hippolyte as an unfortunate event; he believes that the communal relationship of marriage will comfort him in this

---

[28] Rachel Ginnis Fuchs and Victoria Elizabeth Thompson, *Women in nineteenth-century Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 2.
[29] Flaubert, 254.

crisis. While he waits for news of Hippolyte's amputation, he turns to his wife, telling her, "Embrasse-moi donc, ma bonne!"[30] The phrase implies that, as Fuchs and Thompson would put it, Emma's "comforting and regenerative" presence will satisfy Charles's need for solace. But Emma views her marriage as an exchange relationship and therefore refuses this benefit because she knows Charles will provide no benefit in return. Since Charles cannot provide her with the fame or luxury she desires, Emma expands her market to include Rodolphe, Leon, and Lheureux. In doing so, she disrupts the marriage economy and initiates a steady flow of money and sexual power away from Charles, through Rodolphe and Leon, and finally into the pockets of the usurer Lheureux. For Emma, money and virtue become the currency she uses to participate in exchange relationships outside her home. Charles, unaware of this debts to his wife, essentially has his debts "sold" to an outside party, who will satisfy Emma's needs.

Rodolphe easily seduces Emma because he deals in a currency she accepts: sentimentalism and material goods. When Rodolphe first meets Emma, he introduces an exchange of sentimental words to which Emma has already attributed a high value:

> Alors, il parlèrent de la médiocrité provinciale, des existences qu'elle étouffait, des illusions qui s'y perdaient.
>
> --Aussi, disait Rodolphe, je m'enfonce dans une tristesse…
>
> --Vous ! fit-elle avec étonnement. Mais je vous croyais très gai ?
>
> --Ah ! oui, d'apparence, parce qu'au milieu du monde je sais mettre sur mon visage un masque railleur; et, cependant, que de fois, à la vue d'un

[30] Ibid.

> cimetière, au clair de lune, je me suis demandé si je ne ferais pas mieux d'aller rejoindre ceux qui sont à dormir…[31]

The words and phrases Rodolphe offers to Emma in this conversation (tristesse, cimetière, clair de lune) correspond directly to the love-struck exchanges Emma reads in her sentimental novels. Rodolphe thereby provides a real-world equivalent of the exciting lovers Emma desires. As Flaubert's narrator remarks in earlier passages, Emma enjoys these novels not because she reads them, but because she *consumes* them. In describing her taste for Romantic novels, the narrator explains, "elle rejetait comme inutile tout ce qui ne contribuait pas à la consommation de son cœur—étant de tempérament plus sentimentale qu'artiste, cherchant des émotions et non des paysages." Emma consumes the sentimental words in these books; it seems only natural to consume the words Rodolphe offers her as well.[32]

Rodolphe's seduction of Emma takes place during the auction of agricultural goods, linking the exchange between the couple to the mercantile exchange taking place only a few yards away. The effect is both hilarious and poignant. At the moment when Rodolphe takes Emma's hand, the president of the auction cries, "Ensembles de bonnes cultures!" (collection of good crops). Rodolphe's further seductions are interspersed with monetary offers from the auction, giving the impression of an assigned value for each seductive phrase : "soixante et dix francs" follows the first sentimental foray. A profession of eternal love seems to garner the price of "une médaille d'or." A final

---

[31] Ibid., 205.

[32] Dorothy Kelly has published an excellent article in the Australian Journal of French Studies, entitled "Emma's Distinctive Taste," which inspired this analysis. Kelly explicates the references to literary consumption in Madame Bovary and draws a comparison between consumption of literature and ingestion. In my analysis, I am more interested in the role of consumption—consumerism—in exchange relationships.

confession of love appears to result in the sale of a pig, priced at sixty francs.[33] The exchange between Emma and Rodolphe is a *comices* for humans, with Emma as a desirable object for purchase.

Emma is an avid consumer, and Rodolphe therefore secures his seduction of Emma by offering her the promise of luxury as well—precisely that which Charles cannot provide her. Maria Rippon explains that Emma's attraction to material goods provides Rodolphe with the means to seduce her.[34] He carefully constructs his clothing to match Emma's expectations : "Ainsi, sa chemise de batiste à manchettes plissées bouffait au hasard du vent, dans l'ouverture de son gilet, qui était de coutil gris, et son pantalon à larges raies découvrait aux chevilles ses bottines de nankin, claquées de cuir verni. Elles étaient si vernies, que l'herbe s'y reflétait."[35] Rodolphe, with his romantic shirt and shiny boots, is the reincarnation of the lovers in Emma's books. He achieves this transformation through material goods, the currency of Emma and Rodolphe's exchange relationship. While she consumes his material goods, he consumes her.

Rodolphe, unlike Charles, knows immediately that his relationship with Emma will be based on exchange. He offers her sentimental words and material goods; in exchange, he expects her virtue and her body. From the start, Rodolphe literally calculates his actions, with the ultimate goal of buying Emma's affections: "Et il comprit que son *calcul* avait été bon, lorsque, en entrant dans la salle, il aperçut Emma pâlir."[36] The sentimentalism and luxury that Emma accepts from Rodolphe put her into his debt.

---

[33] Flaubert, 215-216.
[34] Maria R. Rippon, *Judgment and justification in the nineteenth-century novel of adultery*, Contributions to the study of world literature, no. 112 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002).
[35] Flaubert, 204.
[36] Ibid., 222. Italics mine

Ironically, Charles encourages her to accept the very "propositions" that will ultimately become Charles's debt:

> --Pourquoi n'acceptes-tu pas les propositions de M. Boulanger, qui sont si gracieuses ?....
>
> Eh ! comment veux-tu que je monte à cheval, puisque je n'ai pas d'amazone ?
>
> --Il faut t'en commander une ! répondit-il.
>
> L'amazone la décida.[37] (224)

While Rodolphe has calculated correctly in this exchange, Charles once again mismanages his household. He not only provides his wife with an "amazone" that will ultimately benefit Rodolphe, but also provides Rodolphe with his wife. Emma, in turn, repays Rodolphe for the fantasy he creates by offering him the only currency that he accepts—herself: "tout en pleurs, avec un long frémissement et se cachant la figure, elle s'abandonna."[38]

Sex is certainly an important system of exchange in Emma and Rodolphe's relationship, but Emma places less value on this aspect of their relationship than Rodolphe. To compensate for this imbalance, she introduces a letter and gift exchange to provide her with items that she considers valuable. Emma writes Rodolphe letters and expects a letter in return that is either equal or greater in sentimentality and length than her own. Rodolphe does not place a value on these letters, however, and therefore continually disappoints: "Emma portait sa lettre au bout du jardin près de la rivière, dans une fissure de la terrasse. Rodolphe venait l'y chercher et en plaçait une autre, qu'elle

[37] Ibid., 224.
[38] Ibid., 228.

accusait toujours d'être trop courte."[39] The value of gold is measured by weight; the value of diamonds is measured by size; and, for Emma, the value of a letter is measured by length. She has once again entered into a system of exchange in which she offers items that she believes to be of a higher value than the ones she receives.

Emma therefore introduces a gift exchange in another effort to equalize her relationship with Rodolphe: "D'ailleurs, elle devenait bien sentimentale. Il avait fallu échanger des miniatures, on s'était coupé des poignées de cheveux, et elle demandait à présent une bague, un véritable anneau de mariage, en signe d'alliance éternelle."[40] The narrator attributes these demands to sentimentality. Emma is imitating the heroines in her eighteenth century novels. On a more fundamental level, however, Emma desires these items because she has placed a value on them; they are, as the narrator says, an "échange." A miniature, a tuft of hair, and a ring—these are all currency in Emma's world. This exchange is also Emma's attempt to recoup some of her earlier losses.

When Emma sends letters to Rodolphe, she has no way of ensuring that Rodolphe will return a letter of equal value. Her investment in this currency is a losing endeavor because Rodolphe, in fact, does not provide her with equally long letters. Emma does not run this risk with the exchange of miniatures and hair. In both cases, the exchange promises to be an equal one: a miniature for a miniature, a tuft of hair for a tuft of hair.

The letters, however, are of small value compared to her greatest loss: her body. When Rodolphe first seduces Emma, she "abandons" her body to him. This term suggests that Emma does not receive an equal exchange in return. In the nineteenth century, male and female infidelity are not equal; men could divorce their wives for infidelity, but

[39] Ibid., 230.
[40] Ibid., 237.

women could only do so in the most extreme circumstances.[41] Since Rodolphe's body is not a unit of currency equal to her own body, Emma seeks another way to recoup this loss. She demands of Rodolphe "un véritable anneau de mariage, en signe d'alliance éternelle." Marriage creates an alliance that equalizes sexual exchanges because the woman no longer risks more than the man in engaging in sex. While the wedding ring Emma demands from Rodolphe is merely symbolic, and therefore does not insure against this unequal sexual exchange, the ring does mitigate Emma's sacrifice by offering something of real value in return.

Emma is a consumer, however, and therefore these gifts cannot continue to satisfy her after she has enjoyed them. She continues to demand items from Rodolphe, in exchange for the presents she gives him. In this system—essentially an arms race of gift giving—Rodolphe finally decides that the value of the gift Emma demands of him is greater than the gift she offers in return. Emma finally demands that she and Rodolphe run away together: this would mean the ultimate sacrifice for Rodolphe: his home and his money. Emma brings no money to the relationship, and Rodolphe will therefore absorb all the expenses of this adventure. Emma's body—which has remained the unit of currency with the most value in Rodolphe's eyes—cannot equal the value of house and money. As Rodolphe tells himself after having rejected Emma's attempt: "Car enfin, exclamait-il en gesticulant, je ne peux pas m'expatrier, avoir la charge d'un enfant. …Et d'ailleurs, les embarras, la dépense…Ah !"[42]

Emma's adulterous affair was really one exchange relationship designed to replace another. Ultimately, however, Rodolphe too disappoints and Emma must turn to

---

[41] Patricia Mainardi, *Husbands, wives, and lovers : marriage and its discontents in nineteenth-century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 14.
[42] Flaubert, 268.

Léon as a new source of value. Léon has learned much about the art of seduction since moving to Rouen to pursue his law studies. In fact, the first exchange between Emma and Léon after meeting in Rouen mirrors the first exchange between Emma and Rodolphe. Once again, sentimental words become currency: "Emma l'interrompit pour se plaindre de sa maladie où elle avait manqué mourir; quel dommage ! elle ne souffrirait plus maintenant. Léon tout de suite envia *le calme du tombeau*."[43] The phrase "le calme du tombeau" evokes the world of the eighteenth-century novels that Emma so prizes. But since this is seduction, Léon adds more currency to the system. As the narrator recounts, "Il se mit à vanter la vertu, le devoir, et les immolations silencieuses, ayant lui-même un incroyable besoin de dévouement qu'il ne pouvait assouvir."[44] Léon exalts personal sacrifice to achieve personal gain. As with Rodolphe in previous episodes, the words "virtue" and "duty" are mere tokens, exchanged with Emma in the hopes of gaining sex in return.

Emma does give Léon her body, as he had hoped. She also tries to create for herself a real relationship with Léon—one that very much mimics marriage. Emma and Léon rent a hotel room to carry on their affair, and as the narrator explains, "Ils disaient notre chambre, notre tapis, nos fauteuils, même elle disait mes pantoufles, un cadeau de Léon, une fantaisie qu'elle avait eue."[45] Léon and Emma turn the hotel room into a mock household every Thursday, in which Emma even has her own pair of slippers. These objects—rug, chairs, slippers—become for Emma "evidence" that her love is real, an approximation of the ideal marriage. But the hotel room is rented, not owned; a hotel

[43] Ibid., 306.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 338.

room is by definition temporary. The materials that Emma brings into this transitional space are a counterfeit of a real home—the first of several counterfeits.

In her relationship with Rodolphe, Emma never feels that she has been adequately repaid for "giving" her body to her lover; Emma can only engage in exchange relationships, and so she begins the same cycle again with Léon: "elle demanda des vers, des vers pour elle, *une pièce d'amour* en son honneur; jamais il ne put parvenir à trouver la rime du second vers, et il finit par copier un sonnet dans un keepsake."[46] Emma wants love poetry, but Flaubert's choice of words here emphasizes the economic value Emma places on these poems. Emma demands "*une pièce d'amour*" in her honor. The word *pièce* has multiple meanings: Emma wants a "work of love" in the form of a poem, but this request harbors within it also a request for another kind of *pièce*—a coin. In Emma's economy of exchange, the poem is payment for the services she provides. Léon is unable to pay and therefore provides her with a counterfeit: "il finit par copier un sonnet dans un keepsake." Once again, Emma has entered into a bad investment—she receives only counterfeits. This dilemma would not have been unfamiliar to the nineteenth century reader. The presence of counterfeits and cheats was a veritable obsession in nineteenth-century literature, with writers including Balzac, Zola, Baudelaire and Mallarmé treating the subject.[47] Inevitably, the presence of a counterfeit always leads to disaster for someone in these fictional accounts, suggesting an anxiety about the realiability of money as a means of exchange in the nineteenth century. Emma has not yet directly asked for money from Léon, but her demands lead increasingly away from barter and toward monetary exchange.

---

[46] Ibid., 351.
[47] Scott Carpenter, *Aesthetics of Fraudulence in Nineteenth-Century France: Frauds, Hoaxes and Counterfeits* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

As with Rodolphe, Emma finally demands something of greater value than what she offers in return : "Léon, tu vas me rendre un service. Et, le secouant pas ses deux mains, qu'elle serrait étroitement, elle ajouta: Ecoute, j'ai besoin de huit mille francs!"[48] Of Rodolphe, she demanded that he run away with her in exchange for the services she has provided him. With Léon, the buffer between the service and its monetary value falls away. Deeply in debt, Emma demands monetary payment from Léon; in her eyes, what she has given to Léon is worth the eight thousand francs she owes. Emma's phrasing, "tu vas me rendre un service" underscores this exchange system. The word "rendre" literally means to "give back"; in finding eight thousand francs for Emma, Léon will give back in exchange for the sacrifices Emma has made for him.

When Emma realizes that Léon does not possess eight thousand francs and cannot legitimately find it for her, Emma demands that he steal it, telling him, "Si j'étais à ta place, moi, j'en trouverais bien!....A ton étude!"[49] To steal from his work would be a sacrifice far greater than eight thousand francs—it would be the end of Léon's career. Emma's demands have finally become too great, leading Léon to give Emma one last, fraudulent "pièce":

> Il se frappa le front en s'écriant: 'Morel doit revenir cette nuit! Il ne me refusera pas, j'espère, (c'était un de ses amis, le fils d'un négociant fort riche), et je t'apporterai cela demain', ajouta-t-il…..Pourtant, si tu ne me voyais pas à trois heures, ne m'attends plus, ma chérie. Il faut que je m'en aille, excuse-moi. Adieu![50] (372)

[48] Flaubert, 370.
[49] Ibid., 371.
[50] Ibid., 371-72.

Léon, unwilling to steal from his employer but unable to refuse Emma, tells Emma that his rich friend Morel will surely provide him with the money when Morel returns to Rouen tonight. The story is a lie, a bit of theater (une pièce), but Léon offers it as a token to Emma—the "pièce" shows his desire to shield her from disappointment, while offering nothing of real value. Léon does not return the next day, of course, and Emma returns home without the money and without a lover.

Emma has been deeply disappointed by her husband and abandoned by both her lovers because of her desire for total devotion. The exchange system in which she engages with each of these men ultimately destroys the relationship itself as her husband and lovers try to disengage themselves from the inherently monetary value she attributes to them. In fact, throughout her married life, Emma has only one constant, devoted lover: Lheureux. Only Lheureux remains "devoted" to Emma because he, like Emma, knows of no relationship outside the bounds of economics. To Lheureux, as to Emma, all relationships are exchange relationships.

Emma and Lheureux do not engage in a sexual relationship; instead, they engage in a sensual relationship built around the love for material objects—things which give Emma more pleasure even than sex. On his first visit to Emma,

> Lheureux exhiba délicatement trois écharpes algériennes….Puis, les deux mains sur la table, le cou tendu, la taille penchée, il suivait, bouche béante, le regard d'Emma qui se promenait indécis parmi ces marchandises. De temps à autre, comme pour en chaser la poussière, il donnait un coup d'ongle sur la soie des écharpes, dépliées dans toute leur longueur; et elles frémissaient avec un bruit léger en faisant, à la lumière verdâtre du

> crepuscule, scintiller, comme de petites étoiles, les paillettes d'or de leur tissue.[51]

Rodolphe and Léon seduce Emma with romantic words; Lheureux seduces Emma with silk. The exchange between the peddler and Emma exudes sensuality as Lheureux lays three silken scarves on the table for Emma. As she looks at the wares, Lheureux gets physical pleasures from watching Emma perusing his offerings: his neck is stretched towards her, his waist bent toward the wares, his mouth wide open (bouche béante). From time to time, as if touching a woman's body, he caresses the scarves, making them tremble. Flaubert underscores the relationship between these material objects and sex with the ambiguous phrase "elles frémissaient," which suggests that Lheureux's touch has the power to make both scarves and women "tremble." Emma finds this seduction almost irresistible; when she ultimately refuses them, she congratulates herself on having avoided (sexual) temptation: "Comme j'ai été sage! se disait-elle en songeant aux écharpes."[52]

Disappointed by her first failed romance with Léon, Emma does ultimately succumb to Lheureux; in fact, she buys the prettiest of the scarves she previously refused. From this moment, Lheureux becomes her ideal partner—always giving items of more value than what she offers in return, seemingly without a thought to the inequality of the relationship. Lheureux fulfills Emma's every desire, more surely even than her lovers: "Il causait avec elle des nouveaux déballages de Paris, de mille curiosités féminines, se montrait fort complaisant, et jamais ne réclamait d'argent."[53] When Emma wants a riding

[51] Ibid., 168.
[52] Ibid., 170.
[53] Ibid., 257.

crop from Rouen for Rodolphe, "M. Lheureux, la semaine d'après, la lui posa sur la table."[54]

Emma is, for a time, happy with Lheureux because they are kindred spirits. Neither can imagine a relationship outside an exchange system. And, for Emma, Lheureux is the first man who appears to give more than she does; in her relationships with Charles, Rodolphe, and Léon, Emma always seems to devote more money, time, and effort than her lovers do. Lheureux offers an ideal alternative—one in which she both dictates and benefits from the material goods Lheureux provides. Emma uses the concept of "emotional debt" to her advantage in order to justify the goods she acquires from Lheureux. Lheureux, too, understands the concept of debt; he uses it acquire households: "Il espérait que l'affaire ne s'arrêterait pas là, qu'on ne pourrait payer les billets, qu'on les renouvellerait, et que son pauvre argent, s'étant nourri chez le médecin comme dans une maison de santé, lui reviendrait, un jour, considérablement plus dodu, et gros à faire craquer le sac."[55] Charles's emotional debts may have been "sold" to Rodolphe, Léon, and ultimately Lheureux, but they have not gone away. They have grown exponentially and will ultimately require repayment. The emotional breaches of contract that instigated Emma's search for sexual and material gratification have become real monetary debts that will disrupt and bankrupt the family more surely even than simple marital infidelities.

Even before Emma's debts finally bankrupt the family, her economic infidelities begin to dismantle the household—the seat of bourgeois power. Emma accrues debts on top of debts, borrowing money in order to pay back previously borrowed money. The

[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid., 280.

debt becomes enormous: "Parfois, il est vrai, elle tâchait de faire des calculs, mais elle découvrait des choses si exorbitantes, qu'elle n'y pouvait croire. Alors elle recommençait, s'embrouillait vite, plantait tout là et n'y pensait plus."[56] Charles, then Rodolphe, the Léon incurred emotional debts that Emma repaid to herself through Lheureux. The exchange system Emma creates around these relationships ultimately creates its own trap as Emma herself falls victim to the demand that she return something of value to Lheureux. As a result, the household suffers: "La maison était bien triste, maintenant! On en voyait sortir les fournisseurs avec des figures furieuses. Il y avait des mouchoirs traînant sur les fourneaux ; et la petite Berthe, au grand scandale de madame Homais, portait des bas percés."[57] Emma, deeply in debt, takes from her own household in order to pay Lheureux for the goods she purchased for herself and her lovers. Her adulterous relationships have disrupted the marriage economy, literally bankrupting the family.

The relationships Emma had with Rodolphe and Léon comprised two currencies: love tokens and sex. Emma valued love tokens, in return for which she offered sex—the currency most valued by Rodolphe and Léon. In Lheureux's relationship with Emma, money is the only accepted currency. When Emma therefore tries to offer sex as an alternative, the attempt is laughable—as if Emma were offering rocks instead of gold as payment:

> Elle fut lâche, elle le supplia; et meme elle appuya sa jolie main blanche sur les genoux du marchand.
>
> --Laissez-moi donc! On dirait que vous voulez me séduire!

[56] Ibid., 361.
[57] Ibid.

Lheureux refuses her offer of payment and Emma, having no money, remains hopelessly indebted to Lheureux. The tragedy of Emma's miscalculations is that, even if Lheureux were to accept sex as payment, she would be no closer to paying off her debts because he has already sold them to a third party. Emma's troubles have originated because she participated unawares in speculation with Lheureux. Speculation was first introduced in the nineteenth-century and promptly became a source of deep anxiety. As Christope Charle explains, "this mistery surrounding speculation was fascinating and alien to the predominant artisan or shopkeeper mentality."[58] The lucky few could make an extraordinary amount of money without producing anything; the less fortunate could lose everything.

In the capitalist economy in which Lheureux operates, debts can not only grow exponentially, but they can also be sold. This is Emma's dilemma, as Lheureux has sold a portion of her debt to Vinçart, a broker at Rouen. Emma's debts have entered into common circulation—they have become part of a separate, larger economy of debt and interest in which personal relationships have no place. Emma's body has no value in this economy; instead, the objects in her household—now up for seizure and sale to repay her debts—become Emma's only value. Emma used these objects—clothing, furniture, jewels—to define herself as the woman she wanted to be; Emma had become one with the goods she purchased. When these pieces are sold piece by piece, Emma, too, is sold piece by piece to the highest bidder. She offered her body to Lheureux and finds herself instead sold to everyone and no one.

It is fitting that in consuming her final material good—arsenic—Emma refuses the economy of exchange. Instead of buying the arsenic on credit or with actual money,

---

[58] Christophe Charle, *Social history of France in the nineteenth century* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 78.

Emma steals it: "La clef tourna dans la serrure, et elle all adroit vers la troisième tablette, tant son souvenir la guidait bien, saisit le bocal bleu, en arracha le bouchon, y fourra sa main, et, la retirant pleine d'une poudre blanche, elle se mit à manger à meme."[59] In fact, to avoid payment, Emma takes advantage of a communal relationship. She asks Justin, the young pharmacists assistant, who is hopelessly in love with Emma, to open the door to the pharmacy for her. He does so to please her.

Emma's decision to commit suicide is, as are all her decisions, an economic one. Unable to pay her debts, either with money or with her body, the only way Emma can escape the economic system in which she is entangled is to kill herself—or so it seems. In fact, in the purely capitalistic society that Lheureux and his compatriots embody, Emma's suicide fits seamlessly into the economic system. Her dying and her death generate additional debts that will be circulated throughout the region: Charles calls doctors to cure Emma, orders romantic funeral arrangements ("je veux qu'on l'enterre dans….trois cercueils, un de chêne, un d'acajou, un de plombe"[60]), and purchases luxury goods that Emma would have liked ("il s'acheta des bottes vernies, il prit l'usage des cravats blanche"[61]). To pay for all these debts, Charles signs additional bank notes with Lheureux and the system of debt and interest begins once again:

> Les affaires d'argent bientôt recommencèrent, M. Lheureux excitant de nouveau son ami Vinçart, et Charles s'engagea pour des sommes exorbitantes….Alors, chacun se mit à *profiter*. Mademoiselle Lempereur réclama six mois de leçons, bien qu'Emma n'en eût jamais pris une seule;

[59] Flaubert, 389.
[60] Ibid., 403.
[61] Ibid., 417.

> le loueur de livres réclama trois ans d'abonnement; la mère Rolet réclama le port d'une vingtaine de lettres."[62]

Rather than stopping the economy of debt in its tracks, Emma's death releases a whole new series of debts of which Charles was totally unaware. Everyone profits, except for Charles.

Once the debts have been paid to all who stand to profit, twelve francs and seventy-five centimes remain as the only testament to Charles and Emma's net worth. Berthe, the daughter of Emma and Charles, goes to live with a relative and soon begins working in a factory as an "ouvrière." For a nineteenth-century reader, this ending for Berthe represents not only an economic degradation, but also a sexual one. As Joan Scott has argued in *Gender and the Politics of History*, the French middle class associated working women, particularly rural women who came to cities to work in factories, as actual or potential prostitutes.[63] Girls like Berthe Bovary were often forced into prostitution by the low wages of the factory in order to survive. Hippolyte Dussard captures the connection between factory work and prostitution in *Le Journal des Economistes*, writing "L'ouvrière!...ce mot sonne dans les oreilles comme le synonyme, comme le resume des choses cruelles: douleurs, privations, miseres, prostitution."[64] Condemning her daughter to a life of factory work and prostitution, Emma's financial deviance also extends to the next generation; the close relationship between the ouvriere and the prostitute in the nineteenth century suggests that Berthe will replace Emma in undermining the bourgeois marriage contract. As a sexually and socially deviant

---

[62] Ibid., 416.
[63] Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
[64] Ibid., 139.

ouvrière/prostitute, Berthe's very existence threatens the stability and the efficacy of the bourgeois marriage contract, which exists to prevent the proliferation of girls like Berthe.

Madame Bovary directly illustrates the destructive power of the deviant woman in the economic sphere. Emma's actions financially ruin her family and practically guarantee a sexually deviant life for the next and future generations. The story is a powerful, though not a subtle one, explicitly linking sexual and economic deviance to the destruction of the bourgeois family.

***

The Scarlet Letter, on the other hand, offers a more subtle investigation into the connections between economics and human (sexual) relationships by introducing religion as a key semantic player. Despite the difference in representation, *The Scarlet Letter*, too, grapples with the socially destructive power of sexual and economic deviance.

