“Self-begot, Self-rais’d”:
Elective Orphanhood in American Novels, 1790-1852

by

Karen Weiser

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Dr. William P. Kelly

Date

Chair of Examining Committee

Dr. Mario DiGangi

Date

Executive Officer

Dr. Joan Richardson

Dr. Duncan Faherty

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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Adviser: Professor William P. Kelly

“Self-Begot, Self-Rais’d: Elective Orphanhood in American Novels, 1790-1852” explores the rhetoric of the family as a national poetics across the birth of American Literature in novels from the 1790s to the 1850s. In it I propose that the figure of the orphan, originating in the pamphlet literature of the American Revolution, became a useful and often-used trope in writing of the period. In novels by Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville, as well as two obscure early popular novels about cross-dressing women (one anonymously published, the other by Herman Mann), I examine the various conceptual contexts, such as republicanism and aesthetics, which make the orphan legible as a figure encapsulating the woundedness and possibility of autogenesis. The elective orphan figure provides a new lens for reading a stock figure of sentimental writing, the sentimental orphan. These orphan figures, when viewed as doubles, shed light on the affective dissonance of revolutionary authority. This dissertation extends the work of Julie Ellison and Lori Merish by revealing the feminization of sympathy from enlightenment discourses of masculine fellow feeling.

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fell upon Pierre's heart, and her long hair ran over him, and arbored him in ebon
fell   Pierre   long   air   h   arbor   him in ebon
   l   ie   long   i   h   arbor   him
                                        long   i   h   arbor   him
                                        l   a bor   him
                                        l   a bor

                                 o   y
                          t   o   my
                          to   to   my
              her.   to her, to   my   was
am   her.   to her, to both o my   what was   from
am my mother. I give to her, to both of my girls, what was taken from me.

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Introduction

From "The Sons of Liberty" to Elective Orphanhood

"We know no time when we were not as now;/ Know none before us, self-begot, self-rais'd / by our own quick'ning power" —Satan, Milton, "Paradise Lost"[1]

"We have it in our power to begin the world over again. A situation, similar to the present, hath not happened since the days of Noah until now. The birth-day of a new world is at hand…" —Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*[2]

I begin with Satan's boast in Book Five of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* that he and the other angels are "self-begot, self-rais'd," a revolutionary rejection of the kingly authority of God. Satan has just asked his cabal of fallen angels who "rememberest thou / Thy making" (l. 858), to assert that there had been no time where they were not as they are, their own creations. This claim to be "self-begot, self-rais'd" is at the heart of the American[3] figure of elective orphanhood. Though the Founding Fathers would successfully turn the symbolic matrix of family to their own ends, the claim of self generation would continue to echo with revolutionary and parricidal potential in novels throughout the nineteenth century.

This dissertation explores the resonance of elective orphanhood as a national poetics across the birth of American Literature in novels from the 1790s to the 1850s. In it I propose that the figure of the elective orphan, originating in the pamphlet literature of

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[1] John Milton, "Comus." In *The Complete Poetry of John Milton*, edited by John T. Shawcross, 124-153. New York: Doubleday, 1963, 1971, V, ll. 859-860
[2] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776). New York: Penguin, 2004, 69.
[3] By this I mean in terms of the literature of the United States.

the American Revolution, became a useful and often-used trope for testing the mythos of autogenic authority enshrined in the *Declaration of Independence*. As one who chooses to be "self-begot, self-rais'd," the elective orphan is both vulnerable and powerful, the subject and object of a revolutionary authority based on breaking with the past. As a symbol of the agency of this rupture, this figure both asserts and calls into question the validity of the necessary fiction of "a new world." Through readings of novels from the post-Revolutionary through the Antebellum periods, from Charles Brockden Brown to Herman Melville, as well as their conceptual contexts, I suggest that novelists used this particular figure of self-generation as a speculative test of the problems raised by an evacuated authority. By emotively performing a selfhood unmoored from a stable inheritance, the elective orphan could ask what role self-interest, the market, gender, race and art had in and on a still-forming social contract.

The rhetorical power of the elective orphan was fully developed in the English debates of the seventeenth century about the nature of power and the social contract, which analogized state authority as familial, with the King as father and the subjects as children.[4] The family too served as a miniature power structure, one that was, under the influence of the writing of John Locke and the Scottish Enlightenment, in a state of transition away from patriarchal authority toward contract and sympathy. The American colonies were viewed as the children of the British on both sides of the Atlantic during the revolutionary period, evidencing the ubiquitous notion of the patriarchal family and

[4] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*: *The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

state as mirror entities.[5] The symbols of Mother Country and Father King were so powerful that the Revolutionaries did not try to unravel their rhetorical influence or assert a different kind of tie. Instead, they made use of the idea of kinship as a means to argue *for* Independence, revising the emotional thrust of the symbols in their tracts, and cleansing Independence of the autogenetic boast that Milton's Satan encapsulated.

Against charges from the Tories that the colonies were ungrateful and disobedient children that needed discipline, or worse, parricidal, the "Sons of Liberty" asserted that the colonies had achieved the age of independence and were ready to be set free into the self-governance of national adulthood. Furthermore, they declared that the parent country had abused her children, therefore unnaturally severing the ties of kinship. Both of these symbolic subject positions are deeply problematic, but together they provide affective traction for a revolutionary and post-revolutionary imagining of the nation. I propose that the oscillation between an iteration of agency and victimhood created a space between being the subject or agent of violence as a parricide, and the object of violence as a mistreated child. By charting the space between these two untenable subject positions, the narrative of elective orphanhood assumes both the rational choice to break with tradition and the loss inherent in doing so— a loss that suggests not only a fractured identity but a forfeit of patrimony and stable familial line. Though this narrative suggests a shared mourning as well as a common ability to unite as a new national family, it is also ambivalent, highlighting the dangers posed by attempting the impossible project of self-creation. The elective orphan figure encapsulates the dilemma, loss and possibility of an autogenic authority.

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[5] This is a central claim of Jay Fliegelman's wonderful text *Prodigals and Pilgrims*: *The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800*.

Many Revolutionary writings, including those of Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson, framed an argument for Independence by turning to the rhetorical power of kindred relations. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* creates the logic that there is only one rational and emotionally honest choice for the American colonies: to revolt against the British. Though there are a number of resonant metaphors and symbols that Paine employs, he comes back over and again to familial symbolism, and the significance of redefining the knot of kinship between the Mother Country, the Father King, and their children, the colonies. His use of familial symbolism varies in ways that suggest that he is trying to find new ways of shaping it, as if it is an allegorical puzzle he can shift into a new picture.