The writing of *The Scarlet Letter* was one of the most economically driven and certainly economically successful of Hawthorne's endeavors. Written after his politically-motivated removal from the Custom House, *The Scarlet Letter*'s main purpose was, quite frankly, to earn money for Hawthorne and his family. Though Hawthorne first intended the story to be part of a larger collection, his editor convinced him that *The Scarlet Letter* would have greater earning power as a novel—a rapidly growing class of literature in the nineteenth century.[65] As Nina Baym explains, Fields "knew that no book of short stories, however highly regarded its author might be, could command the critical attention or the popular interest of a novel."[66] To Hawthorne's surprise, *The Scarlet Letter* was almost

---

[65] Hubert H. Hoeltje, "The Writing of the Scarlet Letter," *The New England Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (Sep. 1954): 326-346.

[66] Nina Baym, "Hawthorne's 'Scarlet Letter': Producing and Maintaining and Literary Classic," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 30, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 69.

instantly popular, going through three editions in nine months and prompting multiple favorable reviews. The novel fulfilled and exceeded Hawthorne's economic expectations of it. It has never been out of print since its first publication.

The Scarlet Letter has been widely recognized as an American classic. But the origins of *The Scarlet Letter* attest to Hawthorne's ongoing struggle to make writing an economically viable occupation. As a writer who was not part of the leisure class, Hawthorne's stories had to earn money. His writings therefore became involved in the complicated exchange system of the publishing world. Hawthorne's irritation with the famous "scribbling women" stems from their ability to take better advantage of the exchange system than he:

> America is now wholly given over to a d****d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash—and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed. What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of *The Lamplighter* (by Maria Susanna Cummins), and other books neither better nor worse? Worse they could not be, and better they need not be, when they sell by the hundred thousand.[67]

That these sentimental books sell "by the hundred thousand" means that these women have discovered the literary formula to economic success. Even after the success of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne would never develop this kind of profitable relationship with his readership.

The rise of novels that sold by the hundred thousand may seem like an anomaly, but it was part of a larger trend in the American economy at the time towards "big

[67] Fred Lewis Pattee, *The Feminine Fifties* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1940), 110.

business" as we know it today. The successful writers of the time were part of ever-growing publishing houses. *The Lamplighter* was published by J.P. Jewett & Co., which also published the first edition of Tom's Cabin. These two books alone sold over a million copies—an almost unheard of phenomenon and one that generated a lot of income for the publishing house. These arrangements tended to help the publishing house more than the author, a source of much tension in the nineteenth century.[68]

In the wider economic world, a similar pattern of increased industrialization after the Civil War meant that businesses who had once been considered successful at one million dollars a year realized profits of tens of millions: the modern corporation was born.[69] Hawthorne, like other Americans, was caught up in this rapid change, which was the source of a new anxiety soon after the trauma of the Civil War. The economic face of America was changing, leading to a new source of anxiety about national identity: "economic incorporation wrenched American society from the moorings of familiar values."[70] Even the meaning of the word America "became the focus of controversy and struggle."[71]

Not confined only to letters to his editor, Hawthorne's concern with economics appears in the writing of *The Scarlet Letter* as well. The narrator purports to discover the actual scarlet letter amid trading documents in the Custom-House. This scarlet letter and the story that accompanies it were a token that participated as much as other trading

---

[68] Susan Geary, "Harriet Beecher Stowe, John P. Jewett, and Author-Publisher Relations in 1853," *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1977): 348.
[69] John O'Sullivan and Edward F. Keuchel, *American economic history : from abundance to constraint*, 2nd updated and enl. ed. (New York: M. Wiener Pub., 1989), 108-109.
[70] Alan Trachtenberg, *The incorporation of America : culture and society in the gilded age*, 25th anniversary ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 7. See also: Peter J. Parish, Adam I. P. Smith, and Susan-Mary Grant, *The North and the nation in the era of the Civil War*, 1st ed., The North's Civil War, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 3.
[71] Trachtenberg, 7.

documents in the public marketplace of old Salem. Though the letter and the story have remained hidden in the Custom-House for years, their true place is in the public eye. Referring to the author of the original narrative, deceased Surveyor Pue, the author of the original narrative, the narrator explains,

> With his own ghostly voice he had exhorted me, on the sacred consideration of my filial duty and reverence towards him—who might reasonably regard himself as my official ancestor—to bring his mouldy and moth-eaten lucubrations before the public.[72]

Even after 200 years, Hester's private sin continues to be propelled into the public marketplace, where the gaze of the reader can continue the process of judgment and forgiveness. But this is the nineteenth-century, not the seventeenth-century, so Hester's sin promises monetary redemption, in addition to religious redemption: "'Do this,' said the ghost of Mr. Surveyor Pue, emphatically nodding the head that looked so imposing within its memorable wig; 'do this, and the profit shall be all your own."[73] The narrator will, in fact, profit handsomely from Hester's story by bringing it into the literary marketplace. There, the text is traded from editor to publisher, from publisher to reader, with monetary rewards returning to all these parties. Even before Hester's story becomes *The Scarlet Letter*, her sin is a token, offered in exchange for (monetary) redemption.

Moreover, exchange economies occupy a central place in the narrative, directing the actions and inactions of the characters. As we move into the story proper, the narrative appropriately begins in the marketplace—that public venue where both sins and goods can be redeemed:

---

[72] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter and Other Writings*, ed. Leland S. Person (New York: Norton, 2005), 28.
[73] Ibid.

> The grim beadle now made a gesture with his staff. "Make way, good people—make way, in the King's name!" cried he. "Open a passage; and I promise ye, Mistress Prynne shall be set where man, woman, and child may have a fair sight of her brave apparel from this time till an hour past meridian. A blessing on the righteous colony of the Massachusetts, where iniquity is dragged out into the sunshine! Come along, Madame Hester, and show your scarlet letter in the market-place!"[74]

As the beadle's words imply, in the Puritan society that Hawthorne here imagines, the market-place serves an important purpose in the redemption of the town's sinners. It is here, on the scaffold, that "iniquity is dragged out into the sunshine" for the benefit of both the sinner and the witnesses. To assuage those watchers who may fear that not all will have equal share in Hester's spectacle—this economy of punishment and redemption—, the beadle promises, "Mistress Prynne shall be set where man, woman, and child may have a fair sight of her brace apparel." Without these witnesses, Hester's penance would have little value.

As Hester's time on the scaffold stretches on and the town's leaders take their turns in exhorting Hester to confession, it becomes increasingly obvious that Hester—in her very status as a pariah—has assumed a central role in this society. With Hester as the convenient subject of the day's sermon, her sin and the scarlet letter serve as a token,[75] passed around from parishioner to parishioner to be admired and abhorred. The clergymen, too, profit from Hester's sin:

---

[74] Ibid., 41.
[75] Ibid., 40. Hawthorne repeatedly refers to the letter as a token.

> The elder clergyman…addressed to the multitude a discourse on sin, in all its branches, but with continual reference to the ignominious letter. So forcibly did he dwell upon this symbol, for the hour or more during which his periods were rolling over the people's heads, that it assumed new terrors in their imagination, and seemed to derive its scarlet hue from the flames of the infernal pit."[76]

In this religious economy, which has incorporated the exchange of penance and forgiveness as its currency, Hester's great sin has great value. The narrator is explicit about the important role that Hester will assume in the town: "she would become the general symbol at which the preacher and moralist might point, and in which they might vivify and embody their images of woman's frailty and sinful passion."[77] Hester has paid a great price for her sin, but her penance will redeem others.

This economy thrives on the exchange of penance and forgiveness. In *The Platform of Church Discipline*, first published in 1648, Puritan church elders specifically include public confession and forgiveness as vital to redemption:

> If the Lord sanctify the censure to the offender, so as by the grace of Christ, he doth testify his repentance, with humble confession of his sin, and judging of himself, giving glory unto God; the Church is them to *forgive* him and to *comfort* him, and to *restore* him to the wonted brotherly communion, which formerly he enjoyed with them.[78]

---

[76] Ibid., 50.
[77] Ibid., 55.
[78] *A platform of church-discipline: gathered out of the word of God, and agreed upon by the elders and messengers of the churches assembled in the Synod at Cambridge in New-England: to be presented to the churches and General Court, for their consideration and acceptance in the Lord, the 8th month, anno 1649* (Boston: Thomas Fleet, 1731), 53.

Without public penance, however, there can be no forgiveness, disrupting a series of exchanges from which the public should benefit. For this reason, Hester's refusal to confess her fellow sinner's name discombobulates the preachers. Without this name, they cannot forgive; without forgiveness, neither Hester, nor the townspeople can be redeemed. The Reverend Mr. Wilson's appeal to Hester well demonstrates the economic character of Hester's role as sinner: "Woman, transgress not beyond the limits of Heaven's mercy!" cried the Reverend Mr. Wilson, more harshly than before. . . ."Speak out the name! That, and thy repentance, may avail to take the scarlet letter off thy breast."[79] Wilson is proposing a deal: Hester's confession in exchange for the removal of the letter. This deal supposes to benefit all parties, with the townspeople offered a chance at forgiveness, Hester offered redemption, and the fellow sinner made to trade in the currency of penance and forgiveness. Were this the conclusion to the story, this economy would continue on untroubled.

Hester, however, disrupts this economy by refusing to name her fellow sinner: "Never," replied Hester Prynne, looking, not at Mr. Wilson, but into the deep and troubled eyes of the younger clergyman. "It is too deeply branded. Ye cannot take it off. And would that I might endure his agony as well as mine!"[80] Hester not only disrupts the economy, but in fact refuses to accept the scarlet letter as a token belonging to the townspeople. Though forced by them to wear it and told by them what she must offer in order to remove it, Hester claims the scarlet letter for herself, telling the Reverend, "Ye cannot take it off." In fact, even before Hester outwardly claims the letter as her own, she has already assumed ownership of it by attributing to it a value far greater than originally

[79] Hawthorne, 49.
[80] Ibid.

intended by her punishers. Hester has "fantastically embroidered and illuminated" the letter with gold thread. The onlookers seem to realize immediately that something is wrong in this process of penance, exclaiming, "Why, gossips, what is it but to laugh in the faces of our godly magistrates, and make a pride out of what they, worthy gentlemen, meant for a punishment."[81] Without an incentive to remove the letter, the people have nothing of value to offer Hester in return for her confession, and the exchange falls apart.

In their abhorrence of her sin, the townspeople have made Hester into a veritable pariah. She lives on the very edge of the town in a small hut and none dare greet her in the street.[82] When she enters a church, she becomes the subject of the sermons and is therefore chased even from the house of God: "If she entered a church, trusting to share the Sabbath smile of the Universal Father, it was often her mishap to find herself the text of the discourse."[83] Children, "discerning the scarlet letter on her breast, would scamper off with a strange contagious fear."[84] Hester lives outside realm of human affairs, and yet the same skill with the needle that made the scarlet letter her own inserts Hester's presence into every important event in the village. The narrator explains,

> By degrees, not very slowly, her handiwork became what would now be termed the fashion….Vanity, it may be, chose to mortify itself, by putting on, for ceremonials of pomp and state, the garments that had been wrought by her sinful hands. Her needle-work was seen on the ruff of the Governor; military men wore it on their scarfs, and the minister on his

[81] Ibid., 41.
[82] Ibid., 57.
[83] Ibid., 59.
[84] Ibid.

> band; it decked the baby's little cap; it was shut up, to be mildewed and moulder away, in the coffins of the dead.[85]

Though ostensibly outside the bounds of polite society, Hester's work appears on ruffs, scarves, babies and the dead, not of the poorest, but of those most able to pay for Hester's valuable work. The Governor himself—a participant in the spectacle in the market-place—now wears Hester's needlework on his most important gowns. Elements of Hester's letter and, by extension, Hester's sin have therefore ensconced themselves in the society that shuns Hester's presence. All events, from birth to death, are tainted by Hester's original sin. Hester's infamous scarlet letter, in addition to serving as her penance, also serves as a continual advertisement for her needlework skills. The letter, rather than serving as Hester's payment, in fact generates income for Hester.

Hester's liminal position in society—at once inside and outside—is best understood using through Derrida's explanation of the *ergon*/*parergon* in *Truth in Painting*. Although Derrida uses this framework to explore the structure of art, this framework is also illustrative of the structure of social relationships. Derrida explains that "a *parergon* comes against, beside, and in addition to the ergon, the work done [fait], the fact [le fait], the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside."[86] Much like the *parergon/ergon* framework, in which the *ergon* imagines itself as the center, and the *parergon* as an outsider, the social structure in which Hester operates also views her as outside the social world. And yet, as we have already seen, Hester's needlework produces accessories that every fashionable woman and influential man must have.

---

[85] Ibid., 58.
[86] Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans., Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 54.

The *parergon* is something attached to, but outside the main work (*ergon*), that fills a lack in the work. When speaking of the demand for Hester's needlework, the narrator tells us, "Hester really filled a gap which must otherwise have remained vacant." Derrida explains that filling this lack (or gap) is the job of the *parergon*: "It is not because they are detached but on the contrary because they are more difficult to detach and above all because without them, without their quasi-detachment, the lack on the inside of the work would appear."[87] The village needs Hester—not just for her needlework, but also to serve as the pariah against which all others can measure themselves. According to Kai T. Erikson, "the deviant act…creates a sense of mutuality among the people of a community by supplying a focus for group feeling."[88] Hester's role as outcast is a valuable one because it strengthens the community; since the community needs a person like Hester, the pariah becomes interior to the society, even as she lives on its exterior.

A *parergon* is valuable to the *ergon* because it hides an intolerable lack. Hester's role as pariah is valuable to the town; the town's demand for her needlework and gradual acceptance is valuable to Hester. As such, these two entities—the *parergon* and the *ergon*—participate in an exchange economy where penance, retribution, and money have all become valid currencies in regulating the relationship between Hester and the town.

A closer look at key scenes in *The Scarlet Letter* demonstrates that a nineteenth-century interpretation of a seventeenth-century religious society can remain very much steeped in the language of economy. When Hester begs the Governor Bellingham for the right to keep Pearl, despite their misgivings about Hester's influence on the child, she

---

[87] Ibid., 59.
[88] Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans : a study in the sociology of deviance* (Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2005), 4.

tells him, "God gave me the child! . . . .He gave her in requital of all things else which ye had taken from me. She is my happiness—she is my torture, none the less! Pearl keeps me here in life! Pearl punishes me, too! See ye not, she is the scarlet letter, only capable of being loved, and so endowed with a millionfold the power of retribution for my sin?"[89] As Hester explains to the Governor, Pearl is God's "requital" to Hester, a payment made in exchange for the things of value (happiness, marriage, social acceptance) that Hester believes he has taken from her. At the same time, Pearl is God's retribution, forcing Hester to pay daily for her adultery. These words—requital and retribution—are both the language of exchange. Requital, meaning a payment or repayment; retribution meaning, a restitution or "rendering back."[90]

In an effort to help Hester save her child, Dimmesdale, too, adopts the language of exchange, telling Governor Bellingham that Pearl "was meant, doubtless, the mother herself hath told us, for a retribution."[91] In the case of Dimmesdale, who has more influence over Governor Bellingham than Hester, the word "retribution" assumes a second value—a religious token that serves to convince Governor Bellingham that Dimmesdale's argument has value. In fact, Dimmesdale litters his defense of Hester with these token words:

God	Sacredness	Creator	Heavenly Father
Sin	Spirit	Blessing	Retribution
Miracle	Satan	Soul	Immortality
Righteousness	Sacred	Providence	

[89] Hawthorne, 76.
[90] "Requital," in *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); "Retribution," in *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
[91] Hawthorne, 77.

For Governor Bellingham and Mr. Wilson, it is not the merit of the argument, but the value of these religious tokens that convinces them to leave Pearl with Hester. Dimmesdale deals in the currency of religion, thereby purchasing a reprieve for Hester.

Dimmesdale is well-versed in the religious economy of this Puritan society. But while he can garner a reprieve for Hester, he struggles to redeem himself. Puritans placed great value on the public repentance of deviants convicted by the courts, even recording the repentant words for posterity. To do so is to "agree that the standards of the community are right and that the sentence of the court is just….the victim is asked to endorse the action of the court and to share in the judgment against him, to move back into the community as a witness to his own execution."[92] If the deviant has hurt the public, it follows that his repentance must address the public. As with Hester, this relationship is an economic exchange in which society expects the deviant to repay his sins.

Dimmesdale, however, is incapable of making this public repayment and is therefore, both religiously and economically, irredeemable. To redeem is to buy back from someone, in this case the community, but since Dimmesdale refuses to confess his sins, he has no second party to redeem him: "True; there are such men … [who] shrink from displaying themselves black and filthy in the view of men; because, thenceforward, no good can be achieved by them; no evil of the past be redeemed by better service."[93] Though he is well-versed in the Puritan culture of public confession, and even participated in witnessing Hester's public penance, Dimmesdale fears that even "displaying himself" as a sinner to the town will not redeem him.

---

[92] Erikson, 195.
[93] Hawthorne, 88.

This refusal to confess publicly results in Dimmesdale's vain attempt to do penance outside of a system of exchange. As the narrator recounts, "His inward trouble drove him to practices more in accord with the old, corrupted faith of Rome, than with the better light of the church in which he had been born and bred. In Mr. Dimmesdale's secret closet, under lock and key, there as a bloody scourge."[94] In his attempt to redeem himself through self-punishment, Dimmesdale imitates a religion—Catholicism—abhorred by the Puritans. By doing so, his debt of guilt grows ever greater.

In an additional attempt to do penance in private, Dimmesdale uses Puritan methods, but takes them to an extreme: "It was his custom, too, as it had been that of many other pious Puritans, to fast, — not, however, to purify the body and render it the fitter medium of celestial illumination, but rigorously, and until his knees trembled beneath him, as an act of penance."[95] Though he tries to extricate himself from system of exchange, this report demonstrates that Dimmesdale is very much enmeshed in the economy of religion. In Dimmesdale's view, the more extreme the act, the higher its value. A moderate fast therefore has only moderate value; a weakness-inducing fast has high value. Again, Dimmesdale's actions increase his debt: though the fast is intended to "purify the body," Dimmesdale has co-opted this pious act for his own purposes—to do private penance. Both these actions run counter to a Puritan ethic.

As further punishment, Dimmesdale keeps vigils that deprive him of sleep. The term vigil has long had a religious association, either in association with watching over a recently deceased person (a wake) or as a religious act prior to a special holy day. The term "vigil," in its religious use, is an other-centered act. The focus of the person keeping

[94] Ibid., 96.
[95] Ibid., 96.

the vigil is external, focused either on another person or a god. In both cases, the act is a kind of payment. In the case of a wake, the expectation is that others will also hold a wake for the person keeping the vigil once he has died; in the case of a god, the vigil demonstrates devotion and therefore holds a perceived value in the eyes of that god. But Dimmesdale's vigils have a peculiarly narcissistic quality:

> He kept vigils, likewise, night after night, sometimes in utter darkness; sometimes with a glimmering lamp; and sometimes, viewing his own face in a looking-glass, by the most powerful light which he could throw upon it. He thus typified the constant introspection wherewith he tortured, but could not purify, himself.[96]

Dimmesdale's vigils, during which he "view[s] his own face in a looking-glass" are quite literally self-centered. He has abandoned the communal spirit of the vigil. Since no member of the community witnesses the penance, no one can redeem him.

In a final, unsuccessful, attempt to approximate public penance without actually engaging in it, Dimmesdale heads to the scaffold—at night: "Mr. Dimmesdale reached the spot, where, now so long since, Hester Prynne had lived through her first hours of public ignominy….The minister went up the steps."[97] The scaffold stands in the marketplace so as to provide the largest number of townspeople with a view of the perpetrators who ascend its steps. In this square, the people gather to witness the deviant's penance; as such, they serve an important role in the transgressor's expiation. While Dimmesdale enacts the motions of penance—walking up the platform and standing there, ostensibly for all to see—he has no audience to participate with him in

[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid., 97.

this ceremony. Even the narrator acknowledges the futility of Dimmesdale's gesture, asking, "Was it but the mockery of penitence?" and calling the visit to the scaffold a "vain show of expiation."[98]

Dimmesdale's visit to the scaffold is that it negates the role of the other. The transgressor who ascends the scaffold at noon must, by necessity, acknowledge the presence of the others who judge him. They surround him on the scaffold, engage him with insults or calls for repentance, witness his suffering, and decide on his release or his death. The others are the source of both his punishment and his forgiveness. Reverend Dimmesdale, in mounting the scaffold at night, acts out a punishment, but prevents the others from either punishing him or forgiving him. Here again, Dimmesdale evades the economy of exchange that is so integral to this scaffold in the marketplace. Dimmesdale knows that his vigil is worthless, and he finds himself instead fantasizing about being discovered on the scaffold: "The earliest riser, coming forth in the dim twilight would perceive a vaguely defined figure aloft on the place of shame and, half crazed betwixt alarm and curiosity, would go, knocking from door to door, summoning all the people to behold the ghost—a he needs must think of it—of some defunct transgressor."[99] He imagines them surrounding him, "their amazed and horror-stricken visages around the scaffold."[100] And yet, even in this fantasy, Dimmesdale does not confess his sin, leaving the imagined townspeople to divine for themselves why Dimmesdale stands on the scaffold. Even in fantasy, Dimmesdale cannot repent (repay) in full.

In a final attempt to avoid the judgment of the townspeople and the economic consequence of losing his position, Dimmesdale tries to convince himself—and Pearl—

[98] Ibid., 98.
[99] Ibid., 100.
[100] Ibid.

that the only appropriate judge for his sin is God. Dimmesdale asks Hester and Pearl to join him on the scaffold. But even Pearl knows that this vigil needs an audience; she asks Dimmesdale, "Wilt thou stand here with mother and me, to-morrow noontide?" Dimmesdale demurs, telling Pearl that he will stand on the scaffold "at the great judgment day….Then, and there, before the judgment-seat, they mother, and thou, and I, must stand together. But the daylight of this world shall not see our meeting!"[101] Dimmesdale knows that he must pay for his sins, but attempts to defer that payment, preferring God's wrath over that of the townspeople. But payment before God and payment before the people are not equivalent. Even Pearl understands that Dimmesdale's plan is flawed and she tells him, as much as a townsperson as a daughter, "Thou was not bold!—thou wast not true!....Thou wouldst not promise to take my hand, and my mother's hand, to-morrow noontide!" As Pearl points out, the debt Dimmesdale must repay to his daughter, to his fellow adulterer, and to the people can only be paid at noontide.

When Dimmesdale returns to the scaffold for his final confession, he does so at "noontide," at an event where more people occupy the marketplace than on any other day of the year—Election Day. In Puritan New England, this holiday provided a curious melding of religious and political agendas. In his book, *American Jeremiad*, Sacvan Bercovitch explains that the *political sermon* evidenced the "dual nature" of the Puritan leaders' calling, "as practical and as spiritual guides," since "in their church-state, theology was wedded to politics and politics to the progress of the kingdom of God."[102] That is to say, the Election Day sermon recognizes, more overtly than any other occasion,

[101] Ibid., 101.
[102] Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), xiv.

the primacy of community relationships, even in a theocracy. Fittingly, Dimmesdale chooses "the relation between the Deity and the communities of mankind" as his topic for the Election Day sermon. Both in the sermon and in the political agenda for the day, exchange relationships comes to fore.

Dimmesdale's final words to Hester and Pearl, the townspeople, and Chillingworth further underscore the role that payment and repayment play in human relationships. Hester and Pearl, he repays with recognition: "'Hester', said he, 'come hither! Come, my little Pearl!" and "I stand up on the spot where, seven years since, I should have stood; here, with this woman."[103] For Pearl especially, Dimmesdale's confession finally accords him the right to a kiss from Pearl, a token of acknowledgment from Pearl that Dimmesdale has paid appropriately: " Dear little Pearl, wilt thou kiss me now? Thou wouldst not yonder in the forest! But now thou wilt?' Pearl kissed his lips."[104] The kiss, previously refused by Pearl because Dimmesdale refused to acknowledge them in public has great value to Dimmesdale; as such, it's passing from Pearl to the Reverend initiates a kind of currency, a payment requested in exchange for his sacrifice.

To the townspeople, too, Dimmesdale owes a great debt, accrued over seven years. In this chapter, "The Revelation of the Scarlet Letter," Hawthorne devotes more space to Dimmesdale's exchanges with the townspeople, than he does to exchanges with Hester, Pearl, and Chillingworth combined. Clearly, in this moment of confession, it is all of society, not just those directly wronged, who deserve to witness Dimmesdale's penance. While he seeks forgiveness in front of God, the Reverend recognizes that he

[103] Hawthorne, 159 and 161.
[104] Ibid., 162.

needs the witness of the town to earn that heavenly forgiveness: "In the name of Him, so terrible and so merciful, who gives me grace, at this last moment, to do what—for my own heavy sin and miserable agony—I withheld myself from doing seven years ago." Dimmesdale recognizes God as his strength, but as a strength that finally allows him to confess his sins to the people. Religion and social obligation become, in this moment, one. As the narrator recounts,

> The Reverend Dimmesdale turned to the dignified and venerable rulers; to the holy ministers, who were his brethren; to the people, whose great heart was thoroughly appalled, yet overflowing with tearful sympathy, as knowing that some deep life-matter—which, if full of sin, was full on anguish and repentance likewise—was now to be laid open to them. The sun, but little past its meridian, shone down upon the clergyman, and gave a distinctness to his figure, as he stood out from all the earth, to put his plea of guilty at the bar of Eternal Justice.[105]

The narrator is careful to paint for the reader the picture of a community united, brought together by their shared shock at Dimmesdale's confession. Rulers, ministers, and the people stand together, faces upturned watching a man who no longer belongs to them, and instead "stood out from all the earth." Dimmesdale brings his guilty plea to the "bar of Eternal Justice," but at this moment, the people are his jury, witness to a deviance that was among them all along. Dimmesdale tells them, "There stood one in the midst of you, at whose brand of sin and infamy ye have not shuddered!"[106] Dimmesdale's sin reinforces the townspeople's goodness.

---

[105] Ibid., 160.
[106] Ibid., 161.

Dimmesdale dies after his confession, but even so he remains indebted to his fellow citizens. The Puritan ritual of confession, punishment, and redemption succeeded with Hester, but Dimmesdale offers only a confession, leaving the townspeople before they can determine an appropriate penance and ultimately redeem him. This inability to determine a punishment and exact "payment" from the sinner in fact divides the town, undermining the unity of the people. After Dimmesdale's death, the narrator tells us that opinions are divided on the letter A that Dimmesdale revealed on his chest:

> Opinion 1: "Some affirmed that the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale, on the very day when Hester Prynne first wore her ignominious badge, had begun a course of penance, —which he afterwards, in so many futile methods, followed out, —by inflicting a hideous torture on himself.
>
> Opinion 2: "Others contended that the stigma had not been produced until a long time subsequent, when old Roger Chillingworth, being a potent necromancer, had caused it to appear
>
> Opinion 3: "Others, again, —and those best able to appreciate the minister's peculiar sensibility, and the wonderful operation of his spirit upon the body, —whispered their belief, that the awful symbol was the effect of the ever active tooth of remorse."
>
> Opinion 4: Certain persons, who were spectators of the whole scene, and professed never once to have removed their eyes from the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale, denied that there was any mark whatever on his breast."[107]

The spectators disagree on the self-injury they witnessed on Dimmesdale's breast because they were not the source of the punishment. As Emile Durkheim explains, in a

[107] Ibid., 162.

functioning system, society is the source of punishment, since it is society that suffers when a crime is committed.[108]

This implies that deciding on a punishment that fits the crime unites a community because its members—even if mediated by a judicial system—agree on a punishment together. When the criminal is punished for his crime, everyone witnesses the same penance. In this way, deviance can unite society against the perpetrator.

Dimmesdale's crime, however, undermines the unity of the townspeople because he chose his own punishment and because he did not live long enough to suffer their choice of penance. As a result, the witnesses of Dimmesdale's confession cannot agree on what they saw, its cause, or whether they saw anything at all. The act of witnessing a penance—a repayment to society—has been disrupted. After this debate over Dimmesdale's confession, Hawthorne does not make a single reference to him by name for the rest of the story; those who do not pay their dues in life have not earned a place in history.

Hester and Dimmesdale participate in a social ritual of repentance, and suffer because neither wants to recognize the economic nature of these rituals. Hester is forced to pay because her body betrays her; Dimmesdale long refuses to pay, because the price dismays him. Because he considers himself a creditor rather than a debtor in this economy of sin, Chillingworth embraces this economy. More than any other character in the story, the narrator's and Chillingworth's own references to his desire for vengeance (for repayment) employ economic terms to explain Chillingworth's relationship to both Hester and Dimmesdale.

---

[108] Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 48.

Chillingworth's first encounter in the New World with his wife takes place in the marketplace—that nexus of exchange—where Hester does her penance on the scaffold. He, too, has come to the marketplace to be redeemed: "I have met with grievous mishaps by sea and land, and have been long held in bonds among the heathen-folk to the southward; and am now brought hither by this Indian to be redeemed out of my captivity."[109] While Chillingworth must pay the Indian's demanded price for his release, from now on, it is Chillingworth who will set the price for Dimmesdale's redemption.

In Chillingworth's economy, however, Dimmesdale is doomed. With society unable to set the penance Dimmesdale owes, Chillingworth is free to demand any price from the minister. And it soon becomes clear that Dimmesdale's debt is infinite and therefore irredeemable. When Hester asks Chillingworth, "Has thou not tortured him enough?....Has he not paid thee all?," Chillingworth responds, "No!—no!—He has but increased the debt!"[110] Dimmesdale owes penance not only for the original sin, but also for the sins committed by others in consequence of his own. Dimmesdale's first crime, adultery, is the catalyst for all Chillingworth's resulting sins; by extension, the crimes committed by Chillingworth are also Dimmesdale's crimes. The sins committed by Pearl, the product of Dimmesdale's first crime, are also Dimmesdale's sins.

Chillingworth establishes himself as the confidant of the minister, so that "all that guilty sorrow, hidden from the world, whose great heart would have pitied and forgiven, [will] be revealed to him, the Pitiless, to him, the Unforgiving! All that dark treasure to be lavished on the very man, to whom nothing else could so adequately pay the debt of

[109] Hawthorne, 45.
[110] Ibid., 112.

vengeance!"[111] In Chillingworth's economy, Dimmesdale's guilt and his minor, tortured admissions serve as a currency. When Chillingworth discovers the marks upon Dimmesdale's chest—for Chillingworth a certain indicator of guilt—the physician's reaction is one of pure joy: "what a wild look of wonder, joy, and horror!....he threw up his arms towards the ceiling, and stamped his foot upon the floor!"[112] One could almost say he won the lottery.

In his conversations with Dimmesdale, Chillingworth alludes to Dimmesdale's debt, even as he makes clear that it is irredeemable. When Dimmesdale tells Chillingworth, "I thank you, and can but requite your good deeds with my prayers," Chillingworth responds, "A good man's prayers are golden recompense!.... Yea, they are the current gold coin of the New Jerusalem, with the King's own mint-mark on them!"[113] With this remark, Chillingworth reminds the minister that Dimmesdale is not a "good man." His prayers for Chillingworth are therefore worthless. Dimmesdale will have to repay his debt in some other way.

Though he recognizes the economic character of his desire for vengeance, Chillingworth, like Hester and Dimmesdale, seeks to operate in a private economy outside the social network. If he desired revenge within the social norms, he would have exposed Dimmesdale as Pearl's father early in the story; this approach would have resulted in Dimmesdale's public punishment and penance. Instead, Chillingworth exacts a private vengeance, possible only because both he and Dimmesdale reject the social economy of repentance. Guilt and redemption acted out in a social context, as with Hester, assumes a finite price for crime. Even if the price is death, the social system of

[111] Ibid., 93.
[112] Ibid., 92.
[113] Ibid., 143.

punishment assumes that this is the adequate repayment for the crime. In this context, any crime, no matter how heinous, can be repaid through an appropriate combination of punishments.

As long as both Chillingworth and Dimmesdale reject this social system, Dimmesdale's crime remains infinite and his debt irredeemable. When Dimmesdale chooses to re-enter the social system through the act of confession—the first step in public penance—Chillingworth is devastated: "Thou hast escaped me!" he repeated more than once. "Thou hast escaped me!"[114] Dimmesdale's confession allows for public judgment and penance, thereby making his crime finite and redeemable. From this moment, Dimmesdale is no longer indebted to Chillingworth alone, but to society as a whole. With Dimmesdale's crime made public, Chillingworth's vengeance loses all value. As the narrator remarks,

> This unhappy man had made the very principle of his life to consist in the pursuit and systematic exercise of revenge; and when, by its completest triumph and consummation, that evil principle was left with no further material to support it, when, in short, there was no more Devil's work on earth for him to do, it only remained for the unhumanized mortal to betake himself whither his Master would find him tasks enough, and pay him his wages duly.[115]

Once Dimmesdale has paid his debt, Chillingworth's economy falls apart, as does his body. And yet, the narrator implies that the cycle of debt continues even in death.

---

[114] Ibid., 161.
[115] Ibid., 164.

Chillingworth, the narrator predicts, joins the Devil, with whom he enters into an infinite economic exchange.

Hawthorne set *The Scarlet Letter* in the seventeenth century, but he wrote it during a time in his personal life when economic realities forced him to take the job in the Custom House that he credited with creating an "antipathy to pen and ink" while he was there. On a national level, Hawthorne wrote *The Scarlet Letter* during an era of economic failures, the debate over the national bank, unreliable paper money, massive national debt, and looming civil war. With the South and North increasingly divided by economic differences—the North shifting towards manufacturing and the South remaining largely agricultural—the ideal of *E Pluribus Unum* and a cohesive national identity seemed to be rapidly disappearing. Nina Baym has argued that *The Scarlet Letter* is at least in part an answer to these national schisms: "To identify the New England Puritan as the core of the national past, and New England aesthetics as the core of the national future, is to unify and construct the nation, over time and ever-expanding space, in the image of New England."[116] I would agree with Baym that *The Scarlet Letter* is neither a true representation of Puritan life, nor a direct allegory for nineteenth century America. Instead, the novel offers an investigation of how economic relationships during both periods underscored and undermined crucial social relationships.

Hester and Dimmesdale's original sin incurs an original debt, from which all of Hester's, Dimmesdale's, Pearl's, and Chillingworth's subsequent sins originate. Unrepaid, this debt grows infinitely, ultimately bankrupting Dimmesdale's religious fervor and Chillingworth's scientific curiosity. The economic relationships that connect Hester, Dimmesdale, Chillingworth, Pearl and the townspeople as a whole should serve

[116] Baym: 66.

as a protection against individual deviance; the penance of one serves as redemption of all; the forgiveness of all serves as the redemption of one. And yet, as the United States painfully discovered in the nineteenth century, the exchange relationships that support a community can also destroy it, as it did in the rift between North and South during the 1850s and 60s; when neither party can agree on the terms of payment and forgiveness, the community suffers.

Madame Bovary and *The Scarlet Letter*, written at a time of economic restructuring in both France and the United States, both share an anxiety about the relationship between sex and economic relationships, particularly in their influence potentially pernicious influence on the family and the community. In *Madame Bovary*, the consequences of sexual and economic infidelities are clear and unequivocal; Emma's infinite debts destroy her family, cause her suicide, lead to her husband's death, and condemn Berthe to the desperate life of the ouvrière. Hester, too, disrupts the family with her adulterous behavior, but more importantly, her refusal to participate in the social economy by fully confessing her and Dimmesdale's sin disrupts the community, which loses a devout preacher, a knowledgeable doctor, a talented seamstress, and the stability of a system of penance and forgiveness that should protect against the deviance that lives among them. In both cases, economic deviance, rather than sexual deviance, result in disaster for the family and the community, suggesting that for better or for worse, these women have far more than a "token" role in the economic fate of their families and their country.

WORKS CITED

Baym, Nina. "Hawthorne's 'Scarlet Letter': Producing and Maintaining and Literary Classic." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 30, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 61-75.

Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The American Jeremiad*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978.

Carpenter, Scott. *Aesthetics of Fraudulence in Nineteenth-Century France: Frauds, Hoaxes and Counterfeits*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009.

Charle, Christophe. *Social history of France in the nineteenth century*. Oxford: Berg, 1994.

Clark, Margaret S., and Judson Mills. "Communal Relationships and Exchange Relationships: Controversies and Research." In *Theoretical frameworks for personal relationships*, edited by Ralph Erber and Robin Gilmour, xi, 271 p. Hilldale, N.J.: L. Erlbaum, 1994.

Derrida, Jacques. *The Truth in Painting*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Durkheim, Emile. *The Division of Labor in Society*. New York: The Free Press, 1984.

Erikson, Kai T. *Wayward Puritans : a study in the sociology of deviance*. Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2005.

Flaubert, Gustave. *Madame Bovary*. Paris: Flammarion, 1986.

Fuchs, Rachel Ginnis, and Victoria Elizabeth Thompson. *Women in nineteenth-century Europe*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Gallman, Robert E. "Economic Growth and Structural Change in the Long Nineteenth Century." In *The Cambridge economic history of the United States*, edited by Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman, 2, 193. Cambridge [England] ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Gallois, William. *Zola: The History of Capitalism*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000.

Geary, Susan. "Harriet Beecher Stowe, John P. Jewett, and Author-Publisher Relations in 1853." *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1977): 345-367.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *Scarlet Letter and Other Writings*, Edited by Leland S. Person. New York: Norton, 2005.

Hoeltje, Hubert H. "The Writing of the Scarlet Letter." *The New England Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (Sep. 1954): 326-346.

Langland, Elizabeth. "Nobody's Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel." *PMLA* 107, no. 2 (March 1992): 290-304.

Mainardi, Patricia. *Husbands, wives, and lovers : marriage and its discontents in nineteenth-century France*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Nord, Philip. "Republican Politics and the Bourgeois Interior in Mid-Nineteenth-Century France." In *Home and Its Dislocations in Nineteenth-Century France*, edited by Suzanne Nash, 193-214. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

O'Sullivan, John, and Edward F. Keuchel. *American economic history : from abundance to constraint*. 2nd updated and enl. ed. New York: M. Wiener Pub., 1989.

Parish, Peter J., Adam I. P. Smith, and Susan-Mary Grant. *The North and the nation in the era of the Civil War*. 1st ed. The North's Civil War,. New York: Fordham University Press, 2003.

Pattee, Fred Lewis. *The Feminine Fifties*. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1940.

A platform of church-discipline: gathered out of the word of God, and agreed upon by the elders and messengers of the churches assembled in the Synod at Cambridge in New-England: to be presented to the churches and General Court, for their consideration and acceptance in the Lord, the 8th month, anno 1649 Boston: Thomas Fleet, 1731.

"Requital." In *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

"Retribution." In *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Rippon, Maria R. *Judgment and justification in the nineteenth-century novel of adultery* Contributions to the study of world literature, no. 112. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002.

Schlesinger, Arthur M. "The Bank War." In *Issues in American economic history*, edited by Gerald D. Nash, 215. Boston: Heath, 1964.

Scott, Joan Wallach. *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Tanner, Tony. *Adultery in the novel: contract and transgression*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981.

Trachtenberg, Alan. *The incorporation of America : culture and society in the gilded age*. 25th anniversary ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 2007.

Vatin, François. "Introduction." In *Économie et littérature : France et Grande-Bretagne, 1815-1848*, edited by Nicole Edelman and François Vatin, 11-13. Paris: Le Manuscrit, 2007.

Weyler, Karen A. *Intricate Relations: Sexual and Economic Desire in American Fiction, 1784-1814*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004.

CHAPTER 4

RACIAL DEVIANCE IN *EDGAR HUNTLY* AND *THE ALGERINE CAPTIVE*

In his farewell address to the country, George Washington felt compelled to leave the citizens of the early Republic with some advice and a warning. He told them that "national union" is the key to individual and collective happiness. This union, he warned them, is always in danger, as "this is the point in your political fortress against which the batteries of internal and external enemies will be most constantly and actively (though often covertly and insidiously) be directed."[1] The new country was, in other words, a nation under siege: the XYZ Affair, the Bavarian Illuminati scandal, and the Jacobin threat were real and imagined conspiracies that had made for a turbulent decade in the 1790s. As Robert Levine explains, "situated within the national newness, ever on the lookout for subversion, they needed perpetually to be reading and interpreting a protean social landscape."[2]

Yet even as Washington focused on the threats to the country, he provided the American citizen with a purpose: uniting in self-defense. The fear of enemies to the nation provided some of the most solid support for national unity. George Washington's speech reiterates a pattern that had already developed throughout the 1790s: an *us* versus *them* mentality that pitted white Americans against foreigners, Native Americans, and blacks. According to Levine, "like the Puritans, the citizenry of a new nation needed to conceive of itself in opposition to threatening and villainous communities."[3] The legislative result of these wide-spread conspiracy fears included the Alien and Sedition

---

[1] George Washington, "Washington's Farewell Address," (Yale University Avalon Project, 1796).
[2] Robert Levine, *Conspiracy and romance : studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville*, Cambridge studies in American literature and culture (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 9.
[3] Ibid.

Acts, passed in 1798. These four acts were designed to give the government greater control over foreigners in the country by requiring foreigners to reside within the United States for 14 years prior to becoming citizens; giving the president near total freedom to remove any foreigner considered to be "dangerous to the peace and safety of the United States"; allowing for the deportation of foreigners from countries who are at war with the United States (originally intended for France); and criminalizing anti-government writing deemed to be "false, scandalous, and malicious."[4] These laws were intended to remove any individuals deemed to be an enemy of the state, but this did not resolve the underlying problem of discovering the enemies of the state, who could look just like anybody else. It is this anxiety about the invisible enemy that helped propel race—an eminently visible marker of difference—to the center of debates about aliens in America.

Race had been an issue for white Americans since they first encountered Native Americans. In post-revolutionary America, race issues became closely tied to national identity. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg explains, "A small band of white settlers clinging to the edge of a red continent, they feared that their newly won separation from Engand had cast them off from all they considered civilized."[5] George Fredrickson has argued that "in the years immediately before and after 1800, white Americans often revealed by their words and actions that they viewed Negroes as a permanently alien and unassimilable element of the population."[6] Thomas Jefferson hypothesized in his "Notes on Virginia" that "blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and

---

[4] "Alien and Sedition Acts," *Primary Documents in American History*, The Library of Congress, http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Alien.html (accessed Mach 20, 2011).

[5] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire: the birth of an American national identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 6.

[6] George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind : the debate on Afro-American character and destiny, 1817-1914* (Scranton, Pa.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 1.

circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind."[7] Of their possible emancipation, he wrote, "when freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture."[8]

Native Americans were regarded with similar suspicion. Luke Gibbons writes, "It is against this primitivist background that the Indian emerged as the enemy within, against which the civility of the new republic defined itself."[9] The popular literature of the time reflected this fear. Indian captivity narratives had been around since the seventeenth century, one of the most famous being Mary Rowlandson's *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682). While some of these stories were ultimately sympathetic to Indians, the prospect of the original kidnapping was still harrowing to most readers. Moreover, even into the late eighteenth century, newspapers in America printed thousands of stories about Indians. While a few of these stories remarked upon a benevolent Indian, most of these articles highlighted their continuing ferocity or their stupidity. An Indian war was assumed to be, if not inevitable, at least possible.[10]

---

[7] Thomas Jefferson, Adrienne Koch, and William Peden, *The life and selected writings of Thomas Jefferson*, The modern library of the world's best books (New York: The Modern library, 1944), 270.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Luke Gibbons, "Ireland, America, and Gothic Memory: Transatlantic Terror in the Early Republic," *boundary 2* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 29.

[10] "Anecdote of the Talents and Benevolence of an Indian Chief," *The Spectator* January 1799, 3. This article is a respectful obituary of an Indian chief. The obituary details his achievements as a bone setter and healer, and concludes, "This honest, worthy Indian died in November 1797, at the advanced age of 84 years—a remarkable instance of native ingenuity and humanity." ; "October; Indians; John Leper; Red; Tennessee; Evan Watkins; Col. Winchester; Bledsoe's," *Hartford Gazette*, January 1, 1795. ; "Anecdotes," *Kline's Carlisle Weekly Gazette*, January 16, 1799. This joke at the expense of Native Americans is intriguing because it mirrors similar jokes about "simple" black slaves. An Indian who makes wooden utensils is asked by a white customer to make her a butter ladle. The punchline: "Butter ladles!" answered the tawny son of the forest, in the native simplicity of his soul-- 'Why mistress, if I was to fashion such things, they would all melt away before I could get here.'" ; "Zachariah Cox," *The Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, January 11, 1799. This article is about the capture of Zacharia Cox, who had, in the writer's opinion, nearly caused an Indian war. The writer assumes that just such a war was entirely possible before Cox's capture: "The late treaty at Tellico, and extinction of Cox's plans will place the favourite object of many people in this country, an Indian war,

Even some European immigrants—specifically the Irish—were anathema to established New Englanders, Pennsylvania Quakers, and Virginia planters alike.[11] The Irish were too poor to move into more genteel urban areas in New England, much to the relief of New Englanders. American politicians, already fearful of European conspiracies, considered the Irish the greatest threat to the early Republic. The Alien and Sedition Acts were passed primarily to suppress an imagined "Irish conspiracy"[12] and to disenfranchise those of Irish descent. Moreover, politicians depicted Irish immigration as a veritable invasion, with Harrison Gray Otis protesting the naturalization of "hordes of wild Irishmen" by arguing that they would disrupt the social order.[13] As with Native Americans and African slaves, politicians like Rufus King believed that the Irish were unassimilable.[14]

In the late eighteenth century, race separated the citizen from the non-citizen, and the free from the unfree. The diversity of the new country fostered a growing anxiety about the impact of racial others on the country's ability to forge a national identity. As we have already seen with sexual deviance and economic deviance in previous chapters, the novel once again helped chronicle, drive, and shape the debate about race and national identity. Two novels in particular—Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly* and Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive*—help illustrate just how influential race became in the national debate. Brown envisions the Indian as a severe threat to white civilization and presents the reader with the nightmare of Native American influence on

---

at a very great distance, and establish the friendship between the United States and the Cherokees upon a firm basis."

[11] Walter A. McDougall, *Freedom just around the corner: a new American history, 1585-1828*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004).

[12] Rex Syndergaard, "Wild Irishment and the Alien and Sedition Acts," *E'ire Ireland; a journal of Irish studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 15.

[13] *Debates and Proceedings of the Congress of the United States*, 5th Cong. 1851. 430.

[14] Syndergaard: 15.

and infiltration into the white American community. Royall Tyler uses the specter of white slavery to call for a strong federal government that will both unite and protect citizens from outside dangers. While their approaches differ, both Brown's and Tyler's approaches are an attempt to unite specifically white Americans under a national flag.

***

Charles Brockden Brown regarded racial others with suspicion. He considered them a threat to national security, and devoted a large part of his most famous political pamphlet, *An Address to the Government of the United States, on the Cession of Louisiana to the French*, to demonstrating just how dangerous these racial strangers were. In the pamphlet he writes, "Indians have ever been destructive neighbors whom it has been extremely difficult *for us* to manage."[15] He remarks that the French, on the other hand, have had some success in befriending Indians—a situation that could lead to a dangerous French-Indian alliance.

Brown depicts the United States as a country under siege: "Mutinous slaves in the heart of our country; hostile garrisons and fortresses on one side; numerous and tumultuous savages around us; the ocean scoured by the fleets of our enemy."[16] Half of these threats to America are by racial others. In response, Brown asserts that white Americans have a right and a duty to dominate the country:

> We have a *right* to possession….These interests demand that the reign of peace and concord should be diffused widely, and prolonged as much as possible. By unity of manners, laws, and government is concord preserved…and by sheltering [all citizens] under the pacific wing of a

[15] Charles Brockden Brown, "Address to the Government of the United States, on the Cession of Louisiana to the French," (Philadelphia: John Conrad & Co, 1803), 48.
[16] Ibid., 47.

> federal government.[17]

Brown describes a utopia of racial hegemony, in which all citizens are white citizens. Moreover, Brown suggests that such racial hegemony will facilitate national unity, since eliminating racial difference will allow for a "unity of manners, laws, and government" that is not currently possible.

Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker, is the novel in which Brown most pointedly demonstrates the threat of Indian and Irish strangers. The strange, sometimes incoherent narrative has generated many divergent readings of the novel.

Dieter Schulz, for example, casts *Edgar Huntly* as a quest romance, but gives his reading a psychoanalytical edge when he claims that "in the course of his search, the hero turns from his role as active agent of his quest into the object of uncontrollable forces within his own self."[18] Stephen Shapiro follows a similar line of reasoning by focusing on the psychology of prohibited sex:

> Routing *Edgar Huntly*'s narrative shifts through the sites of restless beds, Brown uses the contradictory time-space between paradoxical sleep and paradoxical awakening to convey that alternatives exist within the definitional transformation of same-sex sexuality, from prohibited act to perverted identity, even while room for these options is simultaneously being foreclosed.[19]

Both of these authors focus on the internal disturbances of Edgar Huntly to understand

---

[17] Ibid., 48.
[18] Dieter Schulz, "Edgar Huntly as Quest Romance," *American Literature* 43, no. 3 (November 1971): 325.
[19] Stephen Shapiro, "Man to Man I Needed Not to Dread His Encounter: *Edgar Huntly's* End of Erotic Pessimism," in *Revising Charles Brockden Brown : culture, politics, and sexuality in the early republic*, ed. Philip Barnard, Mark Kamrath, and Stephen Shapiro (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 216-51.

the sometimes illogical actions of the protagonist.

Leslie Fiedler, on the other hand, provides a seminal reading of *Edgar Huntly* as a bildungsroman in *Love and Death in the American Novel.* He argues that "Brown's novel is an initiation story, the account of a young man who begins by looking for guilt in others and ends up finding it in himself."[20] Dana Luciano also sees *Edgar Huntly* as a rite-of-passage novel, but adds that the novel is more than a coming-of-age story because "this telos is troubled by the novel's drive toward embodiment."[21] She considers *Edgar Huntly* primarily in the context of individual body consciousness. Her analysis is a cross between the psychological and the initiation rite readings of *Edgar Huntly.*

These two approaches fail to situate the protagonist's individual struggles within a wider, national context. In an essay on Walstein and Engel, Brown states that "every man occupies a station in society in which he is necessarily active to evil or good."[22] He also maintains that "a man...may yet exercise considerable influence on the condition of his neighbours."[23] The actions of the individual have social consequences. Edgar Huntly's fate and actions have a wide sphere of influence. Brown explains in his essay "The Difference Between History and Romance," that fiction allows him to focus on the motivations of his characters—something history cannot provide.[24] With *Edgar Huntly*, Brown demonstrates the dangers of foreign influences on those motivations. In this view, I agree with Robert Levine, who has also argued that *Edgar Huntly* needs to be

---

[20] Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and death in the American novel*, Rev. ed. (New York: Stein and Day, 1982), 144.
[21] Dana Luciano, "Perverse Nature: Edgar Huntly and the novel's reproductive disorders," *American Literature* 70, no. 1 (March 1998): 4.
[22] Charles Brockden Brown, "Walstein's School of History; From the German of Krants of Gotha," *Monthly Magazine, and American Review* (August 1799): 408.
[23] Ibid., 409.
[24] Charles Brockden Brown, "The Difference Between History and Romance," *Monthly Magazine, and American Review* (April 1800): 251-53.

considered within the framework of national, political concerns. Levine states, "Brown's 'Federalist concerns' are about the threat posed by expedient seducers to credulous Americans lacking self-knowledge, self-control, and a tradition of self-government."[25] When considered within the national context, Edgar Huntly's odd behavior is a symptom of a national anxiety, rather than individual disturbance or development.

Charles Brockden Brown wrote *Edgar Huntly* in 1799, one year after the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts. It is his fifth novel, and has all the marks of Brown's signature gothic style. Edgar Huntly is obsessed with finding out who murdered his friend Waldegrave. When he sees a man digging at the spot where Waldegrave was murdered, Huntly decides to investigate. He finds that the digger is Clithero, an Irish farm hand on a nearby farm. Huntly dwells repeatedly on Clithero's foreign status: "I perceived that the only foreigner among us was Clithero," and "Clithero was a stranger, whose adventures and character...were unknown to us."[26] Huntly believes that Clithero murdered Waldegrave. This belief impels him to follow Clithero, a sleepwalker, deep into the wilderness. The results of this obsession are disturbing: he ultimately becomes more savage than this Irish quasi-Indian.