Paine first argues that the colonies do not need England by suggesting that they have graduated from childhood and change is therefore natural: "We may as well assert, that because a child has thrived upon milk, that it is never to have meat; or that the first twenty years of our lives is to become a precedent for the next twenty."[6] Directly after he writes, "her motive was interest, not attachment," primarily "trade and dominion" rather than a motherly protection based on the bond of emotion. By claiming that the Mother country did not act in the disinterested character of a true parent,[7] Paine aims to convince his audience that the "sister colonies" (27) are free of the obligation of obedience. Rather than nullify the familial symbolism, he asserts that a monstrous mother wronged the colonies: "But Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the more shame upon her

[6] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776) (New York: Penguin, 2004), 26. All future references will be cited parenthetically in the chapter.
[7] As Fliegelman explains (p. 104), Adam Ferguson writes the figure of the breastfeeding mother as an icon of disinterested parental love. Ferguson writes, "It is unthinkable that a mother in presenting the breast to her child has in view some future returns."

conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families" (27-8). In the same passage, he loosens the tie of kinship by trying to displace it: "Europe, and not England, is the parent country of America. This new world hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from *every part* of Europe" (28). Then he again returns to the idea of the Mother Country, arguing against the idea of reconciliation by suggesting that the familial tie would feel inorganic, since love and honor are no longer operative. He writes, "Nature hath deserted the connection, and Art cannot supply her place" (34). As Jay Fliegelman explains, Paine borrows from Scottish Common Sense philosophy the idea of filial obedience as involuntary and arising from a love free from obligation.[8] Influenced by this idea, Paine asserts that the antipathy toward the British, arising from mistreatment itself, annuls the tie. That the tie can be unknotted by "Nature" is the basis of the state of elective orphanhood, a justification for Independence and self-fashioning; it is also utterly destabilizing to the very nature of a social fabric and social contract.

Paine goes to great lengths in *Common Sense* to conjure real families and to direct a sense of duty and obligation toward flesh and blood kindred. He writes, "As parents, we can have no joy, knowing that this government is not sufficiently lasting to ensure any thing which we may bequeath to posterity" (31). He also reminds the reader that the objects of British violence were real people with families, and that for them the ties of honor and sympathy have been rent: "Have you lost a parent or a child by their hands, and yourself the ruined and wretched survivor? If you have not, then are you not a judge of those who have. But if you have, and can still shake hands with the murderers, then are

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[8] Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, 25.

you unworthy the name of husband, father, friend, or lover…" (33). Paine argues that not acting in the present will only defer the revolution, "leaving the sword to our children" (35). These references implicitly acknowledge the artificial nature of the symbolic tie of kindred between the King and the colonies, a claim he passionately states when he accuses the King of "the pretended title of FATHER OF HIS PEOPLE[9] [who] can unfeelingly hear of their slaughter, and composedly sleep with blood upon his soul" (37). By naturalizing the breakdown of the relationship between the colonies and their symbolic Father King and Mother Country, Paine maintains that they are already orphaned, and as orphans must seize the opportunity to create a new identity or national family in a "new world."

Thomas Jefferson makes a similar claim in the "Original Rough Draught"[10] of the Declaration of Independence. In the passages Congress excised,[11] Jefferson articulates the paradigm of elective orphanhood in the terms of a doubled rhetoric oscillating between agency and victimhood, rationality and emotion, choice and loss. He makes use of familial imagery by considering the colonies as the offspring of the King and Mother country, referring to the British as "Brethren," and discussing the colonies' previous petitions on the ground of the "ties of our common kindred" and "consanguinity."

It is in the movement back and force between agency and victimhood that Jefferson's excised words reveal the deep loss underwriting the project of autogenesis

[9] Paine's original capitalization.
[10] Thomas Jefferson, "Original Rough Draught," The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Princeton University. http://www.princeton.edu/~tjpapers/declaration/declaration.pdf).
[11] See Gary Wills, *Inventing America Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (London: Athlone Press, 1980) for a thorough exploration of how Jefferson meant the document, and how this differed from the Congressional Declaration.

and self-fashioning. In the second to last paragraph, talking of his "British brethren," Jefferson writes:

> at this very time too they are permitting their chief magistrate to send over not only soldiers of our common blood, but Scotch & foreign mercenaries to invade & deluge us in blood. these facts have given the last stab to agonizing affection, and manly spirit bids us to renounce for ever these unfeeling brethren. we must endeavor to forget our former love for them, and to hold them as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends. we might have been a free & a great people together; but a communication of grandeur & of freedom it seems is below their dignity. be it so, since they will have it: the road to glory & happiness is open to us too; we will climb it in a separate state, and acquiesce in the necessity which pronounces our everlasting Adieu!

As wronged kindred, the colonies are envisioned as necessarily but reluctantly turning away from a vital organizing relationship gone sour. When Jefferson uses hyperbolic sentimental language to imagine this difficult emotional turn, "these facts have given the last stab to agonizing affection," it is not the decision to divorce oneself from the national family that is "agonizing," but the affection itself that prompts the discomfort. He emphasizes that this is what must be severed, first and foremost, in order to declare Independence: "we must endeavor to forget our former love for them." He even envisions a future of familial peace no longer possible: "we might have been a free & great people together" in order to drive home the message of loss at the heart of this passage. Only then, by relying on the vocabulary of masculine feeling, what he terms "manly spirit," can Jefferson tap into the communal sensibility that holds a people together.[12] Julie Ellison, Elizabeth Barnes, Bruce Burgett, and Glenn Hendler have argued that it is precisely this masculine rhetoric of feeling that promised to create a cohesive citizenship

[12] As Adam Smith first proposed in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).

in the vacuum of authority.[13] Jefferson suggests that there is a deep loss of love involved but that the colonies must acknowledge the emotional logic of a wounded heart and "acquiesce in the necessity which pronounces our everlasting Adieu." Bruce Coviello proposes that Jefferson solves the dilemma of revolutionary authority in this excised passage by relying on emotion's unifying power. He writes, "A citizen's capacity for affect—here for grief-strickenness—is nothing less than a capacity for national belonging."[14] Jefferson posits the experience of orphanhood, or woundedness over the loss of familial love, as the common emotion that will create a sense of shared virtuous citizenship. Only after he has hit that particular affective register can he propose the revolutionary act of Independence. Thus, the shared mourning of orphanhood allows Jefferson to "declare these colonies to be free and independent states." The historical agency to elect a new identity is at once elided and marshaled into action. Gary Wills suggests that the Declaration's opening statement works much in the same way, so that "When in the course of human events" hides the agency involved in "the designation of the moment when suffering is no longer 'sufferable.'"[15] The elective orphan can be read as a figure that allows for election while claiming a lack of agency that borders on victimhood. As a figural solution to this emotional and rhetorical dilemma of agency, the elective orphan provides a symbolic answer to the question Elizabeth Barnes asks,

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[13] Julie Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1999); Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Bruce Burgett, Sentimental Bodies: *Sex, Gender, and Citizenship in the Early Republic* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998); Glenn Hendler, *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2001).
[14] Bruce Coviello, "Agonizing Affection: Affect and Nation in Early America" *Early American Literature* Vol. 37, No. 3, (2002) 439-468.
[15] Wills, 144.

"…how does a nation repudiate that which has brought it into being without repudiating an essential part of itself?"[16]

This study builds on the assertion that the figure of the elective orphan made it possible to interrogate the problematic grounding of shared citizenship in a condition somewhere between historical and individual agency. The elective orphan figure is especially ubiquitous around the turn of the nineteenth century, in the first flowering of American novels of the post-revolutionary period.[17] As Cheryl L Nixon argues, factual and fictional orphans were common in eighteenth century Britain, were often portrayed not as poor orphan waifs, but as persons of property and inheritance, "valued orphan[s]."[18] Nixon finds that British orphans offered an opportunity to narrate the discourse of individualism and to explore "the value of the narrative construction of the individual"[19] from the point of view of an insider who can explore "how social, familial, and individual value is conferred."[20] I argue that orphans in American novels give up a patrimony, if they have one at all, to elect orphanhood. American writers adapted the British orphan narrative to serve as a narrative test of the stakes of a revolutionary inheritance, even positing the test as a crucial inheritance in itself, an interrogative individualism.

The interrogative individualism of the elective orphan gave way to a celebration of individualism as the inheritance of the Revolutionary period was re-defined. The

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[16] Barnes, x.
[17] Stephen Shapiro, *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel: Reading the Atlantic World System* (Philadelphia: Penn State UP, 2008).
[18] Cheryl L. Nixon, *The Orphan in Eighteenth-Century Law and Literature: Estate, Blood and Body* (Ashgate: Surrey, 2011).
[19] Ibid., 13.
[20] Ibid,. 8.

antebellum period brought with it a new orphan, the sentimental orphan, which I argue grew out of, and whose narrative needs to be examined alongside that of the elective orphan. During the antebellum period, the sentimental orphan became the prominent literary reincarnation of the orphan figure. If we consider elective orphanhood a relation that attempted, by testing, to resolve the ambiguous ethics of revolutionary authority, the sentimental orphan reintroduces a similar problematic from a fundamentally different standpoint. The sentimental orphan takes as her jumping off point the same metaphorical matrix of family and state, but refracts different kinds of cultural questions from this resonant symbolic prism, evidencing deep cultural shifts.[21] The sentimental orphan is a figure, most often but not always female, that appears to make sense best within the confines of the sentimental novels of the mid-nineteenth century, for it is here that she has the starring role. While critics argue that the absence of a intact nuclear family indicated by an orphan protagonist is one way of understanding the radical genesis of sentimental novels,[22] this orphanhood must be considered in relation to the broken origins of the fantasy of the colonial family bond, and therefore, as an index to a change in ideas of revolutionary authority. I argue that sentimental orphanhood is an expression of the internalization of an agency now located wholly in a quest and ability to gain a new family. This narrative of liberation is based in self-discipline and self-control.

[21] Between the Revolutionary War and the mid-nineteenth century, the US experienced rapid development in every cultural arena, including the industrial and market economy, in population, changes to the family and gender roles, religion, the information economy, literacy and publishing , and in terms of ideas about race and slavery, among others. It must have felt terrifying to live at that explosive time, much like in our own overloaded and vertiginous culture.

[22] Cindy Weinstein, *Family, Kinship, and Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature (*New York: Cambridge UP, 2004). Weinstein suggests on p. 161 that "Melville sees the radical origins of sentimental novels, which is to say that without the biological family in shards, they can't work."

Thus this study focuses on works from two different periods in early American novels: the turn of the nineteenth century and the height of the antebellum period. The first three chapters of this study explore novels of elective orphanhood from the post-Revolutionary period: Charles Brockden Brown's novel fragment *Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist* (1803), as well as Brown's novel *Arthur Mervyn Or, Memoirs of the Year 1793* (1799), *The History of Constantius and Pulchera, or Constancy Rewarded* (1797), anonymously written, and *The Female Review* (1797) by Herman Mann. The fourth chapter, jumping ahead in time, looks at Edgar Allan Poe's works, focusing on his *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) and *Eureka* (1848), while the last chapter turns to Herman Melville's *Pierre, or The Ambiguities* (1852). By focusing just prior to the antebellum period, and then at its height, this study shows that the elective orphan figure's test of autogenic revolutionary authority became more poignant and relevant against the profusion of literary sentimental orphans. Sentimental orphans, the stock protagonists of sentimental novels, can only be fully understood when read as a further expression of elective orphanhood.

By offering this study of elective orphanhood, I hope to further our understanding of the interconnection between the narratives of liberation implicit in so many of the dominant ideologies of liberalism, such as individualism, self-reliance, and self-fashioning, and their counterparts, domesticity and sentimental ownership, as expressed through sympathy. I focus on novels and novel fragments because of that genre's focus on narrating individuals as well as the ideals of an emerging discourse of individualism.[23]

[23] Ian Watts, *Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defore, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Chatto and Windus Ltd., 1957); Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

As Cathy Davidson's argues in *Revolution of the Word*: *The Rise of the Novel in America,* the novel was appropriate to this moment: "It was a dangerously inchoate form appropriate for and correlative to a country first attempting to formulate itself."[24] The nation could be said to formulate itself in the vocabulary of Republicanism, whose discourse elective orphanhood explicity celebrates and interrogates. By locating the roots of sentimental orphanhood in the affective ideals of republican discourse, this study aims to extend the work of Julie Ellison and Lori Merish,[25] both of whom posit sentimentalism as a direct descendent of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy and republicanism. Finally, I pair elective orphanhood and sentimental orphanhood with the hope that these mirror or twinned orphanhoods make legible the effects of the Enlightenment's transformation of agency from providence to individual moral will[26] in the limited narrative of individual (rather than social) self-fashioning, so resonant in American culture both then and now.

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[24] Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and The Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*, (New York: Oxford UP, 2004), 14.
[25] Lori Merish, *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000).
[26] Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993), 140-150.

Chapter One

***Memoirs of Carwin*: Elective Orphaning, Self-Interest, and Reading "Comus"**

"O strengthen me, strengthen me, Father, that not a single movement of my heart may rise up against the divine disposal!"
—Cristolph Martin Wieland, "The Trial of Abraham"[27]

I.

Charles Brockden Brown chose to name his protagonist and 1798 novel *Wieland* after the German poet and writer Cristolph Martin Wieland, whose 1753 poem "The Trial of Abraham" fleshes out the thoughts and feelings of Abraham and Isaac in the moment of sacrifice. As my epigraph notes, Wieland narrates Abraham's obedience in his prayer to god that every part of his being conform to divine authority as he prepares to sacrifice his son. Furthermore, as Abraham explains to Isaac his sad fate, Isaac himself narrates his own filial obedience. Abraham's obedience to his god and divine injunction mirrors Isaac's knowing and willing self-sacrifice to his own father. Reprinted a number of times

[27] Cristolph Martin Wieland, from *Der geprüfte Abraham (The Trial of Abraham*) (Norwich, Conn.: Trumbell, 1777), reprinted in *Wieland and Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist*: *Authoritative Texts, Sources and Contexts, Criticism* (ed. Bryan Waterman, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011), 237.

in North America, Wieland's 1753 poem fills in the the emotional content left out of the Bible in its attempt to sketch the ultimate dilemma undergirding all moral judgment: how does one know what is right?

The content of Wieland's poem must have attracted Brown's notice. Not only was the role of filial obedience between the colonies and the parent country a common question during the American Revolution, Brown was preoccupied with the themes of moral judgment and motivation. He viewed motivation as conditioned by one's material situation. In particular, he thought motivation related to one's national circumstance, and desired to portray "new springs of action [...] growing out of the condition of our country."[28] Until recently, many critics have taken this to mean that Brown viewed fiction as a means of illuminating the obscurity of human consciousnesses, revealing cultural and national traits of character.[29] While Brown wrote about his career-long fascination with the connections among thinking, moral judgment, and motivation in a number of essays and prefaces,[30] these relations are conspicuously absent from Brown's widely-read first novel, *Wieland*. The absence of the mental reasoning of the titular character in that novel makes a wider political point in that it suggests the dangers and vulnerabilities of American minds to religious fanaticism. The protagonist, Theodore Wieland, thinking he

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[28] Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly or, Memories of a Sleep-Walker* (1799) (New York: Penguin, 1988), 2. To note, "condition" has been read by variously by critics to mean the general culture, physical landscape, the infancy of the nation, or the state of the market economy, to name a few readings.
[29] Philip Barnard in his *Introduction* to *Revising Charles Brockden Brown* discusses this critical history.
[30] See Brown's essays: "Walstein's School of History: From the German of Krants of Gotha" and "The Difference Between History and Romance," in *Arthur Mervyn, or Memoirs of the Year 1793 with Related Texts* (1799), (edited by Philip Barnard and Stephen Shapiro. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2008. In addition to the preface to *Edgar Huntly*, see also Brown's preface to *Wieland* in *Wieland and Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist* (edited by Jay Fliegelman. New York: Penguin, 1991).

hears the voice of God, murders his family offstage, denying the reader any understanding of his psychosis. In addition, the motives of the quasi-villain Carwin, whose malicious and playful acts of ventriloquism destabilize the mental states of both Theodore and his narrator sister Clara, in effect *causing* the horrific actions that follow, are likewise left out of the narrative. While Brown foreshadows Theodore's descent into madness through his family history, and then describes it through Clara's conjectures, he leaves Carwin's mind and motives an utter mystery.