Huntly remains the narrator throughout, and his descriptions establish Clithero as strange, dangerous, and savage. When Huntly first encounters Clithero, the Irishman's appearance immediately arouses Huntly's suspicions, as well as his fears: "Something like flannel was wrapped round his waist and covered his lower limbs. The rest of his

---

[25] Levine, 30.

[26] Charles Brockden Brown, "Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a sleep-walker," in *Three Gothic novels: Wieland or, The transformation; Arthur Mervyn or, Memoirs of the year 1793; Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a sleep-walker*(New York: The library of America, 1998), 651.

frame was naked. I did not recognise in him any one whom I knew."[27] Clithero is essentially wearing a breech cloth and dressed much like an eighteenth century reader would have imagined a Native American. The man is foreign to Huntly, who claims that he does not "recognise in him any one whom I knew." In an isolated village on the edge of the wilderness, any strangers are cause for concern.

Moreover, Clithero is not British, but Irish, a distinction that, as I explained earlier, ties Clithero even more closely to Native Americans. In the eyes of an eighteenth-century reader, he is predisposed to "wildness" and is possibly subversive.[28] Huntly tells his reader, "The other was a person of a very different cast. He was an emigrant from Ireland."[29] Huntly refers to Clithero's "cast"—even his appearance and comportment as an Irishman separate him from the rest of the farmers. Luke Gibbons has argued that Brown specifically wants to highlight this Irish threat:

> In Brown's novels…the internal menace of the Native American is set against precisely this threat from an encroaching European other, in the form of the exiled or outcast Irish hero-villain. The publication by Brown of the first two classics of American gothic, Wieland (1798) and Edgar Huntly (1799), both featured destructive Irish interlopers on American soil and coincided with the moral panic over subversion by French and Irish revolutionaries.[30]

---

[27] Ibid., 647.

[28] Rex Syndergaard explains in "Wild Irishmen" (15) that Americans believed almost all Irishmen were members of the United Irishmen, a group whose main goal was to free Ireland from British rule. The United Irishmen attempted an uprising with the help of France in 1796, but were defeated by the British. After this event, many of the main conspirators sought refuge in the United States. Americans feared that the Irish would attempt a similar overthrow in the United States, again with the help of the French

[29] Brown, 651.

[30] Gibbons: 30.

Brown is clearly aware of the racial and moral links he is making between the Irish Clithero and Native Americans. Brown's readers, steeped in the racial debates of the time, would have been similarly aware that Irishness connoted a foreign threat.

Huntly's description of his trips into the wilderness, first in following Clithero and then in trying to find him, deepen the Irish-Indian association: "The way that [Clithero] had selected, was always difficult; sometimes considerable force was requisite to beat down obstacles; sometimes it led into a deep glen, the sides of which were so steep as scarcely to afford a footing."[31] Huntly implies that Clithero is disturbingly familiar with this terrain, which even he, as a lifelong resident, does not know as well. Clithero feels so at home in this forest that he ultimately disappears into it permanently, telling Huntly, "I have confided in you the history of my disasters....I shall quickly set myself beyond the reach of human tribunals."[32] When Huntly finds him again, his transformation to "savage" is nearly complete:

> Not only the countenance was human, but, in spite of shaggy and tangled locks, and an air of melancholy wildness, I speedily recognised the features of the fugitive Clithero!....His scanty and coarse garb had been nearly rent away by brambles and thorns; his arms, bosom and cheeks were overgrown and half concealed by hair....His rueful, ghastly, and immovable eyes testified not only that his mind was ravaged by despair, but that he was pinched with famine.[33]

The description renders Clithero more beast than man. Huntly emphasizes that Clithero's arms, chest, and cheeks are overgrown by hair. His hair is unkempt and he is

---

[31] Brown, 654.
[32] Ibid., 716.
[33] Ibid., 730.

nearly naked. Lacking all the marks of civilization, Clithero is almost an animal. After Edgar Huntly has established Clithero as more Indian than white, he conveys to the reader that this external savagery reflects an inner lack of moral rectitude. Clithero's own story corroborates Edgar Huntly's assumption that strangers, even strangers who have become intimate friends, always pose a danger to the established group. Clithero tells Edgar Huntly that a Mrs. Lorimer took him in as a small child and raised him along with her son. She provided him with the best education and made him her trusted adviser. Clithero, however, betrayed this trust by accidentally killing Mrs. Lorimer's brother. Clithero tells himself, "She will awake, but only perish at the spectacle of my ingratitude."[34] Wanting to save Mrs. Lorimer this agony, and perhaps himself the need to explain his actions, he decides to kill Mrs. Lorimer.

On hearing this story, Huntly muses on the perpetual danger of foreigners, even those who seem to have been assimilated:

> Was it of no use to superintend his childhood, to select his instructors and examples, to mark the operation of his principles, to see him emerging into youth, to follow him through various scenes and trying vicissitudes, and mark the uniformity of his integrity? Who would have predicted his future conduct? Who would not have affirmed the impossibility of an action like this?[35]

The unpredictability of Clithero is Edgar Huntly's main concern. More than the murder of the brother, and the attempted murder of Mrs. Lorimer, the most disturbing part of Clithero's actions is that they were unforeseen by the Americans, and therefore

[34] Ibid., 712.
[35] Ibid., 720.

impossible to prevent: “The spirit of Clithero was enlightened and erect, but he weakly suffered the dictates of eternal justice to be swallowed up by gratitude. The dread of unjust upbraiding hurried him to murder and to suicide, and the imputation of imaginary guilt impelled him to the perpetration of genuine and enormous crimes.”[36] Clithero has been from the beginning a guest in this household. And “we should remember that the apparently positive, benign, and reconciliatory word *guest* still carried within it the sense of 'stranger,' the foreign, the extraordinary, even “enemy”—as though language itself recognized that the attempt to familiarize the alien presence could never be wholly sure of success.”[37] Clithero destroys the family from within, first by killing Mrs. Lorimer's brother, then attempting to murder Mrs. Lorimer in her bed. He is the nightmare guest, both in Mrs. Lorimer’s home and in the nation at large.

Brown portrays Clithero as a threat to the family and, by extension, society. But it is Clithero's influence on Edgar Huntly that proves the most destructive element in the novel. Brown criticizes this type of person—someone who must rely on others for identity: “How barren and limited must be the capacity of that man who can be instructed or delighted only in contemplating the ideas of others.”[38] This is exactly what happens to Edgar Huntly. As he pursues Clithero more deeply into the wilderness, Huntly devolves from well-educated citizen to savage murderer. If Clithero is the external threat to the national body, Edgar Huntly is the internal counterpart. At first, it seems that Clithero and Native Americans are the catalysts for this terrifying transformation; the true nightmare, however, is that Huntly's abrupt change suggests that he has already been “infected” by

---

[36] Ibid., 746.
[37] Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the novel: contract and transgression*, Johns Hopkins paperbacks ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 26.
[38] Quoted in: Scott Bradfield, *Dreaming revolution : transgression in the development of American romance* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 19.

Native American influences. The boundaries of the wilderness and wildness are not as clear as they should be.

Edgar Huntly decides to pursue Clithero because he suspects him of murder. As the story begins, Huntly merely seems to mirror Clithero's behavior. He follows him into the wilderness, telling us that "I was, at first, fearful that the noise, which I made behind him, in trampling down the thicket, would alarm him; but he regarded it not. The way that he had selected, was always difficult; sometimes considerable force was requisite to beat down obstacles."[39] Having seen Clithero digging beneath the elm, Huntly does the same. He goes at night just like Clithero, and digs in the same spot as Clithero: "By carefully uncovering this hole, and digging as deep as Clithero had already dug, it would quickly appear whether any thing was hidden....I proposed to rise and hasten, with a proper implement, hither."[40]

Huntly also becomes a sleepwalker. The first time, he simply walks back and forth in a room in his uncle's home. The second time, Huntly wakes up in complete darkness. He cannot see, and believes he has gone blind: "I turned my head to different quarters, I stretched my eye-lids, and exerted every visual energy, but in vain. I was wrapt in the murkiest and most impenetrable gloom....The first effort of reflection was to suggest the belief that I was blind."[41] Huntly has sleepwalked into the same cave to which he followed Clithero several days ago. Huntly is no longer pursuing Clithero; instead, he has become Clithero. As Edgar Huntly's identity begins to meld with Clithero's, he drifts ever further away from white civilization. As a figure for the nation, Huntly's transformation is prophetic: American citizens are asleep to the extent to which

[39] Brown, 654.
[40] Ibid., 738.
[41] Ibid., 779.

the Indian threat has penetrated white society.

Huntly's arrival in the cave marks a turning point in the story and his transformation into a savage from this point is both dramatic and rapid. Although in the cave for what can certainly not exceed a day, Huntly professes an extreme hunger:

> My hunger speedily became ferocious. I tore the linen of my shirt between my teeth and swallowed the fragments. I felt a strong propensity to bite the flesh on my arm. My heart overflowed with cruelty, and I pondered on the delight I should experience in rending some living animal to pieces, and drinking its blood and grinding its quivering fibers between my teeth.[42]

Huntly's civilized clothing is now ripped. Moreover, he not only desires to tear an animal to pieces and eat it raw, but even confesses to wanting to eat his own arm. He thus moves beyond carnivorous urges and into the realm of auto-cannibalism. Huntly has frequently characterized Clithero as wild, but he now far surpasses the Irishman in his crazed, murderous fantasies.

When Huntly encounters a panther in the cave, he promptly kills it with the tomahawk. Then, he tells us, "My hunger had arrived at that pitch where all fastidiousness and scruples are at an end. . . . I review this scene with loathing and horror. Now that it is past I look back upon it as on some hideous dream. The whole appears to be some freak of insanity."[43] Still trapped in the cave, Huntly now begins to crawl on all fours, explaining, "My safety required that I should employ both hands and feet in exploring my way. I went on thus for a considerable period."[44] In the space of a few pages, Huntly has transformed from a civilizing presence, walking on two feet, into a

---

[42] Ibid., 783.
[43] Ibid., 786.
[44] Ibid., 787.

flesh-eating beast on all fours.

Huntly has imitated and then surpassed Clithero in moving towards racial otherness. Huntly's moral values follow a similar path toward savagery. In this first encounter with Clithero, Huntly considers himself a moral influence: "Could I arrest his footsteps and win his attention, I might be able to insinuate the lessons of fortitude…. one at least among his fellow-men regarded him with love and pity, could not fail to be of benign influence."[45] In this interaction, Huntly depicts himself a the face of civilization and Clithero as a savage he can save.

Instead, Huntly's obsession with Clithero incites Huntly to murderer. Luciano has commented on the way that the personality of Clithero seems to affect Huntly: "the stories nevertheless manage to leak into him, producing an experiential identification with the storytellers that takes place despite his stated intentions."[46] Luciano argues that Huntly reenacts portions of both Weymouth and Clithero's tales. I agree with her on this point. But the transformation goes even further. Huntly creates his own murderous "narrative" of the Indian and then defends himself against imagined foreign threats through cruel acts that far surpass Clithero's actions.

Clithero attempts murder, but Huntly actually commits seven murders. Despite the savagery of his actions, he considers these killings to be justified by virtue of the race of his victims. When he escapes from the cave and attempts to make his way home, he encounters several Indians sleeping in the forest. One by one, he murders these Indians, many with his tomahawk. Huntly creates a narrative for the Indians that establishes them as bloodthirsty by virtue of their race: "Should they leave this spot, without notice of their

[45] Ibid., 732.
[46] Luciano: 6.

approach being given to the fearless and pacific tenants of the neighbouring district, they might commit, in a few hours, the most horrid and irreparable devastation."[47] Of their skills as warriors, he says, "The slumber of an Indian is broken by the slightest noise....What could hence be predicted but that the band would start on their feet, and level their unerring pieces at my head!"[48] The purpose of these descriptions is to characterize the Indians as "savages"—not fully human.

This imagined narrative allows Huntly to become a savage in self-defense. Huntly kills the Indian silently with the tomahawk, recounting, "He had not time to descry the author of his fate; but, sinking on the path, expired without a groan. The hatchet buried itself in his breast, and rolled with him to the bottom of the precipice."[49] The massacre continues when he encounters the surviving Indians a few hours later. As he describes, "at three steps from the threshold, he received my bullet in his breast. The uplifted tomahawk fell from his hand, and, uttering a loud shriek, he fell upon the body of his companion."[50] Huntly is actually *more* skilled than the Indians at using Indian weapons and tactics.

He is also more skilled at murder than the original threat, Clithero, who has merely attempted murder, but never succeeded. Even Huntly seems surprised at his own ability to kill:

> The destruction that I had witnessed was vast. Three beings, full of energy and heroism, endowed with minds strenuous and lofty, poured out their lives before me. I was the instrument of their destruction. This scene of

[47] Brown, 792.
[48] Ibid., 794.
[49] Ibid., 797.
[50] Ibid., 809.

> carnage and blood was laid by me. To this havock and horror was I led by such rapid footsteps![51]

While Huntly expresses shock at the devastation he has wreaked, the description he provides implies that Huntly is pleased with himself. In this paragraph, which stands alone in the narrative, Huntly first focuses on the Indians' abilities and strengths—clear obstacles to a would-be attacker. Immediately after this description of their abilities, Huntly brings the focus back to himself: "I was the instrument of their destruction" and "This scene of carnage and blood was laid by me." These sentences stand out in the paragraph, as they are noticeably shorter than the framing sentences. They thus change the rhythm of the paragraph, and bring attention to the two sentences focused on Huntly. Rather than expressing horror, Huntly is marveling at himself.

Huntly is astonished the suddenness of his transformation: "My anguish was mixed with astonishment. In spite of the force and uniformity with which my senses were impressed by external objects, the transition I had undergone was so wild and inexplicable."[52] Brown calls attention to the speed of the transformation because it suggests that Huntly—familiar with the wilderness and skilled with the tomahawk—has a predisposition for such extreme violence. Huntly is already a savage. This predisposition prepares him for his last murder. It is the most violent, and deserves to be included in full here:

> [The Indian] lost all power of resistance, and was, therefore, no longer to be dreaded. He rolled upon the ground, uttering doleful shrieks, and throwing his limbs into those contorsions which bespeak the keenest

[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 809.

> agonies to which ill-fated man is subject....There was but one way to end them. To kill him outright, was the dictate of compassion and duty. I hastily returned, and once more levelled my piece at his head. It was a loathsome obligation, and was performed with unconquerable reluctance. Thus to assault and mangle the body of an enemy, already prostrate and powerless, was an act worthy of abhorrence; yet it was, in this case, prescribed by pity.
>
> My faltering hand rendered this second bullet ineffectual. One expedient still more detestable, remained. Having gone thus far, it would have been inhuman to stop short. His heart might easily be pierced by the bayonet, and his struggles would cease.[53]

Huntly shoots the Indian, returns to shoot him again, and then stabs him with the bayonet when both shots failed to kill him. He professes at all times to act out of pity, but the description of the murder is gruesome. The lines between Huntly the white, civilized man, and the savages he kills are effectively erased. Earlier in his story, Huntly described the violence of the Native Americans; in the latter half of the story, he reenacts that (imagined) violence.

The inability of fellow white citizens to recognize Huntly as one of them is a key focus in the latter half of the story. When he first encounters civilization again, Huntly recounts, "The uncouthness of my garb, my wild and weatherworn appearance, my fusil and tomahawk, could not but startle them. The woman stopped her wheel, and gazed as if a spectre had started into view."[54] His appearance frightens the whites he encounters,

---

[53] Ibid., 817.
[54] Ibid., 819.

rendering him an outsider.

His family, Huntly predicts, will have similar trouble recognizing him as one of their own. Huntly tells the reader, "I could not but reflect on the effect which my appearance would produce upon my family. The sleek locks, neat apparel, pacific guise, sobriety and gentleness of aspect by which I was customarily distinguished, would in vain be sought in the apparition which would now present itself before them."[55] Indeed, at the pinnacle of his outsider status, those searching for him mistake him for a savage and shoot at him. Huntly's friend and tutor, Sarsefield, recounts his version of the story: "I marked the appearance of some one stretched upon the ground where you lay. No domestic animal would wander hither and place himself upon this spot. There was something likewise in the appearance of the object that bespoke it to be a man, but if it were a man, it was, incontrovertibly, a savage and a foe."[56] First, Sarsefield doubts whether the being he sees on the ridge is actually a human. When he determines that it is a human, Sarsefield concludes that the wild looking man is "incontrovertibly, a savage and a foe." Sarsefield cannot imagine that any white man would look as Huntly does, and he therefore assumes that he must be an Indian.

This racial mix up nearly kills Huntly. The Indians posed a threat, but the white search party comes closest to killing him because he now resembles the "savages" he despises. After Huntly jumps into the river, the party fires over twenty shots at him. Later, Huntly, too, mistakes his friends for a troop of Indians. Sighting the search party, Huntly explains, "Presently, the treading of many feet was heard, and several figures were discovered, following each other in that straight and regular succession which is

[55] Ibid., 846.
[56] Ibid., 865.

peculiar to Indians."[57] Huntly concludes, based upon external appearances, that this must be a group of Indians, as the straight line in which these men walk is "peculiar to Indians." It turns out that this is the white search party, apparently having assumed the behavior of Indians. Huntly's inability to distinguish between Indian and white man nearly costs him his life: he shoots at the troop, thereby initiating a gunfight. The external racial distinctions that have kept the white man separate from the savages have become too blurred to be useful. White men can no longer recognize each other, making it impossible to distinguish friend from foe, both in the story and in the nation at large.

Edgar Huntly chronicles the transformation of a white American citizen into a quasi-Indian savage. But Huntly proves most threatening *after* he has returned home and assumed his white deportment and attire.

Clithero attempted to murder Mrs. Lorimer and attempts it again when he discovers that she is in New York. When Clithero heads to New York to find Mrs. Lorimer, Huntly writes a letter to Mrs Lorimer's new husband, Sarsefield, to warn him of Clithero's designs. He writes the letter in a hurry, telling Sarsefield, "At present I shall only say that Clithero is alive, is apprised of your wife's arrival and abode in New-York, and has set out, with mysterious intentions to visit her."[58] Sarsefield keeps Clithero's intentions a secret from his pregnant wife and manages to intercept Clithero well away from New York. He does not, however, manage to intercept Edgar Huntly's follow-up letter. Mrs. Lorimer opens the letter, and the shock of learning that Clithero is after her causes Mrs. Lorimer to miscarry.

Huntly, rather than Clithero, comes closest to killing Mrs. Lorimer. Sarsefield

---

[57] Ibid., 832.
[58] Ibid., 888.

tells Huntly, "Her own life has been imminently endangered and an untimely birth, has blasted my fondest hope. Her infant, with whose future existence so many pleasures were entwined, *is dead*."[59] Sarsefield clearly identifies Huntly as the perpetrator, pointing specifically to the act of writing as the main offense: "You acted in direct opposition to my council, and to the plainest dictates of propriety....You knew the liberty that would be taken of opening my letters."[60] While Sarsefield expended his energy in trying to stop one murderer from finding his wife, the actual threat arrived in the mail.

While Huntly does not kill Mrs. Lorimer, he causes the death of her progeny. Linda Kerber explains in *Women of the Republic*, "righteous mothers were asked to raise the virtuous male citizens on whom the health of the Republic depended." The idea of Republican Motherhood cast the mother as "the custodian of civic morality"; mothers, in other words, "guaranteed a steady infusion of virtue into the Republic."[61] Mothers—and by extension family—were the cornerstone of the new republic. The death of the progeny perverts the normal course of events, and so Huntly's unintentional murder has national, not just individual consequences.

The internal and external enemies to the nation so feared in the 1790s become a veritable plague in *Edgar Huntly*. Brown had a vision of national unity that depended on racial homogeneity. *Edgar Huntly* supports this vision of homogeneity by depicting the dangers of the alternative. The story shows white Americans the two possible consequences of racial diversity in the early Republic: disruption from without, or corruption from within. In other words, while Clithero and Native Americans pose an

---

[59] Ibid., 897.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: intellect and ideology in revolutionary America* (New York: Norton, 1986), 10-11.

external threat to white America, the more terrifying realization is that the "other" is always already within us.

***

Edgar Huntly explored the forests around his town and discovered himself made strange by Irish and Native American influences. *The Algerine Captive*'s protagonist, Doctor Updike Underhill, traverses the globe, and also finds himself grappling with issues of race and citizenship. While Royall Tyler's 1797 book has a far greater geographical reach, its author saw *The Algerine Captive* as an American project. Tyler had long expressed a dissatisfaction with the paucity of American-made literature available on the market. In his popular play *The Contrast*, first performed in 1787, Tyler writes in the prologue, "EXULT, each patriot heart!—this night is shewn/A piece, which we may fairly call our own;/Where the proud titles of 'My Lord! Your Grace!'/To humble Mr. and plain Sir give place."[62] Ten years later, he would voice a similar sentiment about the lack of American books: "while so many books are vended, they are not of our own manufacture."[63]

Tyler also presents the weak American book trade and the glut of British books as a problem of national importance. He asserts, "The second misfortune is that Novels, being the picture of the times, the New England reader is insensibly taught to admire the levity, and often the vices of the parent country."[64] He adds, "If the English Novel does not inculcate vice, it at least impresses on the young mind an erroneous idea of the world,

---

[62] Royall Tyler, *The contrast : a comedy*, Burt Franklin research and source work series (New York: B. Franklin, 1970).
[63] Royall Tyler, *The Algerine captive, or, The life and adventures of Doctor Updike Underhill, six years a prisoner among the Algerines*, ed. Caleb Crain, Modern Library pbk. ed., The Modern Library classics (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 6.
[64] Ibid.

in which she is to live. It paints the manners, customs, and habits of a strange country....and renders the homespun habits of her country disgusting."[65] British novels strip the American citizen of his independent qualities, as they encourage him (and most alarmingly *her*) toward a dissipation that is not indigenous to the United States. Writing an American book is patriotic and an important contribution to national identity.

Tyler was well-read and an "enlightened Federalist."[66] Like George Washington and John Adams, Tyler believed that the United States needed a strong central government to prevent the union from dissolving. Engell has explained that Tyler "believed human nature to be corrupt, fallen; he saw law and political and moral judgment as the only ways to curb the passions and self-interest of the citizens."[67] George Washington wrote in his farewell address to the nation, "it is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government."[68] Tyler was a satirist who wrote humorous articles with Joseph Dennie under the pen names Colon and Spondee. This has led scholars to conclude that *The Algerine Captive* is ironic.[69] But national unity was a real concern for Tyler and one reflected in both his plays and his novel. As Caleb Crain argues in his introduction to *The Algerine Captive*, "despite his subversive humor, in all likelihood Tyler intended for the Federalist motto that concludes the novel—By Uniting We Stand, By Dividing We Fall—to be resounding."[70]

In light of the political debates of the time, this second reading is more likely. The

---

[65] Ibid.
[66] John Engell, "Narrative Irony and National Character in Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive*," *Studies in American Fiction* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 21.
[67] Ibid., 21.
[68] Washington.
[69] Engell: 21.
[70] Caleb Crain, "Introduction," in *The Algerine Captive or, the Life and Adventures of Doctor Updike Underhill, Six Years a Prisoner among the Algerines*, ed. Caleb Crain (New York: Modern Library, 2002).

Constitution had been ratified in 1790, following fierce arguments between Federalists and Anti-federalists. The ratification of the Constitution did not end the debate, however, as the federal government's powers were severely limited. The political factions in the United States became increasingly divided from 1792 to 1801, to the point that many questioned whether the union would hold: "the newness of the nation, the fragility of its institutions, and the depth of the hostility and suspicion all contributed to the creation of a volatile situation in which the union's continued existence became highly problematic."[71] Considering Tyler's interest in government (he was also a lawyer and judge), I would argue that Tyler published *The Algerine Captive* at the height of this internal struggle with the intent of participating in the political conversation.

The Algerine Captive questions whether it is possible to be an American citizen outside of a federal union. Though Doctor Updike Underhill travels from New England to Algeria and back again, his narrative constantly forces the reader to look back at the United States and asks him to relate Underhill's experiences—as itinerant country doctor, ship surgeon, and white slave—to American identity. While Tyler satirizes a number of domestic ills in the early Republic, among them quackery and "classical" education, slavery is the main focus of the memoir. Tyler posits slavery as a moral and political threat to American liberty, with a federal union as the antidote to slavery that preserves the liberty of all citizens.

Tyler begins his exploration of slavery in the southern United States, where he portrays the deeply divided values of Southern slaveholders and their Northern compatriots as a threat to the federal union. In the eighteenth century, moral citizens were

---

[71] James Roger Sharp, *American politics in the early republic : the new nation in crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 11-13.

considered by many to be vital to the success of the United States, even though this belief had suffered somewhat by the late 1790s. As a Northerner, Underhill finds the values of the South as strange as those of a foreign country. Of his interactions with women, he explains, "An association with the well educated of the other sex was not so readily attained. There was a haughty reserve in the manners of the young ladies. Every attempt at familiarity, in a young stranger, habituated to the social, but respectful intercourse, customary in the northern states, excited alarm."[72] Moreover, he claims that "the very decorum, prudence, and economy, which would have enhanced my character at home, were here construed into poverty of spirit."[73] Underhill and the Southerners he encounters do not speak in the same social code, preventing him from forming any alliances.

Underhill feels alienated from his fellow citizens in the South for many reasons; the most difficult one for him to understand, however, is slavery. One could argue that Tyler is being hypocritical here. After all, the Northern states benefited economically from the slave trade—for example, the slave trade was a major source of income for shipbuilding industries in the North.[74] Whatever the facts of Northern involvement in slavery, Tyler clearly establishes that southern slavery is antithetical to the concept of federal union. Tyler was a satirist, and he uses humor to describe slavery in the South. However, he uses this humor to argue seriously that slaveholding imperils the virtues and morals of Southern citizens and establishes a rift between northerners and southerners.

Upon arriving in the South, Underhill attends a church service with a friend. The

---

[72] Tyler, 82-83.
[73] Ibid., 83.
[74] Gesa Mackenthun, "The Transoceanic Emergence of American 'Postcolonial' Identities," in *A companion to the literatures of colonial America*, ed. Susan P. Castillo and Ivy Schweitzer, Blackwell companions to literature and culture (Oxford: Blackwell 2005), 341.

parson is late to the service because his slave was late in helping him across the river. The parson uses a switch to "belabour the back and head of the faulty slave, all the way from the water to the church door; accompanying every stroke, with suitable language."[75] A slaveholding society allows a Christian parson—ideally bound by the tenets of forgiveness and a love of fellow man—to curse and beat his slave without fearing remonstrance from his congregation. Immediately after cursing his slave, "[The parson] ascended the reading desk, and, with his face glowing with the exercise of his supple jack, began the service with, I said I will take heed unto my ways, that I sin not with my tongue."[76] The parson and his congregation consider the slaves in their midst to be so far from human that they cannot perceive the irony of the parson's remarks when juxtaposed to his actions.

The second half of the parson's sermon—a treatise on the fourth commandment—is similarly disturbing, in that the congregants flout it as soon as they leave the church. The fourth commandment is to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Underhill describes how seriously the congregants take this commandment: "The whole congregation prayed fervently, that their hearts might be inclined to keep this holy law. The blessing was pronounced; and parson and people hastened to the horse race."[77] There, they gamble, drink, and curse, the parson better than many of his followers. All these activities were generally considered Christian sins in the eighteenth century, even when not, as with gambling and drinking, specifically forbidden in the Bible. Engaging in all of them on Sunday certainly does not keep the Sabbath holy. The parson and the congregants' complicity in the abuse of slaves and immoral activities conveys Tyler's

[75] Tyler, 80.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

essential message: slavery renders the slaveholders blind to their own hypocrisy and encourages a moral code that is incompatible with a united American identity.

Indeed, when Underhill tries to engage his Southern companion in a conversation about the parson's extraordinarily un-Christian behavior, he is astonished to find that his friend literally does not understand him:

> My friend was so happily influenced by the habits of these liberal, enlightened people, that he could not even comprehend the tendency of my remark. He supposed it leveled at the impropriety, not of the minister, but of the man; not at the act, but the severity of the chastisement; and observed, with warmth, that the parson served the villain right, and, that if he had been his slave, he would have killed the black rascal, if he was sure he should have to pay an hundred guineas to the public treasury for him.[78]

The statements of the friend regarding the slave are disturbing, but the most critical fact arising from this interaction is that the Underhill and his southern friend cannot comprehend each other. Slavery has created a division that influences even language; the southern friend is literally incapable of perceiving Underhill's criticism of the parson.

Additionally, slavery cannot be reconciled with the liberty that defines Americanism. In the southern United States, blackness—even a drop of African blood—determined unfreedom, while whiteness guaranteed freedom. Race and liberty are inextricably linked in the South. In this framework, the color of skin alone, rather than the characteristics of the individual determine the right to liberty. For the remainder of the novel, Tyler will use white slavery to question this link between race and liberty, as well as the ability of an American to remain free outside of a strong federal union.

---

[78] Ibid., 81.

Underhill's poverty pushes him out of the United States—and out of the federal union—as he chooses to engage himself as a surgeon on a slave ship. The further he removes from America's shores, the less freedom he has to make choices that he considers ethical and American. Underhill recounts his shock at the treatment of the slaves that are brought onto the ship. His description of the slaves' emotions is deeply sympathetic: "The dumb sorrow of some, the frenzy of others, the sobbings and tears of the children, and shrieks of the women, when they were presented to our captain, so affected me."[79] Underhill wants to leave, but his position on the ship as surgeon instead involves him directly with the slaves. As Underhill describes, "I was hastening from the scene of barbarity, on board the ship, when I was called by the mate, and discovered, to my surprize and horrour, that, by my station in the ship, I had a principal and active part of this inhumane transaction imposed upon me."[80] Underhill becomes directly involved in the slave trade. He is the one who inspects the slaves to determine their strength (read:value) and identifies any ailments.

Underhill sees that the same white slaveholders who will overload their ships with slaves are also willing to engage in transactions with slave traders who look no different than the slaves they are delivering:

> The day after our arrival at Cacongo, several Portuguese and Negro merchants, hardly distinguishable however, by their manners, employments, or complexions, came to confer with the captain, about the purchase of our cargo of slaves. They contracted to deliver him two

[79] Ibid., 95.
[80] Ibid., 96.

hundred and fifty head of slaves, in fifteen days' time.[81]

Underhill explicitly states that the Negro and the Portuguese merchants are hardly different from each other. This remark seems offhand, but questions a distinction between two groups that most readers would have considered as vastly different. The Portuguese may be exotic, but would not be considered as potential slaves by Americans; not so the "Negroes" who participate in the slave trade as traders. That these two groups of merchants engage in exactly the same transactions and exhibit the same behaviors deeply problematizes the idea that "Negros" are meant to be slaves. In fact, this similarity between the merchants seems to point to environmentalism and privilege as main determinants of behavior, rather than an inherent inferiority.

This distinction between slave and free man becomes even more complicated when Underhill is captured by Algerians: "I arose to dress myself, when the tent was overset, and I received a blow from the back of a sabre, which levelled me to earth; and was immediately seized and bound by several men of sallow and fierce demeanour."[82] Algerian slave traders bring Underhill aboard their ship, along with one African who had remained with him. The Algerians throw Underhill into "a dirty hole in the forecastle, where I lay twenty four hours, without straw to sleep on, or any thing to eat or drink."[83] The comparison between Underhill's treatment and the treatment of the black slaves aboard the slave ship is explicit: "The treatment we gave the unhappy Africans, on board the Sympathy, now came full into my mind; and, what was the more mortifying, I discovered that the Negro who was captured with me, was at liberty and fared well as the

[81] Ibid., 95.
[82] Ibid., 104.
[83] Ibid., 105.

sailors on board the vessel."[84] Underhill has now become a white slave and his treatment exactly mirrors the experiences of the black slaves on Underhill's ship. At the same time, those individuals who seemed destined for slavery have now become free again, through a rapid transition of power from American to Algerian merchant.

Underhill's whiteness qualifies him to become a slave, just as the blackness of the Africans sealed their fate on the American ship. The African man with whom Underhill is captured remains free. In fact, he becomes Underhill's savior: "The next day, the same kindly hand appeared again, with the same refreshment. I begged to see my benefactor. The door opened further, and I saw a countenance in tears. It was the face of the grateful African, who was taken with me."[85] Underhill's American citizenship only helps to seal his fate as a white slave: "I replied that I was an American, a citizen of the United States. This was no sooner interpreted to the captain, than, at a disdainful nod of his head, I was again seized, hand cuffed, and thrust into a dirty hole in the fore castle."[86] Underhill, a citizen of the "freest country in the world," is enslaved by virtue of his Americanness. After the American Revolution, the British rescinded their protection of American ships on the high seas. No longer under the British flag, the American merchant ships were easy targets for Algerian pirates; consequently, American citizens captured by Algerians were in danger of being enslaved. In addition, Spain agreed in 1785 to allow Algerian corsairs to pass the Straits of Gibraltar.[87] This allowed Algerian pirates to capture two American ships in the Atlantic—those aboard were enslaved and held for ransom.

Tyler did not choose an arcane topic in deciding to focus on white slavery in

---

[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 106.
[86] Ibid., 105.
[87] Crain, xxix.

Algeria. While the actual number of white slaves was actually quite small, American reaction to the enslavement of the sailors was vehement. Literally thousands of newspaper articles were printed about the topic, many of them reprints of letters sent from the captives. One letter, headlined, "In the Name of Almighty God!" tells Americans, "We are on the verge of eternity; Therefore, we beg of the citizens of the United States, in the name of the Almighty and our Saviour, who died to redeem us all, that our country will adopt some plan to extricate us from this city of human misery."[88] Another letter, sent by a Captain Richard O'Bryan, tells his readers, "We appear to be the living victims of American independence."[89] Another article confirmed the reports of these American white slaves: "There are many American captives yet in a state of slavery, at and about Algiers, and were it not that they receive a small annual allowance from Congress, their situation would be intolerable."[90] It is very likely that Tyler read these letters, among others, as they were published in the *New Hampshire Journal*, the newspaper to which he contributed the Colon & Spondee columns.

The situation of the American captives was embarrassing to the United States government, especially because the newspaper articles reported that "every nation are ransoming their prisoners, except the Americans."[91] Even more embarrassing was when David Humphreys, who had tried to organize the release of the hostages, published a much-reprinted letter that appealed directly to the American people for help.[92] The

---

[88] "In the Name of Almighty God!," *The New Hampshire Journal: Or, The Farmer's Weekly Museum*, January 10, 1794, 3.
[89] Captain Richard O'Bryan, "Extract from the Letter of Captain Richard O'Bryan, a Prisoner at Algiers, dated December 29, 1792," *The New Hampshire Journal: Or, The Farmer's Weekly Museum*, August 30, 1793.
[90] "Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, July 24," *The New Hampshire Journal: Or, The Farmer's Weekly Museum*, August 9, 1793.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Crain, xxx.

American people responded to Humphreys' call with donations and the formation of benevolent societies; the eagerness of the private sector to help was not appreciated by Washington's government. Humphrey's letter had exposed the weakness of the federal government. The plight of Americans in Algeria pointed directly to the need for a stronger federal government.

The reaction to white slavery was so vehement because it challenged both racial distinctions and the American celebration of individual liberty. When Underhill enters Algeria, the status of slave tests his ability to maintain, as an individual and a foreigner, his American values. He chronicles for his reader his descent from proud American to fearful slave. Underhill arrives for inspection at the palace of the Dey, and is instructed to pay reverence to him: "When within thirty paces, we were made to throw ourselves upon the earth and creep towards the Dey, licking the dust as a token of reverence and submission."[93] Deigned a captive not worth much ransom, Underhill will be sold on the market. He tells his readers, "On the next market day, we were stripped of the dress in which we appeared at court. A napkin wrapped our loins, and a coarse cloak thrown over our shoulders."[94] Underhill is treated like an animal, and examined for imperfections by his would-be buyer: "It was astonishing to observe, how critically they examined my muscles, to see if I was naturally strong; moved my limbs in various directions, to detect any latent lameness or injury in the parts; and struck suddenly before my eyes, to judge by my winking, if I was clear sighted."[95] This description mirrors Underhill's own role in the slave trade, thereby emphasizing the role reversal that Underhill experiences.

Upon being purchased, Underhill "was obliged by the master of the shop…to lie

[93] Tyler, 113.
[94] Ibid., 115.
[95] Ibid., 116.

down in the street, take the foot of my new master, and place it upon my neck; making to him, what the lawyers call attornment."[96] Underhill's submission seems complete—it is he who places the master's foot upon his own neck. This submission is entirely un-American, and far removed from American ideals of individual liberty. Notably, Underhill is painfully aware of the discrepancy between his actions and his American citizenship. He tells his disapproving readers, "Perhaps a free citizen of the United States may, in warmth of his patriotism, accuse me of a tameness of spirit, in submitting to such gross disgrace. I will not justify myself. Perhaps I ought to have asserted the dignity of our nation, in despite of the bastinadoes, chains, or even death itself."[97] Underhill here emphasizes that a "free" citizen of the United States might believe himself a more stalwart American than Underhill. Without a federal union of similarly minded Americans, Underhill is powerless to uphold any American notions of liberty. The individual needs the federal union in order to uphold and to enjoy American liberties. Underhill's enslavement questions even his own American status—can Underhill be a white slave and still be an American? The answer to this question is not geographically specific; rather it depends on the community—no single American can maintain the liberties afforded by the federal union.

The same Underhill who claims to love American liberty becomes, under the right circumstances, a slave. As Underhill tells his reader,

> I now found that I was indeed a slave. My body had been enthralled, but the dignity of a free mind remained….but the terrour of the late execution, with the unabating fatigue of my body, had so depressed my fortitude that

[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid., 117.

> I trembled at the look of the overseer, and was meanly anxious to conciliate his favour.[98]

This assertion, as well as Underhill's realization that "when men are once reduced to slavery, they can never resolve, much more achieve, any thing, that is manly, virtuous, or great," serves as a rebuttal to those who attribute an African's enslavement to his essential inferiority. Tyler—through Underhill—identifies environment as the culprit: "If any of my dear countrymen censure my want of due spirit, I have only to wish him in my situation in Algiers, that he may avail himself of a noble opportunity of suffering gloriously for his country."[99] Neither Underhill's whiteness, nor his American citizenship prevent him from becoming a slave; instead, these are the two factors that seal his fate.

Whiteness and American citizenship provide Underhill with the benefits of a free man in the United States, but prove a detriment in Algeria. Christianity—the dominant American religion in the early Republic[100]—also becomes a liability for Underhill. The Muslims of Algiers do not enslave other Muslims; freedom for Underhill would only require his religious conversion. As an Englishman who did just this explains, "Renounce the Christian and embrace the Mahometan faith; you are no longer a slave, and the delights of life await you."[101] The temptation for Underhill to convert from Christianity to Islam is great. He even asks to speak with a mullah about converting to Islam. Immediately after making this request, he is bathed, clothed in comfortable clothing, and allowed to spend two weeks recuperating. After two weeks, a mullah comes to speak with him about religion, with the goal of converting Underhill to Islam: "Upon the margin of a

---

[98] Ibid., 145.
[99] Ibid., 117.
[100] James T. Kloppenberg, "The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse," *The Journal of American History* 74, no. 1 (1987).
[101] Tyler, 126.

refreshing fountain, shadowed by the fragrant branches of the orange, date, and pomegranate, for five successive days I maintained the sacred truths of our holy religion against the insidious attack of the mussulman priest."[102] The arguments that the priest presents in favor of Islam are so convincing that some readers of *The Algerine Captive* actually accused Tyler of being pro-Islam.[103]

These tactics frighten Underhill because he may not be able to resist them. Indeed, scholars have commented on the fact that Underhill seems to give an entirely inadequate defense of Christianity, so that the arguments for Islam outweigh those for Christianity. Underhill recounts of this debate, "Though I viewed his conduct as insidious, yet he no sooner retired than, overcome by his suavity of manners, for the first time I trembled for my faith, and burst into tears."[104] The conditions of his enslavement are the reason he now considers converting to Islam—a religion that is anathema to the Christianity of early America. Again, Underhill's distant removal from American soil—and thereby the federal union—exposes him to pernicious influences that threaten to undermine his very identity.

The question of religion is closely linked to an understanding of American citizenship. Underhill is a white slave because he is an American and a Christian; he could easily free himself by renouncing his religion and, by extension, his nationality. He chooses, however, to remain a slave: "After five days of conversation, disgusted with his fables, abashed by his assurance, and almost confounded by his sophistry, I resumed my slave's attire, and sought safety in my former servitude."[105] For Underhill, slavery has

---

[102] Ibid., 131.
[103] Crain, xxxi.
[104] Tyler, 130.
[105] Ibid., 136.

become the correct moral choice.

Because of the strong link between Christianity and white American identity, Underhill is more American as a Christian slave than he would be as a free Muslim. As Underhill explains to the converted Englishman, "my body is a slave, but my mind is free. Your body is at liberty, but your soul is in the most abject slavery, in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity."[106] Underhill knows he is unfit for the rigors of slavery, and yet he decides to return to physical labor, rather than give up the liberty of his "soul." His sacrifice is not quite "give me liberty, or give me death," but it is made in the same spirit of American independence.

Tyler considers a federal union essential to preserving the individual liberty that justified the early Republic's existence. A final scene near the end of the novel demonstrates to Underhill and the reader the power of national identity. While aboard a ship bound for Tunisia, a Portuguese ship captures the Tunisians and rescues Underhill. The change in standing among the passengers is immediate. A Portuguese slave, subjected to years of abuse, attacks his former master: "No sooner was his national flag displayed, than the overjoyed Portuguese ran below and liberated me from my fetters, hugged me in raptures, and hauling me upon deck, the first man we met was our master, whom he saluted with a kick, and then spit in his face."[107] The slave is reunited with his fellow countrymen and this turn of events so emboldens him that he confonts his master even before his fellow citizens can physically defend him.

The abusive master, on the other hand, is without the support of his country and immediately assumes all the mannerisms of a frightened slave. Underhill explains, "I

[106] Ibid., 126.
[107] Ibid., 223.

must confess that this reverse of fortune made me feel for the wretched Mussulman[sic] who stood quivering with apprehensions of instant death."[108] The change in fortune is so drastic that even Underhill marvels at how arbitrary and sudden it is: "I had been degraded to a slave, and was now advanced to a citizen of the freest country in the universe."[109] Having returned from his ordeal, Underhill now more fully appreciates his liberties. He claims that his goal is "To contribute cheerfully to the support of our government, which I have learnt to adore, in schools of despotism; and thus secure to myself the enviable character of an useful physician, a good father and worthy FEDERAL citizen."[110]

Tyler—through Underhill—clearly establishes the didactic role of the memoir: "My ardent wish is that my fellow citizens may profit by my misfortunes. If they peruse these pages with attention they will perceive the necessity of uniting our federal strength to enforce a due respect among other nations."[111] In light of Underhill's experiences, isolated citizens are the greatest threat to the country because they do not have the support of the federal union. It is no accident that Underhill professes in the last pages of the memoir that he wants to establish himself in one town and link himself to the community through marriage: "I now mean to unite myself to some amiable woman, to pursue my practice, as a physician; which, I hope, will be attended with more success than when essayed with the inexperience and giddiness of youth."[112]

Underhill has experienced the dangers inherent in being a stranger both in his own land, and in foreign lands. The estrangement of one citizen is a threat to the liberty of

---

[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid., 225.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid., 226.
[112] Ibid., 225.

every citizen. As Underhill explains, “Let us, one and all, endeavour to sustain the general government. Let no foreign emissaries inflame us against one nation...Our first object is union among ourselves.”[113] Indeed, lest the message escape us, he concludes his memoir with words that resonate still today” “BY UNITING WE STAND, BY DIVIDING WE FALL.”[114]

***

George Washington finishes his Farewell Address to the nation by depicting for his audience the ideal citizen: “I anticipate...the sweet enjoyment of partaking, in the midst of my fellow-citizens, the benign influence of good laws under a free government, the ever-favorite object of my heart, and the happy reward, as I trust, of our mutual cares, labors, and dangers.”[115] This citizen is Washington himself, mindful of the laws and united with American citizens by their shared concerns. In his Farewell Address, Washington is participating in and adding to an ongoing conversation about American identity and American citizenship. What it means to be a good American citizen has been debated since the American Revolution; the American Revolution itself is the result of a similar debate—what it means to be a good English subject.[116]

Revolutions, conspiracies, and enemies to the state were hardly new in the eighteenth century. They had long been part of the political landscape, as well-read Americans like Charles Brockden Brown and Royall Tyler knew. America's unique problem, however, was how to reconcile an American identity founded on individual

---

[113] Ibid., 226.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Washington, n.p.
[116] Gordon Wood, *The creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, ed. Institute of Early American History and Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Dr. Wood states that Americans "sincerely believed they were not creating new rights or new principles prescribed only by what ought to be, but saw themselves claiming 'only to keep their old privileges', the traditional rights and principles of all Englishmen, sanctioned by what they thought had always been" (13).

liberty, but needful of collective union. Incorporating racial others like Native Americans and African slaves proved especially problematic, as many Americans thought they could not be assimilated.

Not only politicians, but also everyday citizens, among them writers like Royall Tyler and Charles Brockden Brown, participated in these discussions, be it through speeches, sermons, newspapers, pamphlets, or novels. The novel proved especially effective, as it depicted American citizens *to* American citizens, both reflecting and participating in the formation of American identity. In fact, Cathy Davidson has argued that "the novels reveal the contest over the shape the new nation should take, who might be the nation's paradigmatic heroes and heroines, and who was being left out of the picture in the official version of America's new 'representative democracy'."[117]

The Algerine Captive and *Edgar Huntly* both participate in the debate about American citizenship and attempt in their own way to shape and define American identity. They have in common their understanding that national unity had to mean, as much as possible, cultural hegemony. While cultural hegemony would include religion and values, racial difference proved the most immediate challenge to national unity. For Brown, this meant that Native Americans within the nation proved a greater threat to national security than even France or Britain. Controlling these groups would require not only physical removal or domination, but also psychic distance to prevent undue influences on white Americans like Edgar Huntly. For Royall Tyler, the presence of slavery in the South divided the nation, raising the specter of a dissolved federal union. Tyler uses the well known problem of white slavery to examine how well an American

[117] Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the word: the rise of the novel in America*, Expanded ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5.

can uphold American principles when estranged from his "federal union." Despite their differences, both authors have the same message for their readers: United We (white Americans) Stand, Divided We Fall.

WORKS CITED

"Alien and Sedition Acts." *Primary Documents in American History*, The Library of Congress, http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Alien.html (accessed Mach 20, 2011).

"Anecdote of the Talents and Benevolence of an Indian Chief." *The Spectator* January 1799.

"Anecdotes." *Kline's Carlisle Weekly Gazette*, January 16, 1799, 3.

Bradfield, Scott. *Dreaming revolution : transgression in the development of American romance*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993.

Brown, Charles Brockden. "Address to the Government of the United States, on the Cession of Louisiana to the French." Philadelphia: John Conrad & Co, 1803.

Brown, Charles Brockden. "Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a sleep-walker." In *Three Gothic novels: Wieland or, The transformation; Arthur Mervyn or, Memoirs of the year 1793; Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a sleep-walker*. New York: The library of America, 1998.

Brown, Charles Brockden. "The Difference Between History and Romance." *Monthly Magazine, and American Review* (April 1800): 251-53.

Brown, Charles Brockden. "Walstein's School of History; From the German of Krants of Gotha." *Monthly Magazine, and American Review* (August 1799): 408.

Crain, Caleb. "Introduction." In *The Algerine Captive or, the Life and Adventures of Doctor Updike Underhill, Six Years a Prisoner among the Algerines*, edited by Caleb Crain. New York: Modern Library, 2002.

Davidson, Cathy N. *Revolution and the word: the rise of the novel in America*. Expanded ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Debates and Proceedings of the Congress of the United States. 5th Cong., 1851.

Engell, John. "Narrative Irony and National Character in Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive*." *Studies in American Fiction* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 17-29.

Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and death in the American novel*. Rev. ed. New York: Stein and Day, 1982.

Fredrickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind : the debate on Afro-American character and destiny, 1817-1914*. Scranton, Pa.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987.

Gibbons, Luke. "Ireland, America, and Gothic Memory: Transatlantic Terror in the Early Republic." *boundary 2* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2004).

"In the Name of Almighty God!". *The New Hampshire Journal: Or, The Farmer's Weekly Museum*, January 10, 1794, 3.

Jefferson, Thomas, Adrienne Koch, and William Peden. *The life and selected writings of Thomas Jefferson* The modern library of the world's best books. New York: The Modern library, 1944.

Kerber, Linda K. *Women of the Republic: intellect and ideology in revolutionary America*. New York: Norton, 1986.

Kloppenberg, James T. "The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse." *The Journal of American History* 74, no. 1 (1987): 9-33.

Levine, Robert. *Conspiracy and romance : studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville* Cambridge studies in American literature and culture. Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Luciano, Dana. "Perverse Nature: Edgar Huntly and the novel's reproductive disorders." *American Literature* 70, no. 1 (March 1998): 1-28.

Mackenthun, Gesa. "The Transoceanic Emergence of American 'Postcolonial' Identities." In *A companion to the literatures of colonial America*, edited by Susan P. Castillo and Ivy Schweitzer, 35, 336-50. Oxford: Blackwell 2005.

McDougall, Walter A. *Freedom just around the corner: a new American history, 1585-1828*. 1st ed. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004.

O'Bryan, Captain Richard. "Extract from the Letter of Captain Richard O'Bryan, a Prisoner at Algiers, dated December 29, 1792." *The New Hampshire Journal: Or, The Farmer's Weekly Museum*, August 30, 1793, 2.

"October; Indians; John Leper; Red; Tennessee; Evan Watkins; Col. Winchester; Bledsoe's." *Hartford Gazette*, January 1, 1795, 2.

"Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, July 24." *The New Hampshire Journal: Or, The Farmer's Weekly Museum*, August 9, 1793, 3.

Schulz, Dieter. "Edgar Huntly as Quest Romance." *American Literature* 43, no. 3 (November 1971): 323-335.

Shapiro, Stephen. "Man to Man I Needed Not to Dread His Encounter: *Edgar Huntly's*

End of Erotic Pessimism." In *Revising Charles Brockden Brown : culture, politics, and sexuality in the early republic*, edited by Philip Barnard, Mark Kamrath and Stephen Shapiro. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004.

Sharp, James Roger. *American politics in the early republic : the new nation in crisis*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. *This Violent Empire: the birth of an American national identity*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

Syndergaard, Rex. "Wild Irishmen and the Alien and Sedition Acts." *E'ire Ireland; a journal of Irish studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 15.

Tanner, Tony. *Adultery in the novel: contract and transgression*. Johns Hopkins paperbacks ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981.

Tyler, Royall. *The contrast : a comedy* Burt Franklin research and source work series. New York: B. Franklin, 1970.

Tyler, Royall. *The Algerine captive, or, The life and adventures of Doctor Updike Underhill, six years a prisoner among the Algerines*. Modern Library pbk. ed. The Modern Library classics, Edited by Caleb Crain. New York: Modern Library, 2002.

Washington, George. "Washington's Farewell Address." Yale University Avalon Project, 1796.

Wood, Gordon. *The creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, Edited by Institute of Early American History and Culture. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

"Zachariah Cox." *The Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, January 11, 1799, 3.

CHAPTER 5

RACIAL DEVIANCE IN *ATALA* AND *LA FILLE AUX YEUX D'OR*

In Chateaubriand's *Atala*, Atala is a beautiful and exotic girl, the offspring of an Indian woman and a Spanish colonist. Honoré de Balzac's *La Fille aux yeux d'or* features Paquita, a beautiful and exotic woman, the offspring of a Georgian woman. Both Atala and Paquita suffer tragic ends that are the direct result of their exoticism, and this is precisely what fascinated French readers. From at least the sixteenth century, when travel narratives of the New World reached a European audience, the French were delighted by stories of adventures in foreign lands. As Cornelius Jaenen explains, "there was a continuing pre-occupation with Europe, so that the New World and its native cultures were employed to evaluate Old World society."[1] Rather than opening new horizons for European readers, these exotic travel adventures created a unified identity against the strange new world.