Similar to the way that Christolph Martin Wieland's *Trial of Abraham* filled in unnarrated mental and emotional content, Brown next composed a prequel fragment[31] written from Carwin's point of view entitled *Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist*. Read alongside *Wieland*, this novel fragment gives us its missing, though no less mysterious, "springs of action" by presenting Carwin's early formative experiences and mental reasoning. *Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist*,[32] first published serially in 1803 by the *Literary Magazine,* portrays Carwin's coming of age with a narrative that complicates any easy reading of his character. Brown's prequel requires us to read backwards into *Wieland*, reconciling the descriptions and judgments of Clara with our new understanding of Carwin's character and motives. At the center of Carwin's story, as well as his identity, is the discovery of his ability to project his voice.

As Brown considered motivation a product of culture, Carwin's narrative can be examined as a performance of a mind born out of the conditions of the Revolution and

[31] In 1798.
[32] Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland and Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist*: *Authoritative Texts, Sources and Contexts, Criticism* (ed. Bryan Waterman, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011). All further references to *Wieland* and *Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist* will be cited parenthetically in the chapter.

formation of the new nation. Moreover, Carwin embodies a trope that foregrounds the historical circumstance of revolution: he is an elective orphan, reminiscent of Benjamin Franklin in his *Autobiography*. His memoir demonstrates the libratory possibilities of running away from the past while also suggesting the dark side of Franklin's hallmark—the self-made man.[33] Readers of the period may have recognized the similarities between Franklin's "Autobiography,"[34] and Carwin's text. On the surface there are a number of parallels: both are men of middling social standing who claim to run away in order to escape the fetters of abusive patriarchal authority, both attract older men who mentor them, both travel abroad to deepen their skills, both desire to find their place in the market, both put on or take off their rusticity when convenient, and both are drawn to schemes that better the condition of mankind. However, it is the deeper similarities that suggest Carwin's Frankin-esque character; his elective orphanhood compounds his view of the self as changeable, as *self*-made or autogenetic, as conquerable in the name of the greater good. Like Franklin's *Autobiography*, Carwin's "Memoirs" asks us to consider the self as text and as representative American.[35] By giving Carwin the ability to throw his voice, Brown explores the free-floating power of influence in the public sphere of

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[33] As Jay Fliegelman writes on p. 240 in *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, "*Wieland* is, in effect, the dark flip side of Franklin's *Autobiography*. Here the same post-sensationalist world is invoked, but in all its terror rather than its freedom and glorious opportunity." Also, see Stephen Shapiro, *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel: Reading the Atlantic World System*, (Philadelphia: Penn State UP, 2008), 43.
[34] The first part of Franklin's *Autobiography*, which describes his family background and coming of age, was published from a imperfect manuscript in 1791 in French and translated back into English for a British publication in 1793. In 1798 it was retranslated again into French and republished.
[35] David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004).

print typified by Franklin's pseudonymous writing.[36] Most important is the way Carwin's narrative allows the reader to explore the subjectivity and motivations of a self-fashioning individual who changes his identity by modulating his speech.

II.

How a person heard a disembodied voice registered his/her epistemological framework in 1790s America. The religious experience of hearing God's voice was commonly explored in Christian narrative, and conversely, the eighteenth-century enlightenment preoccupation with demystifying religious experience trained the modern ear to be skeptical of such outside voices. Mathematician Joannes Baptista de La Chapelle published *Le Ventriloque, ou L'Engastrimythe* in 1772, an influential rationalist work cited by Brown in *Wieland* that claimed the disembodied voices of religious experience were caused by ventriloquism.[37] Brown uses Carwin's ability to throw his voice to naturalize the supernatural, and, simultaneously, to suggest a political and cultural critique. Though critics have often tried to parse his specific political position through the symbolic excesses of his novels, Brown remains notoriously difficult to pin into any ideological box. His symbols, though, are generative in how they reference historical and philosophical currents. Carwin's ventriloquism is, in particular, a

[36] Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1996/ 2006) contains a wonderful reading of Franklin's work in this light. For the groundbreaking study on the public sphere, see Jürgen Habermas, *Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambride: MIT Press, 1991).
[37] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 2000) expands this thesis at great length.

productive symbol to consider in the light of the cultural shifts of the period, especially those produced by the American Revolution.

One such way of understanding the disembodied voice's relation to the American Revolution is through the concept of "vox populi." Christopher Looby[38] reads the disembodied voice as the ground of American authority—the voice of the people. He describes the "vocal utterance" as constituting the nation, filling in as an unstable legitimating authority occasioned by the self-conscious project of crafting a nation free from tradition and its corruptions. The foundational act of the Declaration of Independence, with its "We the People," performed through words the ground of authority in the face of "the absence of established institutions of social control and traditional means of securing consent [...]."[39] Looby stresses the significance of the voice, as well as letters, in the public sphere of a nation self-aware of its act of creation. The voice, however, conjures its own vulnerability, suggesting "a fearful sense of its foundationless instability and fragile temporality."[40] This instability is the byproduct of orphanhood, which Looby connects to the idea of a government based on consent: "only democratic consent invests law with its authority and not the tradition or origin which leaves us 'legal orphans.'"[41] Solely by turning away from known structures of social authority could a new system be endowed with the voice of the people, a precarious step into a system categorized by its own lack of tradition, or "orphanhood." But orphanhood can also be read as a condition that allows for democratic consent in its refiguring of

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[38] Christopher Looby, *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996).
[39] Looby, 82.
[40] Looby, 6.
[41] Looby, 157.

authority from patriarchal to contract. Thus, the Sons of Liberty consistently depicted England as a mistreating or absentee parent in influential pamphlets published before the Revolutionary War, claiming for the colonies a condition of shared woundedness in orphanhood. Symbolic orphanhood is then, despite its inherent dilemmas, chosen. The disembodied voice, which becomes for Carwin the *means* of his elective orphanhood, is a powerful symbol of the paradoxical structure of American authority. It allows him to be defined by his self-fashioning. However, as author and authority of himself, rather than the inheritor of identity through family and tradition, Carwin's moral character is unmoored.