In the early nineteenth century, creating a sense of national identity attained a new urgency. By 1801, the publication year for *Atala*, the citizens of France had witnessed the French Revolution, the Terror, serial governmental overthrows, and the establishment of the Consulate. By the time Balzac published *La Fille aux yeux d'or* in 1834, both Napoleon's First Empire and the Restoration had fallen. Louis-Philippe, the citizen king, was attempting to lead a politically divided country. At the same time, French political interests shifted from the New World, where Napoleon's sale of Louisiana ended hopes of Franco-American imperialism, to the Near East, the site of Napoleon's ambitious Egypt expeditions. Even after Napoleon's fall, France's relationship with the Orient would

---

[1] Cornelius Jaenen, "'Les Sauvages Ameriquains': Persistence into the 18th Century of Traditional French Concepts and Constructs for Comprehending Amerindians," *Ethnohistory* 29, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 45.

continue through trade. Literary interests changed as well. French readers who had thrilled to Chateaubriand's accounts of America in the very early nineteenth century were similarly enthralled in later years by plays, travel narratives, and novels about the Orient. Despite the change in setting, however, French readers' taste for exoticism remained. Chateaubriand and Balzac reflect the French readers' changing taste for exoticism and they both create an exotic Other who is excluded from white, French identity. Chateaubriand creates a polarity between the savage and the civilized man to underscore the superiority of white, French, and Christian values. Balzac demonstrates that, despite the French citizen's desire to keep France and the Orient distinct, the Orient is already within Paris and within the Parisian.

***

When Chateaubriand first published *Atala* in 1801, he had to put out five editions in one year to keep up with demand. The story was translated into multiple languages. *Le Journal des Débats*, le *Publiciste*, and *L'Année littéraire* praised *Atala*. A young Victor Hugo wrote in his student notebook, "Je veux être Chateaubriand ou rien!"[2] L'abbé Charles-François Painchaud wrote to Chateaubriand, "Je dévore vos ouvrages, dont la mélancolie me tue, en faisant néanmoins mes délices; c'est une ivresse. Comment avez-vous pu écrire de pareilles choses sans mourir?"[3] More than one hundred years later, Remy de Gourmont wrote "entre le dix-huitième et le dix-neuvième siècle, il y a Chateaubriand; pour passer de l'un à l'autre, il faut traverser son jardin."[4] *Atala* was even an inspiration to other artists, as "poésie, théâtre, musique, peinture, gravures, céramique,

[2] Marieke Stein, *Victor Hugo*, idées reçues (Paris: Le Cavalier Bleu, 2007), 15.
[3] Pierre Moreau, *Chateaubriand*, Les écrivains devant Dieu (Desclée de Brouwer: 1965), 36.
[4] Remy de Gourmont, "M. Huysmans, écrivain pieux," in *Promenades littéraires* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1904), 25.

tous les arts s'inpirèrent de cette 'anecdote indienne'."[5] This small novel had an outsized influence on nineteenth century France.

As a point of comparison, St. John de Crèvecoeur published an account of his travels to Pennsylvania entitled, *Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans l'Etat de New York*, only one year after *Atala.* The endeavor was a complete flop in France. His French readers, who had eagerly read Chateaubriand's descriptions of American wilderness, hated it because the narrative described an America well on the way to industrialization. Travel writings about New France had appeared in France since the seventeenth century, and the discovery of the New World had a profound effect on the French imagination from the beginning. Clarisse Zimra explains, "L'existence du continent au-delà des mers fit l'effet d'une bombe sur un public encore soumis au christianisme et qui confondait, dans un même besoin confus d'exotisme, les vieilles légendes païennes et chrétiennes."[6] But no French account of America enjoyed the wild popularity of Chateaubriand's fictional *Atala. Atala* touched a cultural nerve in France by providing the combination of Christian and pagan legend that appealed to French readers. Zimra argues that Chateaubriand succeeded where Crèvecoeur did not because *Atala* is one of Chateaubriand's "rêveries de sa jeunesse."[7] This dream vision was inspired by rapturous travel narratives of long ago, not the reality of early nineteenth-century America. Drawing from a collective unconscious, Chateaubriand creates a paradise lost in the New World.[8]

The connection between the New World and the Biblical Eden that Chateaubriand

---

[5] Jean Maurice Gautier, "Introduction," in *Atala*, Textes littéraires français 198 (Genève: Droz, 1973), 11.
[6] Clarisse Zimra, "La Vision du Nouveau Monde de Chateaubriand a Beaumont: pour une etude de forme de l'exotisme," *The French Review* 49, no. 6 (May 1976): 1001.
[7] Ibid., 1002.
[8] Ibid.

creates in *Atala* is no accident: “les Français pouvaient regretter d'avoir perdu ce nouvel Eden.”[9] Dennis Spininger has argued, “What Chateaubriand deliberately accomplished was a partial analogy between the New World setting of *Atala* as 'le nouvel Eden' and its mythic counterpart, the 'old' Eden.”[10] Clarisse Zimra makes a similar argument, saying that explorers, missionaries, governors, fur traders, navigators and colonists all sent to France accounts of the New World that situated America as a promised land.[11] New France became in the French imagination an extension of Christian geography.

The popularity of New France well after the embarrassing Treaty of Paris (which forced France to return much of the land conquered in the New World) also reflected a briefly held hope in 1801 that, with a newly stable government under Napoleon, France had the strength to demand Canada back from England. Spain had returned Louisiana to the French in 1800, raising the possibility of a new French colony in America. Two years later, Napoleon would sell the territory to the United States, thereby dashing those hopes.[12] But for a year, the possibility of possessing once again the New Eden fired the imagination of Chateaubriand and inspired *Atala*.

In his preface to the first edition, Chateaubriand says to his readers, “Je ne sais si le Public goûtera cette histoire qui sort de tous les routes connues, et qui présente une nature et des moeurs tout-à-fait étrangères à l'Europe.”[13] That *Atala*'s heroes were American Indians actually seems to have contributed greatly to the popularity of the novel. Nevertheless, reading *Atala* reveals that the idolization of the Native American in

---

[9] Gautier, 4.
[10] Dennis J. Spininger, "The Paradise Setting of Chateaubriand's Atala," *PMLA* 89, no. 3 (May 1974): 530.
[11] Zimra: 1001.
[12] Denis Hollier, "French Customs, Literary Borders," *October* 49, (Summer 1989): 43.
[13] François-René Chateaubriand, "Préface de la première édition (1801)," in *Atala*, ed. Jean Maurice Gautier (Genève: Librairie Droz S.A., 1973), 156.

Chateaubriand's novel is based on a non-reciprocal relationship between whites and Indians that maintains always the superiority of white mores and the otherness of Indian customs. Chateaubriand underscores this binary by rallying his French readers behind the French missionary père Aubry. By reading about the Amerindians in *Atala*, Chateaubriand's French readers become acutely aware of their own whiteness and Christianity, the superior qualities extolled in *Atala*. As a national community of readers, they are allied with the greatest hero in the novel, the French missionary, père Aubry.

Even before he begins the story, Chateaubriand uses the preface to establish the superiority and centrality of whiteness in the novel. Of his methods he writes, "Cela m'a donné de grands avantages, en faisant [Chactas] parler en Sauvage dans la peinture des moeurs, et en Européen dans le drame et la narration. Sans cela il eût fallu renoncer à l'ouvrage: si je m'étois toujours servi du style Indien, Atala eût été de l'hébreu pour le lecteur."[14] *Atala* is a European narration of "savage" mores. Chateaubriand cites Homer and the Bible as his models for great writing. The decision to rely on these monuments of Western literature when writing about Native Americans is not unusual. Chinard explains that Lafitau, the first to create a "faux parallélisme" between savages and the ancients, had a profound influence on Chateaubriand.[15] A Western understanding of the beautiful would also influence his works. Chateaubriand explains, "peignons la nature, mais la belle nature: l'art ne doit pas s'occuper de l'imitation des monstres."[16] The monstrous—especially the monstrously Other—need not and should not be imitated in French literature.

---

[14] Ibid., 158.
[15] Gilbert Chinard, "Chateaubriand en Amérique: Quelques Nouvelles Sources Des 'Natchez' et du 'Voyage'," *Modern Philology* 9, no. 1 (Jul. 1911): 2.
[16] Chateaubriand.

Chateaubriand further distances himself and his readers from alliance with his Native American subjects by distancing himself from Rousseau. Chateaubriand insists that, despite appearances, he does not support the concept of the noble savage:[17]

> Au reste, je ne suis point comme M. Rousseau, un enthousiaste des Sauvages; et quoique j'aie peut-être autant à me plaindre de la société, que ce philosophe avoit à s'en louer, je ne crois point que la *pure nature* soit la plus belle chose du monde. Je l'ai toujours trouvée fort laide, par-tout où j'ai eu l'occasion de la voir. Bien loin d'être d'opinion que l'homme qui pense soit un *animal* dépravé, je crois que c'est la pensée qui fait l'homme. Avec ce mot de *nature*, on a tout perdu.[18]

Chateaubriand privileges thought over nature and does not consider the two compatible. In this paragraph, which begins with reference to the "sauvages," Chateaubriand aligns Native Americans with lack of thought and (white) civilized men with thought. Taken to its logical endpoint, Native Americans who are civilized and possess the ability to reason are by definition "white"; one cannot be both civilized and Native American. To reinforce the opposition between the "savage" and the civilized man, Chateaubriand tells his readers, "j'ai placé auprès du peuple chasseur un tableau complet du peuple agricole, pour montrer les avantages de la vie sociale, sur la vie sauvage."[19] This opposition is again a Native American/European binary, with Indian hunting habits compared unfavorably to European farming practices.

---

[17] Chateaubriand's assertion that he is not a Rousseauist actually contradicts his statements in other writings, in which he supports the idea of the "noble savage" made so popular by Rousseau. His insistence here on the superiority of civilization over nature is nevertheless in line with the overall message of Atala. It seems that, at least when he was writing Atala, Chateaubriand had less enthusiasm for Rousseauist ideas than at other times in his life.

[18] Chateaubriand, 157.

[19] Ibid., 159.

The preface to *Atala* establishes white civilization as a model for the savages of New France. The actual story continues this theme, especially in the figure of père Aubry, self-sacrificing missionary to Native Americans in Louisiana. Chateaubriand positions him not as a mortal priest, but as a savior—a second Jesus designated to save the souls of "savages." His role among them is two-fold: to domesticate them and to Christianize them.[20] He tells his listener Chactas that upon arriving in New France, he found "des familles vagabondes, dont les moeurs étoient féroces et la vie fort misérable."[21] Pure nature, as Chateaubriand asserted in the preface, is "fort-laide." Père Aubry credits himself for domesticating these ferocious savages, telling Chactas, "Je leur ai fait entendre la parole de paix, et leurs moeurs se sont graduellement adoucies. Ils vivent maintenant rassemblés au bas de cette montagne."[22] Père Aubry likens the domestication of the Native American to that of a farm animal, as this process only happens "graduellement." With the missionary's guidance, the group of Indians now live at the base of the mountain in the kind of agricultural society that Chateaubriand lauds in his preface.

They also live at the base of a mortal "mountain," père Aubry. When Chactas enters the village with Aubry—who is trying to add him to the population—Chactas witnesses the adoring Indians at the feet of their priest: "Aussitôt que les Indiens aperçurent leur pasteur dans la plaine, ils abbandonnèrent leurs travaux et accoururent au-

---

[20] J.B. Bernard, *Relations de la Louisiane, et du Fleuve Mississippi* (Amsterdam: 1720), 26. Quoted in Jaenen. This was the tactic assumed by real missionaries in New France. In his accounts of Jesuit missionary work in the Mississippi Valley, Bernard described the goals of the Jesuits: "not only converting these savages...but also they have, in some respects, civilized them with the help of a few French voyageurs who settled among those people." The French settlers set an example for the Indians, who are considered civilized when they, too, form an agricultural society.

[21] François-René Chateaubriand, *Atala*, ed. Jean Maurice Gautier, Textes littéraires français 198 (Genève: Droz, 1973), 94.

[22] Ibid.

devant de lui. Les uns baisaient sa robe, les autres aidaient ses pas; les mères élevaient dans leurs bras leurs petits enfants, pour leur faire voir l'homme de Jésus-Christ, qui répandait des larmes."[23] The Indians clearly worship him, kissing his robe, helping him walk, and raising their children to help them see the "man of Christ." The scene is idyllic yet disturbing for the clear separation between Native Americans, childlike in their adoration, and the white priest, father to all. To the Indian Chactas, he appears to be the Father himself: "Les éclairs qui sortaient des yeux du vieillard, sa barbe qui frappait sa poitrine, ses paroles foudroyantes le rendaient semblable à *un Dieu*."[24]

The enterprise is a veritable theocracy, with Aubry as its benevolent quasi-celestial ruler. New France was also known as the "nouvel Eden," a designation that Aubry seems to take literally. He explains that, though eager to convert his disciples to Christianity, he works hard to keep them ignorant as well: "J'ai tâché, en leur enseignants les voies du salut, de leur apprendre les premiers arts de la vie, mais sans les porter trop loin, et en retenant ces honnêtes gens dans cette simplicité qui fait le bonheur."[25] This portrayal of a primitive existence provides an interesting twist on Eden, as it confirms Aubry as superior precisely because he is—like all white Christians—a fallen man. Spininger has argued that père Aubry represents Eden both before and after the Fall: "Père Aubry is thus allied, through his profession and special qualities or powers by which he at once represents and transcends his professions (one of his symbols is a tamed serpent), to the two distinct paradisiacal conceptions."[26] Père Aubry decides to keep his flock ignorant, so that he is both God and the fruit of knowledge.

---

[23] Ibid., 100.
[24] Ibid., 110. Italics mine
[25] Ibid., 94.
[26] Spininger: 534.

Aubry controls almost all aspects of his disciples' lives. These disciples, Chateaubriand implies, desperately need père Aubry's practical as well as religious guidance. Chactas even refers to the group as “enfants.”[27] Upon the priest's arrival in the Indian village, “il donnoit un conseil à celui-ci, réprimandoit doucement celui-là, il parloit des moissons à recueillir, des enfants à instruire, des peines à consoler, et il mêloit Dieu à tous ses discours.”[28] Besides dispensing advice, reprimanding recalcitrants and instructing the children, the priest also decides where the neophytes can bury their dead, performs all marriages, and baptizes the children.

In the epilogue of the story, Chateaubriand will make of père Aubry a martyr, elevating him to an even loftier status. The reader learns that after Chactas leaves père Aubry, the priest and his followers are attacked by the Cherokees. Both the peaceful Indians and père Aubry are tortured by these warriors, but the Christian faith exhibited by the priest and his followers stuns the Cherokee. Even when tortured, the disciples remain true to their leader: “Pour lui arracher une marque de foiblesse, les Chéroquois amenèrent à ses pieds un Sauvage chrétien, qu'ils avoient horriblement mutilé. Mais ils furent bien surpris, quand ils virent le jeune homme se jeter à genoux, et baiser les plaies du vieil hermite.”[29] The Christianized Indians adore their white, French leader so much that even torture is not enough to renounce him.

Père Aubry sets an example of civilized behavior for his adoring flock that also serves as a contrast to the savage behavior of the Cherokees. The narrator recounts, “Il fut brûlé avec de grandes tortures; jamais on ne put tirer de lui un cri qui tournât à la honte

---

[27] Ibid., 103.
[28] Ibid., 100.
[29] Ibid., 147.

de son Dieu, ou au déshonneur de sa patrie."[30] This bravery on the part of a white man surprises the Cherokees, who are accustomed to seeing Indians suffer through torture, but have never seen a bravery equal to that of père Aubry: "les Chéroquois...ne purent s'empêcher d'avouer qu'il y avoit dans l'humble courage du père Aubry, quelque chose qui leur étoit inconnu, et qui surpassoit tous les courages de la terre."[31] The "something unknown" in père Aubry's strength that strikes the Cherokees as unearthly is the priest's Christian faith, which allows him and his followers to endure torture. This scene demonstrates the superiority of the Christian faith in the face of its exact opposite: savage heathenism. The white Frenchman's actions so impress the Cherokees that several of them convert to Christianity: "Plusieurs d'entr'eux, frappés de cette mort, se sont faits chrétiens."[32] These conversions, inspired by père Aubry's death, are perhaps his greatest victory. He manages to convert some of the warlike Cherokees by turning his death at their hands into a sermon on forgiveness. He becomes not just a martyr but a veritable saint.

Chactas, the narrator in *Atala*, is an Indian and appropriately impressed by père Aubry and his followers. Upon touring the Indian village, Chactas says, "Là, régnait le mélange le plus touchant de la vie sociale et de la vie de la nature: au coin d'une cyprière de l'antique désert, on découvrait une culture naissante; les épis roulaient à flots d'or sur le tronc du chêne abattu, et la gerbe d'un été remplaçait l'arbre de trois siècles."[33] The harvest of one summer replaces the tree of three centuries, a change that both Chactas and his author Chateaubriand clearly consider an accomplishment. Chateaubriand

---

[30] Ibid., 146.
[31] Ibid., 147.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 102.

underscores the superiority of the agricultural and westernized society. Chactas explicitly states that he considers the Indian village better than the nomadic life of the Indian: “Les paroles du Solitaire me ravirent, et je sentis la supériorité de cette vie stable et occupée, sur la vie errante et oisive du Sauvage.[34]

The events of the story also reinforce the ignorance of the Indians and the saintliness of France's representative in America, père Aubry. The catalyst for tragedy in this story is a promise that Atala's mother made to the Virgin Mary in Atala's name. Having trouble in childbirth, Atala's mother desperately promises that if Mary allows her daughter to survive, Atala will remain a virgin for life—a “savage” nun. As Atala retells it, “Ma triste destinée a commencé presque avant que j'eusse vu la lumière. . . . Pour sauver mes jours, ma mère fit un voeu: elle promit à la Reine des Anges que je lui consacrerois ma virginité, si j'échappois à la mort.”[35] Even at the moment of her death, the mother reminds Atala of the promise she has made for her:

> Ma fille, me dit-elle en présence d'un missionaire qui consolait ses derniers instants; ma fille, tu sais le voeu que j'ai fait pour toi. Voudrais-tu démentir ta mère? On mon Atala!. . . . [J]ure sur cette image de la Mère du Sauveur, entre les mains de ce saint prêtre et de ta mère expirante, que tu ne me trahiras point à la face du ciel. Songe que je me suis engagée pour toi, afin de te sauver la vie, et que si tu ne me tiens ma promesse, tu plongeras l'âme de ta mère dans des tourments éternels.[36]

Both Atala and her mother occupy a liminal space between white civilization and the

---

[34] Ibid., 105.
[35] Ibid., 108.
[36] Ibid.

world of "savages." Atala is, in fact, half-white, which further underscores this liminal existence. They know enough religion to be God-fearing, but the severity of the promise that Atala's mother extracts has the taint of ignorance. Educated in the rudiments of Christianity, Atala believes she cannot betray her mother without condemning her to eternal torment.

The mother's promise causes the daughter's suffering, but fortunately a white man can save her. Père Aubry explains that, to be absolved of this vow, she must simply repair to Québec: "j'écrirai à l'évêque de Québec, il a les pouvoirs nécessaires pour vous relever de vos voeux, qui ne sont que des voeux simples."[37] For help in overcoming her mother's vow, Atala must turn to the French for salvation. With père Aubry and the bishop helping her, Atala can yet attain happiness.

The promise and Atala's "savage" mores ultimately hasten her death. Atala's love for Chactas means that she can neither give herself to Chactas, nor defy her mother's wish. The image of her mother literally haunts her: "[T]on ombre, ô ma mère, ton ombre était toujours là, me reprochant ses tourments! J'entendais tes plaintes, je voyais les flammes de l'enfer te consumer. Mes nuits étaient arides et pleines de fantômes, mes jours étaient désolés; la rosée du soir séchait en tombant sur ma peau brûlante"[38] Atala almost hallucinates her mother's torture, as she "hears" her cries and "sees" the flames of hell consume the mother. Unable to resolve her love for Chactas and her love for the mother, Atala chooses suicide: "Quand tu baisois mes lèvres tremblantes, tu ne savois pas, tu ne savois pas que tu n'embrassois que la mort!"[39] She poisons herself at the

[37] Ibid., 113.
[38] Ibid., 111.
[39] Ibid., 114.

moment of her greatest happiness to keep her mother's promise. Suicide is a great sin in Catholic religion, but Atala appears unaware of this; her downfall is the trace of the "savage" that remains within her.

With only a primitive understanding of Christianity, Atala believes that she must honor her mother's vow. But as père Aubry explains to her, "ma fille, tous vos malheurs viennent de votre ignorance; c'est votre éducation sauvage et le manque d'instruction nécessaire qui vous ont perdue; vous ne saviez pas qu'une chrétienne ne peut disposer de sa vie."[40] Atala's "savage" education has caused her death; moreover, her ignorance now threatens to plunge her into "des tourments éternels," as Catholicism forbids suicide. Afraid to commit a sin against her mother, she committed a greater sin against herself. As Aubry explains to Chactas and Atala, "Vous offrez tous trois un terrible exemple des dangers de l'enthousiasme, et du défaut de lumières en matière de religion."[41] In this context, Indian ignorance becomes not just a fault, but an eternal damnation. As half Christian and half savage, half Indian and half white, Atala is "une monstruosité éthnique et réligieuse."[42] Even the white père Aubry cannot save Atala from this fate.

The terrible consequences of the promise that Atala's mother elicits from her daughter do not keep Atala from making a similar request to Chactas. Reenacting her mother's death bed scene, she makes Chactas promise in front of her and the missionary that he will one day convert to Christianity. She tells her lover,

> Chactas, j'ai une dernière prière à te faire. Ami, notre union auroit été courte sur la terre, mais il est après la vie une vie plus longue vie. Qu'il

---

[40] Ibid., 117.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Jean-Albert Bede, "L'Itineraire spirituel de Chateaubriand en Amerique," *The French Review* 49, no. 6 (May 1976): 995.

> seroit affreux d'être separée de toi pour jamais! Je ne fais que te devancer aujourd'hui, et je te vais attendre dans l'empire celeste. Si tu m'as aiméee, fais-toi instruire dans la religion chrétienne, qui prépara notre réunion....Cependant, Chactas, je ne veux de toi qu'une simple promesse, je sais trop ce qu'il en coûte, pour te demander un serment.[43]

This demand is as self-serving as her mother's, as Atala explains that she wants Chactas to convert because "il seroit affreux d'être separée de toi pour jamais!" At the same time, this scene—to which père Aubry is a simple bystander—achieves the ultimate goal: to have the Indian convert other Indians. This culmination eases the burden of the white missionary, and yet recreates him in the Indian, who will carry his message deep into the wilderness.

Overcome by sorrow, Chactas promises to convert, telling his listener René, "Navré de douleur, je promis à Atala d'embrasser *un jour* la religion chrétienne."[44] This phrase signals a continuing resistance on the part of Chactas, who says that he will *one day* convert and that the great Spirit *wanted* to civilize him.[45] Chactas does not join the Indian village he lauds. He also does not become a Christian—he is still not Christianized when he tells his life story to René. Upon finishing his story, Chactas asks himself, "Comment Chactas n'est-il point encore chrétien? Quelles frivoles raisons de politique et de patrie l'ont jusqu'à présent retenu dans les erreurs de ses pères?"[46] Chactas needs to become civilized/Christianized to rectify the fundamental error of his forefathers and himself: being a "sauvage."

---

[43] Chateaubriand, 125.
[44] Ibid. Italics mine
[45] Chactas told René in the beginning of the story, "Je vois en toi l'homme civilisé qui s'est fait sauvage; tu vois en moi l'homme sauvage, que le grand Esprit (j'ignore pour quel dessein) a voulu civiliser."
[46] Chateaubriand, 127.

Chactas accuses himself of using “frivolous” allegiances to politics or the fatherland as a way to avoid converting to Christianity. Now, Chactas is haunted by Atala just as Atala's mother haunted Atala. We do not witness the conversion of Chactas. An epilogue, however, ensures that this loose end ultimately supports Chateaubriand's overall conversion theme. The anonymous narrator of the epilogue hears the rest of the story many years later from René's granddaughter. She tells him, “Nous sommes les restes des Natchez. Après le massacre que les François firent de notre nation pour venger leurs frères, ceux de nos frères qui échappèrent aux vainqueurs, trouvèrent un asile chez les Chikassas nos voisins....*Chactas, qui a reçu le baptême*, et René mon aïeul si malheureux, ont péri dans le massacre.”[47] Chactas has at last rectified his error and thus become worthy of the Christian reader's admiration.

Chateaubriand makes Indian-ness, with all the ignorance and innocence this condition implies, the real tragedy of the story. Chactas loses his great love because neither he nor Atala were civilized *enough*. Atala had some Christian knowledge, and yet not enough to save her from committing the greatest crime—suicide. Chactas had the chance to remain the adopted son of a colonist, yet his inability to accept domestication led to his kidnapping and was the catalyst for Atala's death. Atala and Chactas are tragic figures in this novel, but they are not heroes. Only père Aubry, the white, French priest receives this designation. He is a hero because he domesticates and converts the Indian. He is also a hero because, even in the face of death, he remains loyal to both his religion *and* his country: “jamais on ne put tirer de lui un cri qui tournât à la honte de son Dieu,

---

[47] Ibid., 146. In Les Natchez, Chactas only receives the "baptême de desir," a lesser baptism that announces the intention to be baptized and admission of sins, but is not an official conversion. In Atala, Chactas seems to have received the full baptism, in line with his promise to Atala.

ou au déshonneur de sa patrie."[48] The sole hero in the story, père Aubry, keeps the focus firmly on France.