Playing with this resonance, Brown uses the disembodied voice to destabilize the entire cast of characters in *Wieland*. Brown's interrogation in that novel of both the epistemological crisis of Lockean sensationalism and the American seating of authority in the linguistic acts of the public sphere has been extensively explored.[42] More recently, critics have looked at Brown less from a nationalistic standpoint, and more as a participant in the transatlantic intellectual culture of the late Enlightenment.[43] Carwin's disembodied voice, however, has still to be more fully parsed in terms of both an American mythos and late Enlightenment culture in an American context. The ethical dilemmas inherent in Carwin's self-fashioning, when read as a kind of extreme individualism, expose the voice as a medium that effects change on both the listeners and speaker. If wielding influence changes the subjectivity of s/he who exercises this power,

[42] See Nancy Ruttenberg, *Democratic Personality: Popular Voice and the Trial of American Authorship* (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 1998), also Jay Fliegelman, Christopher Looby and Michael Warner.
[43] See Bryan Waterman, *Republic of Intellect: The Friendly Club of New York City and the Making of American Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2007).

then the public sphere is doubly unstable as a site of authority. At the same time, Carwin's "Memoirs" suggests that the other American institution filling the cultural gap caused by the separation from England, the market,[44] has dire consequences for the selfhood of the individual. The role of self-interest in self-fashioning is exposed and thrown into crisis by the structuring poles of the public sphere and the market.

Brown's decision to have Carwin discover his biloquism in an echo chamber in the wilderness surely implies an allegorical reading about the new nation, much like *Wieland*'s family in their pastoral temple in Mettingen, about which Brown writes that he is: "mak[ing] the picture of a single family a model from which to sketch the condition of a nation."[45] Carwin's biloquism, discovered in an echo chamber, calls to mind the public sphere of print's proliferation of voices which created the conditions of the American Revolution. The rise in literacy and increasing publication and circulation of newspapers and pamphlets created a public space for discussion that directly impacted the political system. Through the use of pseudonyms, writers distanced themselves from their identities, which, as Michael Warner explains, allowed these writers to mimic all the virtues of a republican sphere of print. By being freed from the personal, pseudonymous writing emphasized civic virtue through selflessness. Writers claimed to speak on the basis of disinterest rather than self-interest.[46] Carwin's doubling of voice and identity

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[44] This is one of Alexis DeToqueville's prescient observations in *Democracy in America* (eds. Harvey C. Mansfield, Heffner, and Debra Winthrop. Signet Classics, 2001).
[45] *Edgar Huntly,* 34.
[46] Warner discusses the idea of disinterestedness as a central claim of republican civic virtue: that one writes with the interest of the civic body, as opposed to self-interest. He explores pseudonymous writing in the new republic, especially the work of Benjamin Franklin, in these terms.

evokes these disembodied voices, but interrogates the foundational notion of republican disinterest.

III.

Even in its partial state, the "Memoirs" presents a narrative of character development that the reader must read back into *Wieland*. As Frank Shuffleton[47] explains, the reader must, like a juror, square different narratives to make sense of what s/he concludes actually happened in Brown's novels. Certainty is kept just out of reach by a proliferation of circular and multiplying plotlines. The author's viewpoint is nowhere clearly voiced though each character's experience presents another possible perspective. Here one can feel the influence of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, whom Brown read with the other members of The Friendly Club, the conversational society of which Brown was a part. The Friendly Club was based on the idea that the pursuit of truth required debate, critique and the sharing of differing and often conflicting viewpoints and categories of knowledge. As an interpretive framework, this species of readerly engagement asks the reader to become aware of his/her active participation in piecing together "truth" from the text.[48] For Brown this participation is both an expression of fiction's progressive role as a collaborative process of inquiry as well as a

[47] Frank Shuffleton, "Juries of the Common Reader: Crime and Judgment in the Novels of Charles Brockden Brown," in *Revising Charles Brockden Brown*, edited by Philip Barnard, Mark L. Kamrath, and Stephen Shapiro (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2004).
[48] Tilottama Rajan, "Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Reading the Secrets of the Political Novel," *Studies in Romanticism* Vol. 7, number 2 (Summer 1988): 221-251. Her term for this way of writing/reading is "divinatory hermeneutics."

rationale for the ambiguity of Carwin's moral judgment. The reader must judge the characters' experiences by paying attention to their voices and evaluating their characters.

Character, which can be considered the public expression of internal nature, is itself a measure of an individual's perception. Fiction gives us access to another's perspective, and is therefore a useful medium to explore how moral judgments happen. However, moral character is a tricky matter to judge, as one's outward projection of character may not always reflect one's internal nature. The discerning reader may find that Carwin's character has no moral compass, as opposed to the fixed moral codes of the other characters in *Wieland*, who are ultimately more dangerous. Brown wrote Carwin's narrative to give the reader a way of understanding the character who can transform his identity, to make sense of the notion of an adaptable personality.

Carwin's memoir sketches his life as a rebellious adolescent desirous of avoiding the manual labor of his family's agricultural vocation in favor of intellectual pursuit. His "eureka" moment, which comes to define his subjectivity, is the discovery and mastery of ventriloquism. Having learned to shift his identity, he leaves home to make full use of his talent; found and tutored by con-artist Ludloe he travels the world as an imposter before Ludloe attempts to marry him to a wealthy widow and enlist him in a colonial faux-utopian scheme. Here amidst the tension of Carwin's conversion into a secret "utopian" society based wholly on manipulation, the fragment suddenly ends.

Carwin represents himself as a man whose main objective is to define himself apart from his family and past. He focuses first on leaving his father and brother, freeing himself from his past, to find the father-substitute who can lead him up the social ladder. Unlike *Wieland*, which makes use of conflicting perspectives as well as "letters, notes,

and Theodore's recorded courtroom testimony,"[49] the memoir is wholly from Carwin's limited perspective. Conventionally the first sentence of a memoir or autobiography introduces the reader to the speaker's past by referring to a specific time, place or genealogical line. Carwin's memoir begins with the statement, "I *was* [my emphasis] the second son of a farmer, whose place of residence was a western district of Pennsylvania" (183). That he uses the past tense to indicate an identity that would still describe his place in his family implies a gap between his present and past, a lack of continuity so intense he must describe it in terms of a past life, or echo of himself.

The disruption of self, or creation of a discrete present self disconnected from the past, is the hallmark of the elective orphan, whose coming of age mirrors the national narrative of liberation from patriarchal authority. Carwin goes on to differentiate his character from his older brother, who appears to be a Jeffersonian yeoman, but without education or vision, a parody of Jefferson's ideal. As Carwin says of his brother, "His ideas never ranged beyond the sphere of his vision, or suggested the possibility that to-morrow could be different from today" and "The limits of his acquirements consisted in signing his name, and spelling out a chapter in the bible" (183). Carwin paints a portrait of his father as exceedingly cruel for discouraging his love of learning with "reproaches and blows, painful privations and ignominious penances" (183) that serve only to create a young man adept at trickery. He presents his character as a response to the burden of a stifling patriarchal authority that discourages intellectual independence. Though Carwin

[49] Borst, Anton, "The Miltonic Novel in America: Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*" in *Milton, Rights and Liberties,* Edited by Neil Forsyth and Cristophe Tournu (Bern: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007).

feels fettered under his father's roof, he admits that the punishments were designed to teach him a moral code:

> My father's opposition to my schemes was incited by a sincere though unenlightened desire for my happiness…He has often lamented with tears, what he called my incorrigible depravity, and encouraged himself to perseverance by the notion of the ruin that would inevitably overtake me if I were allowed to persist in my present career. (184)

Here is a conflict not only of perspectives on morality, but also between patriarchal authority and self-governance. Carwin's character is accordingly inscribed with one of the nation's foundational conflicts.