By using Chactas and the Indian narrator of the epilogue as his voice in the story, Chateaubriand substitutes a colonization of language for a colonization of land. Denis Hollier has argued in his article, "French Customs, Literary Borders," that Chateaubriand's "literary vocation, as it were, is triggered precisely by the fact that what happened to France on the map of the world (its exclusion from America) happened primarily to its language."[49] Threatened with French "extinction" in America, Chateaubriand creates a narrative for and by Chactas that looks back to French civilization for its benchmark. Chateaubriand has "colonized" two Chactas characters: the young Chactas who is the subject of the story, and the older Chactas who narrates this story to the white Frenchman, René.

To understand fully the themes of loss and lost opportunity that recur throughout *Atala*, requires a knowledge of French and French colonial history—in other words, a view of the New World through a French lens. Chateaubriand writes in his preface to the first edition, "Après la découverte de l'Amérique, je ne vis pas de sujet plus intéressant, sur-tout pour des François, que le massacre de la colonie des Natchez à la Louisiane, en 1727."[50] This explanation is nothing short of incredible: Chateaubriand can think of no subject "more interesting" to the French than the massacre of the Natchez seventy-two years earlier.[51]

---

[48] Ibid., 147.
[49] Hollier: 43.
[50] Chateaubriand, 154. The massacre actually happened in 1729. Chateaubriand's date is somewhat off.
[51] The Natchez Massacre happened in 1729 and was an organized uprising by the Natchez, who wiped out an entire French settlement and killed over two hundred fifty French colonists. Retaliatory expeditions by the French basically wiped out the Natchez and forced survivors to flee deeper into the wilderness.

This uprising received little press when it happened but proved to have more literary usefulness in the early nineteenth-century: "What began as a local uprising by the Natchez became an epic revolutionary struggle that spoke to an Age of Revolution nearly a century later."[52] Gautier makes a similar argument, claiming, "*Atala* est bien l'ouvrage de la fin du siècle qui fut marqué par la guerre de l'indépendance."[53] It is remarkable that a little-publicized Natchez uprising would provide literary inspiration in the nineteenth century. As Hayden White explains in *Tropics of Discourse*, the tragic or comic elements of a historical incident are not inherent to that event; rather, "how a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian's subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with meaning."[54] It is not the historical event, but Chateaubriand's take on it that renders the event a romance and a tragedy. *Atala* deals only minimally with the Natchez massacre, which takes place chronologically well after the events of the story. Violence and loss are nevertheless the central themes of *Atala.* The individual suffering of Atala and Chactas anticipates the Natchez tribe's later struggles and eventual extinction.

Despite the stated inspiration for the story, the epilogue of *Atala* returns the reader to the specter of *French* extinction. The last person's voice the reader hears is that of Chateaubriand:

> Indiens infortunés que j'ai vus errer dans les déserts du Nouveau-Monde, avec les cendres de vos aieux, vous qui m'aviez donné l'hospitalité malgré votre misère, je ne pourrois vous la rendre aujourd'hui, car j'erre, ainsi que

---

[52] Gordon Sayre, "Plotting the Natchez Massacre: Le Page du Pratz, Dumont de Montigny, Chateaubriand," *Early American Literature* 37, no. 3 (2002): 384.
[53] Gautier, 4.
[54] Hayden V. White, *Tropics of discourse : essays in cultural criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 85.

> vous, à la merci des hommes; et moins heureux dans mon exil, je n'ai point emporté les os de mes pères.[55]

Chateaubriand brings the focus back to his own experience of exile after the French Revolution. The paragraph above is a condensed version of the last paragraph of "L'Essai sur les Révolutions," in which he tries to understand the French Revolution of 1789 in the context of previous revolutions. Chateaubriand even claims that he has suffered more than the Natchez because, unlike the Indians, he does not have the bones of his forefathers to remember them.

Chateaubriand's own troubled relationship with the French people and the French government marks this text. Chateaubriand's family was exiled and murdered during the French Revolution. Chateaubriand describes his experiences with the revolution in detail in the preface to *Atala* and *René*: "Couvert du sang de mon frère unique, de ma belle-soeur, de celui l'illustre vieillard leur père; ayant vu ma mère et une autre soeur pleine de talens, mourir des suites du traitement qu'elles avoient éprouvé dans les cachots, j'ai erré sur les terres étrangères, où le seul ami que j'eusse conservé, s'est poignardé dans mes bras."[56] When Chateaubriand returned from exile, he returned to abandoned family lands. *Atala* chronicles this loss, barely disguised by the exotic setting: "Oh! que des larmes sont répandues, lorsqu'on abandonne ainsi la terre natale, lorque du haut de la colline de l'exil, on découvre pour la dernière fois le toit où l'on fut nourri et le fleuve de la cabane, qui continue de couler tristement à traves les champs solitaires de la patrie!"[57] Doris Kadish has explained that the exile must negotiate between the "conflicting pulls of his

---

[55] Chateaubriand, 151.
[56] Chateaubriand, 152-153.
[57] Chateaubriand, 151.

individual versus collective sense of identity."[58] *Atala* is the product of this negotiation, which chronicles both Chateaubriand's individual experiences and mirrors to French readers a national identity marked by loss.

By alluding to the French Revolution and to his own exile at the conclusion of *Atala*, Chateaubriand brings the focus back to a French tragedy. The sufferings of Chactas, Atala, and père Aubry become only an extended allegory for a French historical event. *Atala*, despite its exotic setting, is a French story written for a French audience by a French author. The story thus contributes to postrevolutionary French identity in two ways. First, the story portrays whiteness, French civilization, and the Christian religion as quintessentially superior to outside traditions. Second, the story allows readers to identify with their own grief and loss after the French Revolution and the Terror. Chateaubriand knew even in his "Essai sur les révolutions" that France would never return to the Ancien Régime. The rupture of the revolution opens up a crisis of identity for himself and the French that figures in *Atala* as a loss of national history. Everything had changed, and the French had not even brought along the bones of their forefathers.

***

Despite its popularity, *Atala* proved to be the culmination of writings about l'Amerique and la Nouvelle France. In the nineteenth century, American exoticism would give way to stories of the Orient.

Nineteenth-century France was obsessed with the Orient. Plays with oriental themes were almost a certain hit: Anicet Bourgeois's popular play *Dgenguiz-Kan, ou la Conquête de la Chine* (1838) was followed only a year later by MM. de Forges's and

---

[58] Doris Y. Kadish, "Symbolism of Exile: The Opening Description in Atala," *The French Review* 55, no. 3 (Feb. 1982): 362.

Paul Vermond's *Lekain à Draguignon*. Besides these two examples, hundreds of plays with oriental themes were performed in nineteenth-century France.[59] Victor Hugo published *Les Orientales*, Baudelaire his "L'Invitation au voyage," and Balzac *La Fille aux yeux d'or*. Travelogues of the Orient were in vogue, so writers like Chateaubriand, Maupassant, and Gerard de Nerval published accounts of their trips to the East, with detailed descriptions of landscape and customs. Eugène Delacroix caused a sensation when he showed his painting *Mort de Sardanapale* at the Salon in 1827.

The common thread uniting these works is the way each of them maintains the superiority of the white, French, male observer.[60] In these representations, the Orient is adjacent to French culture, but separate from it—a safely contained release valve for expressions of desire that have no place in Western culture: "Ancient Assyria…serves as a mirror that reflects the different preconceptions and desires of the representer as much as it does the objective subject being represented."[61]

The power struggle between France and the Orient is almost entirely one-sided. France has, in the figure of the Orient, created an enemy that represents everything the West is (purportedly) not: "Western achievement is contrasted with Eastern ruin and

---

[59] Angela Chia-yi Pao, *The Orient of the boulevards : exoticism, empire, and nineteenth-century French theater*, New cultural studies (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

[60] Isabelle Daunais, *L'art de la mesure ou l'invention de l'espace dans les récits d'Orient* (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1996). In writing about the French travelogues of the Orient, for example, Isabelle Daunais noticed that these travel writers look to each other to mediate the Oriental experience: "De Chateaubriand jusqu'à Maupassant, les écrivains voyageurs sont nombreux aux XIXe siècle et leurs récits se respondent très vite en un jeu d'échos. Comme nous l'avons mentionné, les voyages, surtout dans les pays du Levant, ne sont pas, au XIXe siècle, des voyages de découverte, mais des voyages de reconnaissance, ou "d'assurance." In Delacroix's painting, the observer becomes a voyeur, far enough removed from the violence of the scene to feel uninvolved, but close enough to enjoy the show.

[61] Frederick Nathaniel Bohrer, *Orientalism and visual culture: imagining Mesopotamia in nineteenth-century Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 339.

taken as an index of the morality of the former versus the immorality of the latter."[62] This one-sided love-hate relationship between France and the Orient serves a political purpose. Edward Said has argued that orientalism allows for "a collective notion identifying 'us' Europeans as against all 'those' non-Europeans."[63] Lisa Lowe has made a similar argument in her analysis of nineteenth century orientalism, remarking that "figuration, of the oriental, the woman, and the barbarian masses, as Others of a national bourgeois identity, textualize the desires of a French national identification in an age of instability."[64] In a nineteenth-century France rocked by continuous revolutions, and seemingly disintegrating into an endless number of factions, the oriental Other provides an outsider against which the French can unite in the name of racial hegemony.

French depictions of the Orient also portray it as female. In his analysis of the painters Delacroix and Martin, Bohrer argues that the representations of gender in orientalist paintings directly relate to the concept of Western power and Eastern submission.[65] Lowe has argued similarly that positing the Orient as both sexual and racial Others allayed the fears of the nineteenth-century French bourgeoisie. She maintains that "the projection of Others as not simply culturally but sexually different constitutes a figuration of social and political crises in a rhetorical register of the regimes oscillating between revolution and reaction after 1789," in addition to the uncertainty of changes

---

[62] Ibid., 337.
[63] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 7.
[64] Lisa Lowe, "Nationalism and Exoticism: Nineteenth Century Others in Flaubert's Salammbô," in *Macropolitics of nineteenth-century literature : nationalism, exoticism, imperialism*, ed. Jonathan Arac and Harriet Ritvo, New cultural studies series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 213.
[65] Frederick Nathaniel Bohrer, "Inventing Assyria: Exoticism and reception in nineteenth century England and France," *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 2 (June 1998): 336-57.

wrought by "industrialization, urbanization, and emigration."[66] Faced with a changing social and family structure, white masculinity needed a "powerfully different Other" against which to compare itself."[67] The Orient, which was exotic and "female," was the perfect obsession.

The nineteenth-century French artists discussed in the previous paragraphs were white and male. These artists and writers created in the Orient the "powerfully different Other" to which Lowe refers, and attempted to keep the Orient at bay, even when engaging with it. Edward Said has likened the Orient's role in the West to that of spectacle: "The Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe."[68] There are artists, however, whose engagement with the Orient provides a more complex picture than simple racial and sexual othering. Honoré de Balzac stands out as one of the few who challenges this illusion of difference. While other French depictions of the Orient keep it at a safe distance, Balzac shows in his *La Fille aux yeux d'or* that the Orient is not adjacent to France, but inside it. In doing so, he troubles the concept of a France united against the exotic.

To better illustrate this argument, I will rely upon Derrida's explanation of the *ergon*/*parergon* in *Truth in Painting*. Derrida explains that "a *parergon* comes against, beside, and in addition to the *ergon*, the work done [fait], the fact [le fait], the work, but it

---

[66] Ibid., 215.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Said, 63.

does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside. Like an accessory that one is obliged to welcome on the border, on board."[69] The *parergon* is something attached to, but outside the main work (*ergon*), that fills a lack in the work. The Orient is next to Europe and outside of France. And yet, France's continuing fascination with the Near East—and exoticism in general—suggests an unfulfilled lack. Derrida explains that filling this lack is precisely the job of the *parergon*: "It is not because they are detached but on the contrary because they are more difficult to detach and above all because without them, without their quasi-detachment, the lack on the inside of the work would appear; or (which amounts to the same thing for a lack) would not appear. What constitutes them as *parerga* is not simply their exteriority as a surplus, it is the internal structural link which rivets them to the lack in the interior of the *ergon*."[70] Both Paris and the Orient are "works" inextricably linked in the French imagination. Balzac shows his readers an Orient both outside and inside Paris; if Paris is an *ergon*, then the Orient is its *parergon*. The oriental stranger in Balzac proves to be central to a hegemonic society even as he (or she) is excluded from that society.

Many scholars have written about gender, race, and orientalism in *La Fille aux yeux d'or*. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting has argued that "the Other woman does not exist for Balzac," who "bludgeons her out of existence" at the very moment when she tries to claim subjectivity.[71] Sharpley-Whiting has also called for a more rigorous analysis of the relationship between racial difference and the treatment of the female protagonist.

---

[69] Jacques Derrida, *The truth in painting*, trans., Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 54.
[70] Ibid., 59.
[71] T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, "The Other Woman: Reading a Body of Differences in Balzac's 'La Fille aux yeux d'or'," *Symposium* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1997).

Nathaniel Wing maintains in *Between Genders* that *La Fille aux yeux d'or* offers two "spectacles," both of which "represent the wreckage of a male fantasy of unified subjectivity, of empowerment and control."[72] These analyses focus on the relationship between the male subject and female subject without extending the sphere of influence further than this intimate relationship. Considering the political importance of the oriental Other, especially the nineteenth-century urge for a unified national identity, Balzac's *La Fille aux yeux d'or* must also be considered in the context of French identity.[73]

Balzac's *La Fille aux yeux d'or* consists of two separate sections, which seem as mismatched as France and the Orient. The first section, entitled "Physionomies Parisiennes," is a sociological description of the Parisian populace that focuses on the Parisian desire for gold and money, "l'or" and "plaisir." The second section presents a fictional case study of the desires described in the first. The prologue is an essay while the second part is a mystery story. Balzac wrote and published the essay in 1834 and did not write the fictional story until 1835.[74] Moreover, the first section is a picture of Parisian society during the July monarchy, while the fictional story is set in 1815. Why Balzac would choose to put these two texts together has been an ongoing riddle. Chantal Massol-Bedoin argues, "chacun d'entre eux...est marqué par la crise du Tout," and devotes her essay, "La Charade et la chimère" to showing that the text is a "conflit

---

[72] Nathaniel Wing, *Between genders: narrating difference in early French modernism* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 133.

[73] Marie Pierre Le Hir, "Balzac's Bretons: Racism and National Identity in Les Chouans," in *Peripheries of nineteenth-century French studies : views from the edge*, ed. Timothy Bell Raser (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002). Le Hir makes a similar argument in regards to the depiction of Bretons in Balzac's Les Chouans. She, too, focuses on the project of national identity as a key element in the developing cultural hegemony and cultural difference in nineteenth-century in France.

[74] Chantal Massol-Bedoin, "La charade et la chimère," *Poétique* 23, no. 89 (Feb 1992): 32.

généralisé...entre le Tout et sa négation."[75] Marie Josephine Diamond maintains that the text itself, made up of two incompatible parts, reflects and furthers the monstrosity theme that recurs throughout the text.[76] Shoshana Felman suggests in "Rereading Femininity" that the class divisions and the resulting hierarchies of the first section "correspond to the [fictional] story's hierarchical division of sexual roles."[77]

Clearly, grappling with the fundamental disjuncture of the *La Fille aux yeux d'or* is *de rigeur* for talking about this text. I agree with the scholars cited above that the prologue and the story, despite temporal and narrative differences, function as a (dys)functional unit. Balzac portrays Parisians as harried people, driven to self-destruction by the desire for gold and pleasure: "Là donc, aussi, pour obéir à ce maître universel, le plaisir ou l'or, il faut dévorer de vingt-quatre heures dans le jour et la nuit, s'énerver, se tuer, vendre trente ans de vieillesse pour deux ans d'un repos maladif."[78] The entire city is ceaselessly on the move, so that the constant rubbing against each other has created a Paris populated by the faceless, "non de pas de visages, mais bien de masques."[79] This accelerated existence is far removed from the imagined languor of the Orient.

Balzac claims, "En Orient seulement, la race humaine offre un buste magnifique; mail il est en effet du calme constant affecté par ces profonds philosophes à longue pipe, à petites jambes, à torses carrés, qui méprisent le mouvement, et l'ont en horreur; tandis qu'à Paris, Petits, Moyens, et Grands sautent et cabriolent, fouettés par une impitoyable

---

[75] Ibid., 31.
[76] Mari Josephine Diamond, "The Monstrous Other: The Chimera of Speculation in Balzac's The Girl With the Golden Eyes," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 18, no. 3 (1994): 249.
[77] Shoshana Felman, "Rereading Femininity," *Yale French Studies* 62, (1981): 22.
[78] Honoré de Balzac, "La Fille aux yeux d'or," in *Histoire des Treize*, ed. Pierre Georges Castex, Classiques Garnier (Paris: Garnier frères, 1966), 378.
[79] Ibid., 371.

déesse, la Nécessité, necessité d'argent, de gloire, ou d'amusement."[80] The description opposes Paris and the Orient, and seems to hold the latter in higher esteem. Nevertheless, this description achieves a unified identity: while Parisians are all in a desperate hurry, they are all in a hurry together, united by their mutual desire for gold and pleasure—and issue explored at length by Flaubert in *Madame Bovary* (see chapter 3).

Balzac opposes the West and the East in his descriptions of Paris, but also reveals the links between these two regions. In their search for gold and pleasure, Parisians reach out to the Orient to fulfill the lack in Western culture. The petite bourgeoisie, always ready to supply the desires of the moneyed classes, imports the pleasures of the Orient in exchange for gold. As Balzac explains, oriental goods come to Parisians via "les membres...de cette petite bourgeoisie...qui étend les mains sur l'Orient, y prend les châles dédaignés par les Turcs et les Russes; va recolter jusque dans les Indes."[81] These cheap goods are disdained by their oriental manufacturers, who recognize them as mere trinkets. Parisians want these for the exoticism that they exude.

Balzac casts pleasure itself as an oriental and strange luxury. Paris has its pleasures, whose seductive call Balzac likens to the addictive effects of that quintessential oriental drug, opium: "Comment résister aux habiles séductions qui se trament en ce pays? Aussi Paris a-t-il ses thériakis, pour qui le jeu, la gastrolêtrie ou la courtisane sont un opium."[82] For those who can afford it, Paris is a veritable opium den. In linking Parisian pleasures to the Orient, Balzac casts Paris as a new Gomorrha, infested by an immorality that should be foreign to the West: "La transfiguration de la

[80] Ibid., 387.
[81] Ibid., 377.
[82] Ibid., 384.

métropole française en une ville d'Orient annonce son assimilation à la cité biblique et damnée, ensevelie sous le soufre comme Paris consumé sous les bombes."[83]

The Orient is already within Paris, even a fundamental component of its economy. Western gold supplies Eastern pleasures, a relationship that Balzac portrays as unhealthily dependent. Even the desire to procreate relies, alarmingly, on the artificial stimulation of oriental fantasies. In his description of the petit bourgeois male's role as an extra in the Opera, Balzac portrays orientalism as an aphrodisiac:

> A six heures, tous les deux jours, il est fidèle à son porte. Inamovible, basse-taille des choeurs, il se trouve à l'Opéra, prêt a y devenir soldat, Arabe, prisonnier, sauvage, paysan, ombre, esclave, eunuque noir ou blanc....A minuit il redevient bon mari, homme, tendre père, il se glisse dans le lit conjugal, l'imagination encore tendue par les formes décevantes des nymphes de l'Opéra, et fait ainsi tourner, au profit de l'amour conjugal, les dépravations du monde et le voluptueux ronds de jambe de la Taglioni.[84]

Only in dreaming of the "nymphes" of the Opera and enacting the Arab, the savage or the slave, can the petit bourgeois man make love to his wife. The Orient not only dictates the commercial desires of the Parisian populace, but also its sexual desires—the Orient has invaded the bedroom.

In addition to the racial exoticism of the Orient, French representations of orientalism link the Orient and femininity. This implies the inferiority of both, as the East

---

[83] Elias Ennaifar, "Zobéide, Charlus, Paquita: Une Interprétation d'un conte des Mille et Une Nuits," *IBLA (Institut des belles lettres arabe)* 62, no. 2 (1999): 178.
[84] Balzac, 376.

is associated with the "lesser" gender, while femininity is associated with a "lesser" race. They are both the white Frenchman's Other. Balzac further underscores this connection by portraying women—wealthy women—as the only people who escape the incessant movement of Paris. They do this by living "à l'oriental": "il est à Paris une portion d'êtres privilégiés aux quels profite ce mouvement excessif des fabrications, des intérêts, des affaires, des art et de l'or. Ces êtres sont les femmes....il se recontre dans le monde féminin, de petites peuplades hereusent qui vive à l'oriental, et peuvent conserver leur beauté."[85] What differentiates these women from the masses is that they create a veritable harem within Paris, from which they rarely venture: "elles demeurent cachées...et...constituent de véritables exceptions exotiques."[86] Balzac's description of pockets of orientalism in Paris mirrors the Francocentric views of his contemporaries: the women of the harem represented for Europeans the "mysterious East."[87] Balzac troubles the east/west distinction by claiming that these harems also exist within Paris. To find the East, Balzac directs us to the West.

Besides wealthy women, Balzac identifies one more group of Parisians who have escaped the ravages of the Parisian lifestyle. This is an exceptional group, characterized by its truly exotic beauty and distinguished bloodline: "A Paris, parfois, dans la haute aristocratie, se voient clairsemés quelque ravissants visages de jeunes gens, fruits d'une éducation et de moeurs tout exceptionnelles. A la juvénile beauté du sang anglais, ils unissent la fermeté des traits méridionaux, l'esprit français, la pureté de la forme."[88] These men and women of exceptional beauty are the product of a truly oriental sexuality,

---

[85] Ibid., 387-88.
[86] Ibid., 388.
[87] Mary J. Harper, "Recovering the Other: Women and the Orient in Writings of Early Nineteenth Century France," *Critical Matrix* 1, no. 3 (1985): 2.
[88] Balzac, 388.

specifically that of the British aristocrat Lord Dudley. Through his promiscuity, Lord Dudley has enjoyed a veritable harem of women, many of whom have been "disposées à tirer quelques exemplaires d'un si délicieux portrait."[89] Lord Dudley's children inherit his exotic sensuality. His second child, Euphémie, is the daughter of a Spanish woman, and raised in Havana. By the time she returns to Madrid, she has "les goûts ruineux des colonies."[90] The immorality of the British aristocrat extends even further than adultery and seduction: he is attracted to both men and women. Balzac identifies this bisexuality as oriental, explaining to the reader that "Lord Dudley...vient, en 1816, se réfugier à Paris, afin d'éviter les poursuites de la justice anglaise, qui, de l'Orient, ne protège que la marchandise."[91]

Balzac identifies these offspring of Lord Dudley as truly exceptional, perhaps even outsiders in the exoticism of their immorality. Nevertheless, they provide for Paris a spectacle that it would otherwise lack—unblemished beauty. As Balzac transitions from a description of Paris in 1835 to the story of Henri de Marsay, son of Lord Dudley, in 1815, he shows that Henri's "oriental" morals and values allow him to dominate Paris and Parisian women. Henri de Marsay pictures himself as a veritable pascha—he accepts only absolute power and destroys those who challenge this self-image.

Balzac links De Marsay to oriental despotism, thereby evoking his "oriental" morality: "De Marsay exerçait le pouvoir autocratique du despote oriental." This is a kind of power—despotism without negotiation—that no longer exists in France. Balzac insists that the power Henri exercises as member of the secret society *Les Treizes*, is not a

---

[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.

Western one. Rather, Balzac seeks a simile in the Orient to characterize Henri's self-perception: "Il avait de lui, non pas l'opinion que Louis XIV pouvait avoir de soi, mais celle que les plus orgueilleux des Califes, des Pharaons, des Xerxès qui se croyaient de race divine, avaient d'eux-mêmes, quand ils imitaient Dieu en se voilant à leurs sujets, sous prétexte que leurs regards donnaient la mort."[92] Louis XIV, the Sun-King, was one of the most powerful kings ever to rule France. And yet, Henri is more Oriental than French in his pursuit of absolute power. *Les Treizes* consists entirely of young men "ennuyés de la vie plates qu'ils menaient, entrainés vers de jouissances *asiatiques*."[93]

Henri represents the Orient in Paris, as the licentiousness of his mother and father, as well as his despotic disposition fit him more for the East than the West. And yet he is a master of Parisian culture; he manipulates it for gold and for pleasure. Henri also fills a lack for the Parisian woman. Henri's power over women stems precisely from his tendency toward despotism, as Balzac explains: "Les femmes aiment prodigieusement ces gens qui se nomment pachas eux-mêmes, qui semblent accompagnés de lions, de bourreaux, et marchent dans un appareil de terreur."[94] Women are attracted to Henri because he fills lack in Western masculinity. De Marsay controls his environment, using to his advantage the power of the gaze: "Le jeune homme examinait les promeneurs, avec cette promptitude de coup d'oeil et d'ouïe particulière au Parisien qui paraît, au premier aspect, ne rien voir et ne rien entendre, mais qui voit et entend tout."[95] Henri continually absorbs others and otherness—especially women. As Diamond explains, "Every 'other' is psychologically and socially an object of speculation....[Henri] must endlessly

---

[92] Ibid., 425.
[93] Honoré de Balzac, "Préface," in *Histoire des Treizes*, ed. Pierre-George Castex (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1966), 15.
[94] Balzac, 425.
[95] Ibid., 394.

subordinate the other to the image of his golden perfection."[96] De Marsay tells his friend Paul de Manerville knowingly, "Tu as dû remarquer, si toutefois tu es capable d'observer un fait moral, que la femme aime le fat."[97] He continues, "Et qu'est-ce que la femme? Une petite choses, une ensemble de niaiseries."[98] Although Henri fills a lack for women, he has decreed that they are nothing to him.