In opposition to his brother and father, Carwin exemplifies the kind of citizen the new republic might create with its anti-authoritarian zeal: one who loves learning but hates manual labor, who is ingenuous but self-serving, without respect for authority, especially that of his father, and free of any ground to his character. In the course of the memoir Carwin impersonates his dog's voice, Ariel from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a Catholic Spaniard, and considers but doesn't dare follow through with other voices for the gain they would provide. He can change his nationality, religion, accent, social class, and even species—becoming a signifier for the fluid social structure enjoyed by white males in America.[50] His mutability is dependent upon a break with his past, which occupies Carwin as he schemes to live with his more lenient aunt, and then to find another source of income after she dies. He comments on this occasion, "My father's house was, indeed, open to me, but I preferred to stifle myself with the filth of the kennel,

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[50] Steven Watts, *The Romance of Real Life: Charles Brockden Brown and the Origins of American Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994). Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

rather than return to it" (195). Carwin rejects the morality of his father and the idea of duty in favor of pleasure, exemplifying the Lockean concept of man as mainly motivated by pleasure and pain.

IV.

In the beginning of his narrative, Carwin presents his pursuit of pleasure as morally chaste: "I was not destitute of pure intentions" (192). Carwin emphasizes that his vocal gift has been used for pleasure rather than tangible gain by relating an important incident in which he attempts to force his father to let him live with his aunt by impersonating his dead mother's voice. In manipulating his father's superstitious belief in apparitions, he wonders if "the excellence of my purpose would justify the means employed to attain it" (189). This particular rhetorical phrasing, of "means," comes up in important moments in the fragment, and suggests that Carwin is struggling with a morality seated in the individual's determination of right, rather than an imposed religious ethics. Yet, his attempt to manipulate his father ends with what appears to be a divine act of retribution: lightning strikes outside the window and sets the barn on fire. Though perceiving himself as ever rational, unlike his superstitious father, Carwin is convinced of the connection between his intended act and the lightning: "It palsied my courage and strengthened my conviction, that my scheme was criminal" (191). Carwin relates this tale to convince his audience that his moral sense has been tested and he has emerged guilt-free after turning from a criminal path; the use of the pathetic fallacy here is ambiguous but mirrors Wieland's father bursting into flame in the prehistory of *Wieland*. Is it divine retribution? A warning perhaps? Carwin lies to his father about the

circumstances around his discovery of the fire, but instead of being punished for the lie, which he acknowledges as an immoral act, Carwin finds his father's mind mysteriously changed and in favor of what Carwin wants: to live with his aunt and pursue a labor-free existence of intellectual exploration. Brown suggests that Carwin learns from his change in circumstance that immorality has ambiguous results. At his aunt's, he learns to sharpen his biloquism, but explains that, "I was incapable of knowingly contributing to another's misery, but the sole or principal end of my endeavors was not the happiness of others" but "ambition" and "power" (192) borne out of amusing himself. In this early period of life, before the taint of Ludloe's influence, Carwin's motivating force is pleasure—in the conquering of his own fear, and the amusement of creating wonder in others.

Brown dramatizes the influence of pleasure over Carwin into a supreme moment of recognition, which David Kazanjian calls his "aesthetic judgment" and "rite of passage."[51] As a young man Carwin is sent to bring the cows home and, deciding to forgo his "duty" to report their escape, he instead lingers for his own pleasure and exploration. In his efforts to take a shorter path home he finds a hidden pass across a stream that he follows despite its danger. He begins to make sounds out loud; first, Carwin imitates the calls of a "mohonk savage" (185). Then, he becomes suspended in an echo chamber and hears his voice bounce back to him. The passage bears quoting:

> In a few seconds a voice as I then imagined, uttered the same cry from the point of a rock some hundred feet behind me; the same words, with equal distinctness and deliberation, and in the same tone, appeared to be spoken. I was startled by this incident, and cast a fearful glance behind, to discover by whom it was uttered. The spot where I stood was buried in the dusk, but the eminences were still invested with a luminous and vivid twilight. The speaker, however, was concealed

[51] David Kazanjian, "Charles Brockden Brown's Biloquial Nation: National Culture and White Settler Colonialism in *Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist*," *American Literature* Volume 73, Number 3 (September 2001): 459-496.

> from my view….Five times was this ditty successively resounded, at intervals nearly equal, always from a new quarter, and with little abatement of its original distinctness and force.
>
> A little reflection was sufficient to shew [sic] that this was no more than an echo of an extraordinary kind. My terrors were quickly supplanted by delight. The motives to dispatch were forgotten, and I amused myself for an hour, with talking to these cliffs: I placed myself in new positions, and exhausted my lungs and my invention in new clamours. (185-6)

Hearing his voice's echo, Carwin's terror at being alone in the wilderness in a narrow and possibly dangerous place is turned into an experience of sublimity that transforms terror into aesthetic pleasure.[52] In particular, it is "the idea of a distant voice, like my own" (287) that strikes him, alone in the wilderness. Substituting Carwin's echo for the voice of God, Brown gives us an American who hears his own self-fashioning. Motivated by his achievement of the voice of a "Mohonk Savage,"[53] Carwin teaches himself to create another voice that issues from him and yet is not him. By this vocal act, he becomes fully himself, authoring himself, and locating authority in his will.

Rather than use the word "ventriloquism," Brown invented the word "biloquism" to suggest the doubling of a single voice. Bi-vocalism implies the possibility of mastering that which appears to be beyond one's control, as Kazanjian notes, rather than a gothic proliferation of voices. Brown describes biloquism as the success of the will over the body and he makes this will all-powerful: "…the will is capable of being rendered unlimited and absolute" (187). "Biloquism" evokes therefore the creation of a new character through will alone, an act that represents the performance of fluidity free from

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[52] I will explore this idea at length in Chapter two.

[53] In his essay Kazanjian explores the significance of the "Mohonk Savage" as the voice Carwin assimilates which Kazanjian points out lays bare white settler colonialism's use of the colonized subject as the object to pass aesthetic judgment on and/or assimilate, judgments that create the identifying terms of modern citizenship in their delineation of modern from traditional.

the confining shackles of embodiment. Carwin stresses that it is the *concept* of another who is still himself that motivates him to perfect his biloquism, to move from hearing the echo to controlling the projection of his voice: "To hear my own voice speak at a distance would have been formerly regarded as prodigious. To hear too, that voice not uttered by another, by whom it might easily be mimicked, but by myself!" (187). His surprise at hearing his own voice echoed back at him, but now beyond the normal confines of the body, not easily locate-able, is the recognition of the power of creating and controlling another identity. And Carwin in the *Memoirs* does move from one singular identity to another in each episode of biloquism, suggesting the self is unstable and malleable, a Lockean blank slate.

V.

Carwin's biloquism foregrounds the power of a self without fixed embodiment; the echo provides agency and its concomitant pleasure. Yet this act, which allows Carwin his elective orphanhood, also produces a fragmented and adrift self. Carwin, whose motivations are based on judgment absent a moral center, can be read as a hostile figure. Against this threat, however, looms the more dangerous menace of moral judgment dictated solely by religion, as the murdering Theodore Wieland represents in *Wieland*. By juxtaposing these two characters, Brown prompts the reader to consider the place of the citizen's internalized moral judgment in a culture creating its own civic authority. In Brown's cultural moment, Enlightenment secularism competed with a surging revivalism to pose the question of whether it was more truthful to view the world through the lens of a set moral code, as Wieland did, or as an individual matter, like Carwin. The word

"tradition" etymologically comes from "traditus" or "a handing down," a symbol of embodiment; Carwin's creation of a voice free of his body is an analog of liberty from the shackles of tradition.

Carwin's freedom from tradition reflects both the turning away from religion and turning toward order that categorized late Enlightenment thinking. The danger of a free-floating self, defined by individual liberty (or lack thereof), was counterbalanced by the systematizing of knowledge with mechanism as its guiding metaphor. A mechanical view of the universe and body greatly influenced the way the founding fathers conceptualized the relationship between the autonomy of the individual and the polity, as well as each state within the new nation: as discrete parts within a greater machine. Mechanistic imagery was also deployed to represent the politics of republicanism, imbuing the vocabulary of republicanism with ideas of stability and social control.[54] John Adams famously described the colonies as wholly aligned machines: "Thirteen clocks were made to strike together -- a perfection of mechanism, which no artist had ever before effected."[55] When considering education after Independence Benjamin Rush wrote: "From the observations that have been made it is plain that I consider it as possible to convert men into republican machines. This must be done if we expect them to perform their parts properly in the great machine of the government of the state."[56] Kazanjian notes that Carwin's experiments with biloquism can be seen as a scientific effort to impose order on the natural state of his body. Carwin uses the tools of inquiry to master

[54] Paul Gilmore, "Republican Machines and Brackenridge's Caves: Aesthetics and Models of Machinery in the Early Republic," *Early American Literature* Vol. 39, Iss. 2 (2004): 299-323.
[55] John Adams to H. Niles, 13 February 1818.
[56] John Adams to H. Niles, 13 February 1818.

the mechanical excesses of his form in order to undo the specificity and recognizability of his identity. Brown links the scientific success of authority over bodily mechanism with the ability to self-fashion.

After Carwin discovers his ability, Brown has him return home and then, at night, sneak back out to the "vocal glen" where he comments he "first gave myself up to contemplation, and the perusal of Milton's Comus" (186). His "reflections" then lead him to try and recreate the echo: "From speculation I proceeded to experiment" (187).[57] Carwin somehow comes up with the idea, from the accident of the echo combined with reading Milton's "Comus," (which I will come back to) to make his body create another voice, or turn a natural occurrence into a skill. There is an imaginative leap here, one that Carwin himself acknowledges in the absence of connection from one idea to the next when he writes, "I cannot now recollect the transition which led me to the notions of sounds, similar to these, but produced by other means than reverberation. Could I not so dispose my organs as to make my voice appear at a distance?" (187). Carwin's language of empirical discovery and experiment imply that this imaginative leap is borne out of the Enlightenment's faith in the power of the human will to discern the order within, and make useful, that found in nature. Thus Carwin takes this empirical discovery and turns it back around— he uses his will to turn the natural into what appears to be the supernatural.

Carwin goes on to note, with a tone of wonder and awe, that his "faculty" is not common but that may be the result of a lack of application; all people possess wills potentially able to overcome bodily limitations. He says,

[57] I am indebted to David Kazanjian's article for the idea of Carwin as scientist.

> It cannot be denied that this faculty is wonderful and rare, but when we consider the possible modifications of muscular motion, how few of these are usually exerted, how imperfectly they are subjected to the will, and yet that the will is capable of being rendered unlimited and absolute, will not our wonder cease? (187)

While this statement begins with a democratic sentiment suggesting that the "faculty" of biloquism may be learned by all who seek to control the body, it quickly moves into the larger arena of human will as an instrument of power. By using the language of monarchic authority, "unlimited" and "absolute," Carwin suggests the broader parallel of self-government and government. He excels at self-mastery, and through the power of his will gains self-possession grounded in his ability to govern his body. Brown proposes, from Carwin's point of view, biloquism as an act of agency borne out of empirical discovery. The reader, however, cannot help but see Carwin as defined by a natural ability to influence others through his will. Framed in terms of power, this description of Carwin's faculty begs the question of his plans for his new authority and implies the danger of influence. What does the individual who self-consciously possesses "unlimited" and "absolute" power do within the public and private spheres? Carwin's description leads the reader to questions of self-interest, as if Brown were testing the balance between individualism and republican ideas of civic interdependence.

When considered against these political concepts, it seems that Brown intended Carwin's narrative as an exploration of the cultural anxieties underlying the inexplicable violence in *Wieland*. The ambiguity of Carwin's motivations, a mystery to himself, suggests the problematic and central role of self-interest in a culture inventing its own structures of civic authority. Early modern republicanism borrowed from classical republicanism the idea that an individual's pursuit of self-interest is contained within the

framework of positive liberty, the freedom to act, made possible by the public sphere of citizens concerned with civic virtue. In contrast, the nascent vocabulary of liberalism defined liberty in negative terms, as the absence of barriers. Historians generally argue that the tradition of classical republicanism begins with Aristotle, then Machiavelli, Harrington and the Commonwealthmen, and finally becomes the legacy of eighteenth-century Britain and its colonies.[58] While Aristotle and Harrington are mentioned explicitly in the "Memoirs of Carwin," Machiavelli is critically implicit, as we shall come to see. On American shores, classical republicanism was reframed as a tension between individual rights and republican civic-mindedness. These vocabularies suggested a precarious balance that threatened to upset democracy before it was constitutionally put in place. The backcountry rebellions of the 1760s from the Paxton Riots[59] through the Shays Rebellion demonstrated the danger of democracy. It was the rebellious mob that Hamilton referred to when he argued that an aristocratic hierarchy was necessary to help the mass of people determine right. Thus, the balance between "independence and inter-dependence," as Duncan Faherty writes,[60] structured every aspect of American life including issues of political party, religion, economy, domesticity, sentiment, and networks of affiliation.

VI.

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[58] Lance Banning, "Jefferson Ideology Revisited: Liberal and Classical Ideas in the New American Republic," *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 43, No. 1 (Jan, 1986): 11.
[59] Ed White,"Carwin the Peasant Rebel," in *Revising Charles Brockden Brown*, edited by Philip Barnard, Mark L. Kamrath, and Stephen Shapiro (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2004). White notes that *Wieland* takes place during the Paxton Riots and reads the novel through this prism.
[60] Duncan Faherty, Remodeling the Nation: The Architecture of American Identity, 1776-1858 (University of New England Press, 2007).

The precariousness of this balance is nowhere better represented, and nowhere more telling, than in Carwin's search for meaningful and pleasurable labor. His break from his yeoman past leaves him as un-tethered as his voice, able to make use of his time and labor as he desires. And what does Carwin choose? Unlike Benjamin Franklin, who chose and proposed unceasing labor (both of and on the self) Carwin would rather be a dependent, reliant on others. He does not desire independence, for he would have to work for it. It is as if Brown suggests that the sons of those who fought for the Independence of the colonies, Brown's own generation, would take their liberty for granted.

On the other hand, one can easily read Carwin's desire for freedom from labor as part of his quest for self-determination. It doesn't appear to be laziness or stupidity that prevents Carwin from finding a means to support himself, but a desire for a life not determined by the market, where one's actions are not governed by the necessity of exchange. He is content to live off the means of his aunt, as if she is his patron, and when she dies leaving him nothing he tell us:

> Confiding in the acquisition of my aunt's patrimony, I had made no other provision for the future; I hated manual labor, or any task of which the object was gain. To be guided in my choice of occupations by any motive but the pleasure which the occupation was qualified to produce, was intolerable to my proud, indolent, and restive temper." (195)

This is the key to Carwin's character: he desires a patrimony so he will not have to labor. It is not only that he wants to enjoy his labor, but that he desires his labor to be free from any monetary value whatsoever, or "any task of which the object was gain." Therefore Brown complicates reading Carwin's character as a simple speculator, interested in making money without labor.