But Henri is also a Parisian and he suffers from a lack that he cannot fill. Henri suffers a "soif horrible." He meets his *parergon* in the story: Paquita. When Henri first meets this beautiful woman, his reaction reveals that his desire for her is more than sexual:

> Pour lui cette fille devint un mystère; mais, en la contemplant avec la savante attention de l'homme blasé, affamé de voluptés nouvelles, comme ce roi d'Orient qui demandait qu'on lui créât un plaisir, soif horrible, dont les grandes âmes sont saisies, Henri reconnaissait dans Paquita la plus riche organisation que la nature se fût complu à composer pour l'amour.[99]

Between the beginning and the end of the sentence, the narrator inserts a clause that establishes Henri's state of mind: he is "affamé de voluptés nouvelles" and suffers from a "soif horrible" for something new and great. This clause signals a literal and a figurative space between Henri's mystery (Paquita) and the definition he gives her (object made for love). He defines Paquita as a woman made for love/loving because in his terrible thirst for feeling he desperately wants her to be different—Other. Paquita becomes not just an object of desire, but the desperately sought after oasis. This desire makes Henri

---

[96] Diamond: 255.
[97] Balzac, 410.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid., 421.

vulnerable, however, opening up the possibility that Paquita may not be the lifesaving oasis, but rather the deadly fata morgana.

To ward off this possibility, Henri reacts to his own uncontrollable desire by attempting to control Paquita. The relationship between Paquita and Henri thus mirrors the relationship between East and West depicted in "Physionomies Parisiennes." Paquita and Henri's first private encounter, which I will quote at length here, is not a sexual liaison, but rather a play of domination and submission where the gaze takes the place of sex. For Henri, Paquita is an Other, both in gender and in race:

> Henri reconnaissait dans Paquita la plus riche organisation que la nature se fût complu à composer pour l'amour. Le jeu présumé de cette machine, l'âme mise à part, eût effrayé tout autre homme que de Marsay; mais il fut fasciné par cette riche moisson de plaisirs promis....Il fut affolé par l'infini rendu palpable et transporté dans les plus excessives jouissances de la créature. Il vit tout cela dans cette fille plus distinctement qu'il ne l'avait encore vu, car elle se laissait complaisamment voir, heureuse d'être admirée. L'admiration de de Marsay devint une rage secrète, et il la dévoila tout entière en lançant un regard que comprit l'Espagnole, comme si elle était habituée à en recevoir de semblables.[100]

This paragraph progresses from objectification to visual rape. The narrator tells us that Henri classifies Paquita as both a product of nature ("la plus riche organisation [de] la nature") and a machine ("le jeu présumé de cette machine"). The word "machin" (from machine) is an archaic word for a woman; Henri's claim that Paquita is part nature, part

[100] Ibid., 422.

machine, suggests that her womanhood is an unnatural component. Machine also means a non-organic apparatus, which makes Paquita the cyborg *avant la lettre*. She is what Doris Kadish has called a hybrid, "the presence of heterogeneous parts, an uneasy cohabitation in one living organism or different and incongrous elements."[101] The hybrid was considered in the nineteenth century as a version of "degeneration," which had close ties to femininity.[102]

Paquita is both a product of nature and a machin(e), but she is not human. Her "âme"—the most human part of her—is "mise à part." She becomes through the eyes of Henri a bizarre combination of the natural and the unnatural; in other words, she becomes a monstrosity. The narrator tells us that anyone other than Henri would be horrified by Paquita: "l'âme mise à part eût effrayé tout autre homme que de Marsay." Far from disgusting Henri, Paquita's monstrosity actually excites him because he sees in her "l'infini rendu palpable." Paquita becomes for Henri a medium for pleasure; she is not an end in herself, but a tool.

Since she is oriental and therefore less than human, Henri has no qualms about visually raping Paquita: "il la dévoila tout entière en lançant un regard que comprit l'Espagnole." This substitution suggests that the gaze and the rape are in some way equivalent in their violence. The gaze, like a rape, clearly centers more on violence and power than sex. Henri's look begins the dominance/submission game that continues throughout the story. And Paquita, well trained in the art of submission, seems to play along like a good submissive: "elle se laissait complaisamment voir, heureuse d'être

---

[101] Doris Y. Kadish, *Politicizing Gender: Narrative Strategies in the Aftermath of the French Revolution* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991), 53.
[102] Ibid.

admirée." She continues this professed submission throughout the story: "laissant lire dans ses yeux" and telling Henri, "si tu le veux, prends-moi comme un jouet."[103]

Nevertheless, in this relationship, Henri never quite assumes the despotic status to which he feels entitled. The description "se laissait voir" and Paquita's use of the imperative ("prends-moi") shows that Paquita retains self-possession. She allows Henri to look at her; she orders him to take her. Henri suspects that his possession may not be complete: seeing that Paquita is used to gazes like those she gets from Henri, he has what can only be described as a temper tantrum. He threatens, "Si tu ne devais pas être à moi seul, je te tuerais."[104] A few moments later, he cries out, "Ma Paquita, sois à moi!"[105] In his final plea, he seems to desire to merge with Paquita: "Sois à moi ce soir, à l'instant, suis-moi, ne me quitte pas, je le veux, Paquita!"[106] Is Henri asking her to follow him (suis-moi) or to be him (suis-moi)? Shortly after this outburst, Henri makes himself the follower when he asks, "suis-je le préféré?," which means both "Am I the preferred one" and "Do I follow the preferred one?"[107]

Balzac and his contemporaries clearly establish the masculinity of the West and the femininity of the East. Henri also seeks to maintain a distance between himself and Paquita by demanding her submission and her exclusive devotion. The Orient is the *parergon* of the West, both adjacent to it and inside it. Henri—as the figure of the West—experiences this phenomenon with Paquita, as he discovers that Paquita penetrates him as much as he penetrates her.

Henri's sexual experiences with Paquita endanger his masculinity and thereby his

---

[103] Balzac, 443.
[104] Ibid., 422.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid., 423.
[107] Ibid., 444.

white, French identity. Physically, Henri unveils, and even penetrates, Paquita. This penetration is not, however, a satisfactory one because when he penetrates her physically and discovers that she is a virgin, she becomes even more impenetrable to him: "Ce que les gens...qui vivent comme [de Marsay] vivait savent le mieux reconnaître, est l'innocence d'une fille. Mais, chose étrange! si la *Fille aux yeux d'or* était vierge, elle n'était certes pas innocente."[108] Paquita seems to be at once virgin and vixen; the more de Marsay gets to see of her, the less he can define her.

Only after leaving Paquita and the boudoir, does Henri regain his insight (penetration): "de Marsay commença, quand il en fut à fumer ses cigares, à voir les événements de sa nuit sous un singulier jour....de Marsay s'aperçut qu'il avait été joué par la *Fille aux yeux d'or*, en voyant dans son ensemble cette nuit dont les plaisirs n'avaient que graduellement ruisselé pour finir par s'épancher à torrents."[109] The words "voir," "s'aperçut" and "voyant" emphasize Henri's failure to see. Some part of a woman has become for him, for the first time, uncontrollable. Worse, while he cannot dominate Paquita, she has no trouble controlling him. She knows him well enough to "play" (jouer) him.

Henri should be the Sardanapalus of the the boudoir, determining the life and death of Paquita, but the climax of the story profoundly undermines Henri's despotic powers. In the middle of their lovemaking, Paquita cries out, "Oh! Mariquita!" The name is a mixture of Margarita (her lesbian lover) and Henri, but it is enough to reveal that Henri's feared competition is a woman. This moment brings together many of the story's overarching themes—the frustrated desire for absolute control, the specter of feminine

---

[108] Ibid., 432.
[109] Ibid., 438.

power, and the undermined authority of the West. Henri's reaction reveals the person behind the carefully constructed mask: "Mariquita! cria le jeune homme en rugissant."[110] Henri prides himself on controlled emotions, but through his visible and audible anger, Henri becomes the revealed one, rather than the revealer. Instead of uncovering Paquita, as he had promised himself he would do, Paquita uncovers him by forcing Henri to manifest his emotions on his face and in his voice. Worse, his anger reveals him, powerful "despot" and cynical Parisian, as naïve—he is not all-knowing.

This naïveté, in addition to demonstrating Henri's ignorance, also signals a gender reversal. Henri prides himself on the fact that "aucune des corruptions sociales ne lui était inconnue" and that "il professait au sujet de tous les caprices une parfaite indifférence."[111] The discovery he makes with Paquita's cry, however, shows him to be unschooled—a virgin—in at least one vice. This is also the moment of his first penetration: "il reçut au milieu de sa joie un coup de poignard qui traversa de part en part son coeur mortifié pour la première fois."[112] This penetration is the culmination of a gender role that has already been undermined. Just before she cries out, "Mariquita," Paquita "l'avait enlevé vigoureusement en l'air comme pour le contempler."[113] She lifts him up into the air, suggesting a masculine strength. Moreover, she does so to look at him. Formerly the watcher, now the watched, Henri takes on the traditionally feminine role as a desired object.

That this gender reversal so infuriates Henri might might seem surprising, as he is a self-described dandy. He spends hours on his appearance, has feminine hands, and an

---

[110] Ibid., 446.
[111] Ibid., 439.
[112] Ibid., 446.
[113] Ibid.

even more feminine figure. His own father mistakes him for a homosexual. The figure of the dandy is key to understanding Henri's strong reaction to being "uncovered" and penetrated by Paquita. The dandy is an outgrowth of shifting nineteenth-century class divisions:

> The new configuration of classes which arose from the dust of the French Revolution represents an emasculation of the upper class, so that the dandy's elaborate production of himself as different—not bourgeois—marks an attempt to capitalize on his defining loss and redeploy it for creative purposes. Viewed in the context of his loss of power in the public sphere, the dandy's project of constructing his self as an impenetrable outer shell represents a defensive reaction to a very real social threat.[114]

Henri's dandyism is tied to questions of power and political impotence. Misogyny is an integral component of dandyism, as Henri demonstrates with his assertion that women are nothing but an "ensemble de niaiseries." With masculinity already endangered in the political sphere, femininity is the antithesis of the dandy's self-understanding in the private sphere. Henri, however, can no longer maintain this distinction. As Felman has shown convincivingly in her article, "Rereading Femininity," Henri discovers the feminine and the Orient inside him. Perhaps he is also only an "ensemble de niaiseries."

Henri leaves Paquita, but returns to murder her in revenge. This is an attempt by Henri to recapture his position as despot—ruler over life and death. We have already established that nineteenth-century dandyism stemmed from the upper class's feelings of disempowerment after the French Revolution. The political impotence of young upper

---

[114] Deborah Houk, "Self-Construction and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century French Dandyism," *French Forum* 22, no. 1 (Jan 1997): 61.

class men forced them to express their superiority through the exclusivity of fashion and manners—and in Henri's case, a secret society dedicated to revenge.[115] Balzac explains in his preface to *Histoire des Treizes* that the society recruits only from the "hommes d'élite," and that its founder was inspired by his ruminations on men who had been forced out of the social order, but found themselves thereby empowered.[116] The society's purpose and power lies in carrying out acts of revenge. This is why Henri seeks the help of his fellow members in murdering Paquita. Revenge, however, is purely *reactive* and attests to the upper class's inability to act decisively in the public sphere.

Henri de Marsay wants to murder Paquita to reclaim his masculinity and his dominion over women. His desire for revenge, however, demonstrates the extent of his disempowerment, both in his relationship with Paquita, and in the larger political sphere. Worse, he is too late. Paquita's lesbian lover, Margarita, has preceded him. Not even revenge remains to Henri.

Henri does discover that Margarita is his half-sister, and that Henri and Margarita look so alike that "deux Ménechmes ne se seraient pas mieux ressemblé."[117] The phrase "deux Ménechmes" alludes to a play by Plautus, in which twin brothers separated at seven years of age find each other again, but not before each is mistaken for the other in a comedy of errors. Although in the Plautus play the resemblance is funny, Balzac puts his finger on the inherent crisis in finding an identical sibling. Much like the double entendres peppered throughout the story, having two versions of something obscures, rather than clarifies meaning. If the siblings are identical, then it becomes unclear which

---

[115] Balzac, 16.
[116] Ibid., 9.
[117] Balzac, 452.

one is the original, and which the copy. The resemblance between Margarita and Henri opens up the possibility that Paquita never saw or desired him because she saw and desired instead Margarita. Henri's beauty and charm—the source of his seductive power—might have nothing to do with his success. An Other, Margarita, made possible the seduction; Henri's appearance, supposedly the source of his power, actually displaces his power.

Moreover, the resemblance between Margarita and Henri is so striking that gender becomes ambiguous: does Henri resemble Margarita because of his femininity, or does she resemble him because of her masculinity? If we consider action masculine, then Margarita, who usurps Henri's place as murderer, certainly qualifies for a more masculine position, and places Henri in the role of the feminine. According to Felman, however, the story radically transforms this question and thoroughly disintegrates the masculinity/feminity binary: "Masculinity, Henri discovers, is not a substance, of which femininity would be the opposite....Since Henri himself has a woman's face, the feminine, Henri discovers, is not *outside* the masculine,...it is inside the masculine, its uncanny *difference from itself*."[118] This internal otherness is a horror—a monstrosity even—because it combines the two genders that Henri keeps carefully separate. He incarnates femininity and masculinity at once, and so Henri has become in his own eyes the monster. Worse, he cannot destroy this otherness without destroying himself.

Femininity and masculinity, the Orient and the Occident, are united in Henri. The Orient is in Paris, and more disturbingly in the Parisian. Balzac's approach to the intersection of race and gender differs from his contemporaries because he seems to see

---

[118] Felman: 41.

the non-white woman not as an unassimilable Other, but as a *parergon* to Paris. She is both outside the sphere of Western culture, and yet necessary to this culture—filling a fundamental lack in the economics of the West. Much like Henri, Paris cannot destroy this oriental *parergon* without destroying itself, as the Orient is integral to both Western trade and Western fantasies. In "Physionomies Parisiennes" Balzac asks of the Parisian populace, "Que veulent-ils? De l'or, ou du plaisir?"[119] Whether it is gold or pleasure the Parisian wants, the Orient can and will provide it.

***

The Orient thus exists for the pleasure of the Parisian, and has no identity apart from its utility to the French consumer. In the same way, Chateaubriand's New World furthers the glory of French imperialism and serves as an extended metaphor for the trauma of the French Revolution. *Atala* and *La Fille aux yeux d'or* thrilled French readers. The stories include exotic characters, strange customs, and unfamiliar scenery. Atala is the monstrous product of a biracial passion and Paquita a veritable sex slave, desired by a brother and sister unknown to each other. Chateaubriand describes the torture inflicted on Indian prisoners of the Cherokee; Balzac describes in detail Paquita's brutal murder and banal aftermath. *Atala* begins with accounts of strange flora and fauna in the wilderness; Balzac describes a veritable harem inside Paris, the height of luxury and a den of iniquity. Paquita and her mother, Atala and her lover—these are the exotic creations of French authors. It is this French origin that lends these stories their power. French readers of *Atala* and *La Fille aux yeux d'or* peer out to the Other in order to look in; their voyeuristic explorations of the New World and the Orient provide a clearer

[119] Balzac, 371.

picture of the readers' French identity. To understand these stories, readers must look to France, where they ultimately find themselves on the inside looking in.

WORKS CITED

Balzac, Honoré de. "La Fille aux yeux d'or." In *Histoire des Treize*, edited by Pierre Georges Castex, 371-453. Paris: Garnier frères, 1966.

Balzac, Honoré de. "Préface." In *Histoire des Treizes*, edited by Pierre-George Castex, 9-17. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1966.

Bede, Jean-Albert. "L'Itineraire spirituel de Chateaubriand en Amerique." *The French Review* 49, no. 6 (May 1976): 985-1000.

Bernard, J.B. *Relations de la Louisiane, et du Fleuve Mississippi*. Amsterdam, 1720.

Bohrer, Frederick Nathaniel. *Orientalism and visual culture: imagining Mesopotamia in nineteenth-century Europe*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Bohrer, Frederick Nathaniel. "Inventing Assyria: Exoticism and reception in nineteenth century England and France." *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 2 (June 1998): 336-57.

Chateaubriand, François-René. *Atala* Textes littéraires français 198, Edited by Jean Maurice Gautier. Genève: Droz, 1973.

Chateaubriand, François-René. "Lettre publiée dans *Le Journal de Débats* et dans *Le Publiciste*." In *Atala*, edited by Jean Maurice Gautier, 152-153. Genève: Librairie Droz S.A., 1973.

Chateaubriand, François-René. "Préface de la première édition (1801)." In *Atala*, edited by Jean Maurice Gautier 154-163. Genève: Librairie Droz S.A., 1973.

Chinard, Gilbert. "Chateaubriand en Amérique: Quelques Nouvelles Sources Des 'Natchez' et du 'Voyage'." *Modern Philology* 9, no. 1 (Jul. 1911): 129-149.

Daunais, Isabelle. *L'art de la mesure ou l'invention de l'espace dans les récits d'Orient*. Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1996.

Derrida, Jacques. *The truth in painting*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Diamond, Mari Josephine. "The Monstrous Other: The Chimera of Speculation in Balzac's The Girl With the Golden Eyes." *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 18, no. 3 (1994): 249-62.

Ennaifar, Elias. "Zobéide, Charlus, Paquita: Une Interprétation d'un conte des Mille et Une Nuits." *IBLA (Institut des belles lettres arabe)* 62, no. 2 (1999): 169-85.

Felman, Shoshana. "Rereading Femininity." *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981): 19-44.

Gautier, Jean Maurice. "Introduction." In *Atala*, 1-12. Genève: Droz, 1973.

Gourmont, Remy de. "M. Huysmans, écrivain pieux." In *Promenades littéraires* 3, 24-40. Paris: Mercure de France, 1904.

Harper, Mary J. "Recovering the Other: Women and the Orient in Writings of Early Nineteenth Century France." *Critical Matrix* 1, no. 3 (1985): 1-31.

Hollier, Denis. "French Customs, Literary Borders." *October* 49 (Summer 1989): 40-52.

Houk, Deborah. "Self-Construction and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century French Dandyism." *French Forum* 22, no. 1 (Jan 1997): 59-73.

Jaenen, Cornelius. "'Les Sauvages Ameriquains': Persistence into the 18th Century of Traditional French Concepts and Constructs for Comprehending Amerindians." *Ethnohistory* 29, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 43-56.

Kadish, Doris Y. *Politicizing Gender: Narrative Strategies in the Aftermath of the French Revolution*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991.

Kadish, Doris Y. "Symbolism of Exile: The Opening Description in Atala." *The French Review* 55, no. 3 (Feb. 1982): 358-366.

Le Hir, Marie Pierre "Balzac's Bretons: Racism and National Identity in Les Chouans." In *Peripheries of nineteenth-century French studies : views from the edge*, edited by Timothy Bell Raser, 197-216. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002.

Lowe, Lisa. "Nationalism and Exoticism: Nineteenth Century Others in Flaubert's Salammbô." In *Macropolitics of nineteenth-century literature : nationalism, exoticism, imperialism*, edited by Jonathan Arac and Harriet Ritvo, 213-42. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.

Massol-Bedoin, Chantal. "La charade et la chimère." *Poétique* 23, no. 89 (Feb 1992): 31-45.

Moreau, Pierre. *Chateaubriand* Les écrivains devant Dieu. Desclée de Brouwer, 1965.

Pao, Angela Chia-yi. *The Orient of the boulevards : exoticism, empire, and nineteenth-century French theater* New cultural studies. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

Sayre, Gordon. "Plotting the Natchez Massacre: Le Page du Pratz, Dumont de Montigny, Chateaubriand." *Early American Literature* 37, no. 3 (2002): 381-412.

Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean. "The Other Woman: Reading a Body of Differences in Balzac's 'La Fille aux yeux d'or'." *Symposium* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 43-50.

Spininger, Dennis J. "The Paradise Setting of Chateaubriand's Atala." *PMLA* 89, no. 3 (May 1974): 530-536.

Stein, Marieke. *Victor Hugo* idées reçues. Paris: Le Cavalier Bleu, 2007.

White, Hayden V. *Tropics of discourse : essays in cultural criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Wing, Nathaniel. *Between genders: narrating difference in early French modernism*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004.

Zimra, Clarisse. "La Vision du Nouveau Monde de Chateaubriand à Beaumont: pour une etude de forme de l'exotisme." *The French Review* 49, no. 6 (May 1976): 1001-1024.

CONCLUSION

In 1779, at the height of the American Revolution, the transcript of a speech delivered to the Congress by the Chevalier de la Luzerne appeared in the *The Pennsylvania Packet* newspaper. The speech had been delivered to the Congress in French and was so printed in *The Pennsylvania Packet*, along with a translation. The Chevalier de la Luzerne was the new Minister Plenipotentiary for France, the personal representative for the French King in America. In this capacity, he spoke for the King in writing,

> La sagesse et le courage qui ont fondé votre rêpublique, la prudence qui preside à vos dèlibérations, votre fermetè dans l'exècution, l'habilitè et la valeur que vos Gênêraux et vos soldats ont deploiées dans le cours de cette guerre, ont attirè sur vous l'admiration et les regards du monde entiere. Le Roi, mon Maitre a reconnu le premier une libertè acquise parmi tant de perils et avec autant de gloire.[1]

The Chevalier, in the name of the king, praises the leaders of the new republic for their bravery and wisdom in founding this new system of government. The king admires that these men attained their liberty through peril and with glory.

Ten years later, in July 1789, Thomas Jefferson would help the Marquis de Lafayette draft the Declaration of the Rights of Man,[2] the iconic document of the French Revolution and a prelude to the deposition of the king. The document proclaimed, "Le but de toute association politique est la conservation des droits naturels et

---

[1] "Very Dear, Great Friends and Allies," *The Pennsylvania Packet or the General Advertiser*, 20 November 1779. Accents and orthography as originally printed.

[2] Gerard Gawalt, 2010. "Thomas Jefferson," Library of Congress. Webpage, http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/jeffworld.html (accessed February 4, 2011).

imprescriptibles de l'homme. Ces droits sont la liberté, la propriété, la sûreté et la résistance à l'oppression."[3] In direct defiance of the absolute monarchy embodied by King Louis XVI, the declaration proclaims that liberty is an inalienable right for all men. In less than twenty years, the political structure of two countries fundamentally changed, giving way to a new form of government and new fears.

The uniqueness of this historical moment is almost unmatched in the political history of the world. America and France fundamentally changed their political structure within the space of a few years. Changes in the social, financial, and literary spheres followed, leaving their mark on the world even today. But this nearly unprecedented moment was also a source of anxiety. The new nations threatened to disintegrate at any moment, either through attacks from outside enemies or from the disagreement of political factions on the inside. Without a unifying national identity, both countries would remain on the brink of another revolution.

The novel, a relatively new form of literature, proved the ideal medium for expressing and mediating this national anxiety. Although both France and America faced some external threats, the primary threat to national unity was internal. Those who deviated from social norms threatened to undermine the new, still fragile political structure. In the preceding chapters, I have shown that these deviant characters—shadowy fears of an anxious nation—figured prominently in French and American post-revolutionary novels. The terrible consequences to those who encounter the deviant reveal an attempt to repress or reform the sexual and racial bodies that threaten national and social unity. In short, the novel created outsiders in order to strengthen national

[3] The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.

unity.

***

Many novels in this analysis begin by featuring sex as the transgressive act, but move quickly into an anxious account of a fractured family. *Charlotte Temple* and *Adolphe* start with the consequences of seduction, but are most concerned with the transgressive child; *The Scarlet Letter* and *Madame Bovary* begin with the subject of adultery, but move quickly to a condemnation of the bad mother; *The Power of Sympathy* and *René*, take on the ultimate sexual deviance, incest, but end up mourning the absent father. As we have seen in these chapters, the fortunes of the family and the nation were intertwined in the political consciousness of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In these novels, it is not the sexual transgression itself, but the act's disastrous consequences for the family, that fuel the anxiety of the citizenry. If deviants can destroy the family, they can destroy the nation.

Racial and exotic others were also a deviation from the social norms as reflected in the literature of the time. While interactions with those of another race varied significantly in France and America, these two countries shared a fear of the Other. American novels such as *The Algerine Captive* and *Edgar Huntly* featured marginalized slaves, Indians, and Irishmen, who challenge the fantasy of a racially harmonious society. In these novels, it is not only that the Other threatens the social norms, but that the Other threatens to *become* the social norm. In Tyler's *Algerine Captive,* a white man becomes a slave; in Brown's *Edgar Huntly*, a white man devolves into the Indian/Irish savages he purports to despise. The presence of racial Others in the body politic threatens to undermine a nation built on the (legislatively reinforced) political power of white,

propertied men. Racial deviance is therefore a threat to the very foundation of American national identity, as conceived by the dominant class.

Nineteenth-century France had fewer encounters with racial diversity in the body politic, but nevertheless exhibited an anxiety about otherness, manifested by an obsession with exoticism. *La Fille aux yeux d'or* and *Atala* both feature a love story, but their primary fascination for readers is the exoticism of the characters. In these books, the Other who is supposed to remain outside French society becomes frighteningly central to it. Paquita, the non-Western and non-Parisian main character in *La Fille aux yeux d'or* is housed in the very center of Paris. *Atala* pointedly distinguishes between those tame Indians who have been civilized/Christianized, and those who have not, further reinforcing the French identity as a civilized nation. But this need to look to the Other for an identity is itself a source of anxiety.

***

The phrase "body politic" carries within it the idea that the individual and the nation are forever intertwined. Individuals cannot escape the sexual desires of their bodies or the bodily manifestations that advertise their race. So, too, the body politic finds itself returning to these all-too-corporeal concerns when confronted with a national crisis. The novels featured in these chapters allow the nation to express anxiety about its identity within the bounds of the individual body: the disastrous sexual desire for a brother has something to add to the debate over the king's successor; the decision of a white man to go on a murdering rampage with a tomahawk adds a new dimension to the question of enfranchisement.

Even after the publication of these and many other post-revolutionary works,

France and America continued to struggle with a post-revolutionary identity. In America, the 1860s would bring civil war; in France, the ongoing battle for power between royalists and republicans would continue throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. In this respect, novels did not offer the solution to the political crisis. And yet, their very existence helped forge a piece of that much-needed national identity. The French and American people may not have been united by a shared political or social ideal, but they were united by their shared love of novels.

WORKS CITED

Gawalt, Gerard. 2010. "Thomas Jefferson," Library of Congress. Webpage, http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/jeffworld.html (accessed February 4, 2011).

"Very Dear, Great Friends and Allies." *The Pennsylvania Packet or the General Advertiser*, 20 November 1779.