Carwin's consideration of labor apart from gain is quite unusual for his time. Regarded as the means to an egalitarian society, labor was an extremely loaded concept. Between the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 Americans fiercely debated economy in terms of its moral effects. Alexander Hamilton's plans for a national bank and national debt were objected to by Jefferson and Madison on moral grounds.[61] Republicanism, especially Jeffersonian Republicanism, saw the formation of the United States as an opportunity to create an economy inherently different from the British system. The new republic would fashion a virtuous citizenry through its abundance of land, which citizens would make productive through labor. Consequently labor, and specifically manual labor, became the cornerstone of republicanism. Though republicans in the 1790s, and especially Jeffersonian republicans, have been represented as opposed to mercantilism, historians now generally agree that they wished to restrict a full-scale commercial manufacturing revolution in favor of the free trade of surpluses with other nations.[62] Clearly imagined in Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, the virtuous citizenry made up of educated yeoman farmers, a "universally propertied people,"[63] would produce the raw materials for trade with other nations. In the post-war debates about the economy, labor was seen as a cure for and prevention of "luxury," the byproduct of mercantilism regarded as both infectious and corrupting.

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[61] The economic crisis of 1785-6, in which Britain's blockade of free trade with the West Indies caused a trade imbalance where imports exceeded exports, initiated calls to halt foreign trade in order to stave off the danger of luxury and intensified the discussion of manufacturing and morality.
[62] Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (New York: Norton, 1980).
[63] McCoy, 119.

The republican economic ideal of homespun labor, in which one's labor was equated with tangible monetary gain, was opposed to the terrifying specter of a credit economy. Before the Napoleonic Wars brought an economic boom to the US, the first three years of the 1790s saw a continuation of the previous decade's financial panic. With prosperity came fear of speculation, based on the changing market and the distrust of credit. Against Hamilton's Federalist blueprint, Jefferson argued that bank notes, without basis on the gold standard or actual specie, were illusory. The speculator became a symbol of this new threat, suspicious for the incommensurability between his labor and its gain.[64]

Carwin's free-floating voice embodies the groundlessness of the credit economy, based on paper notes and inclusive of bankruptcy. Thomas Paine wrote, ''[g]old and silver are the emissions of nature; paper is the emission of art. . . . [P]aper issued by an assembly as money . . . is like putting an apparition in the place of a man; it vanishes with looking at it, and nothing remains but the air.''[65] Carwin's actions to distance himself from his past and family, and to substitute the projection of voice, are linked to his attempts to create a selfhood independent of labor. He desires a patrimony rather than advancement through merit. But I do not think Brown casts Carwin as a speculator out for capital gain. His character is more complicated than a simple anti-bank critique. Carwin desires to take advantage of a system where social relations are not set, but in the absence of fixed social hierarchies, he is forced to turn to the marketplace to find his

[64] David Anthony, "Banking on Emotion: Financial Panic and the Logic of Male Submission in the Jacksonian Gothic," *American Literature* Vol. 76, No. 4 (2004): 720-747.
[65] Thomas Paine, ''Dissertations on Government; the Affairs of the Bank; and Paper Money,'' *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Moncure Daniel Conway, 4 vols. (1786; reprint, New York: Burt Franklin, 1969), 2:176.

place. His ambivalence about the idea of equating labor with monetary value, and of accepting an identity linked to that labor, speaks to anxiety about selfhood and the market.[66] Carwin's character contends with the cultural pull toward what would eventually be called a "liberal" subjectivity,[67] or a sense of selfhood based on self-regulating and free market ideas privileging individual liberty.

Brown imbricates labor, gain and pleasure in such a way that Carwin's artifice begins to suggest the qualities of art. Though he produces no tangible art and nowhere claims an ambition to do so, his desire to labor for pleasure rather than gain can be seen to mimic the role of an artist, and at least one influential critic has read Carwin this way.[68] Carwin's own self-creation, his projections of identity, provide him and his listeners with aesthetic pleasure. As he masters his "faculty" it becomes central to his relations with others, coming to increasingly define him. Biloquism and the creation of new identities are Carwin's only meaningful pursuit and labor—his art. David Hume, whose name is mentioned later in the fragment as an author in the library of Ludloe, contended that fine

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[66] Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). Michaels claims that late nineteenth century capitalism changed the nature of subjectivity as the self became a commodity in the marketplace, one embodying its own self-possession. Michaels looks to the money controversies of the period between the Civil War and World War I and the idea of the self as a commodity or market relation developed through consumer capitalism to explain the literary genre naturalism. These subjects are just beginning to surface in the period in which Charles Brockden Brown wrote, incipient but deeply embedded in the novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Carwin's dilemma in his *Memoirs* is as much about the problem of the symbolic aspect of money for labor as Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* will be over one hundred years later.
[67] Steven Watts discusses "liberal subjectivity" in *The Romance of the Real*, though liberal was not used in this particular way until after Brown's time.
[68] Jay Fliegelman, "Introduction,"*Wieland* and *Memoirs of Carwin* by Charles Brockden Brown (New York: Penguin Classics, 1991).

art is the only labor whose goal is pleasure.[69] Hume's aesthetic theory, a precursor to and influence on Kant, parallels the moral and aesthetic faculties and suggests that it is sentiment that allows for judgment. However, Brown raises the issue of valuing moral and aesthetic tastes in a capitalist economy where such qualities have no exchange worth. If one views Carwin as an artist, then one can read his desire for an adopted parent who will pay his way as a yearning for a system of aristocratic patronage, which leaves the artist independent of the market.

While I hesitate to psychoanalyze Charles Brockden Brown, it would be remiss not to mention that his letters reveal these anxieties were close at hand for the man who left a career in law to pursue writing.[70] Brown wrote a letter to his friend William Wood Wilkins in late 1791 in which he casts labor as incongruous with happiness, and especially with intellectual freedom:

> [A]ll happiness on earth is transitory. This blissful period of intellectual liberty will speedily expire. Thou wilt quickly be obliged to combat with disaster and to wrestle with adversity. Thy patrimony will be nothing: The labour of thy hands, or which is yet severer drudgery, of thy understanding must furnish thee with food and raiment. Whither will then thy airy purposes, thy fleeting and elusive joys be gone?"[71]

With the phrase "Thy patrimony will be nothing" Brown concretizes absence in the idea of an inheritance that will not serve its purpose, leaving only a sense of orphanhood and vulnerability.

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[69] Ted Gracyk, "Hume's Aesthetics", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2006 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2006/entries/hume-aesthetics/>.
[70] David Lee Clark, *Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America*, (New York: AMS Press, 1966).
[71] Verhoeven, W.M, "*This blissful period of intellectual liberty":* Transatlantic Radicalism and Enlightened Conservatism in Brown's Early Writings," in *Revising Charles Brockden Brown*, edited by Philip Barnard, Mark L. Kamrath, and Stephen Shapiro (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 7.

Carwin's search for an identity independent of the market takes the form of a quest for patrimony. As Faherty explains while discussing Brown's novel *Edgar Huntly*,[72] his novels often represent the hunt for a patrimony as a common American tale for young men, causing them to leave home and venture into the wilderness to find their fortunes. These young men are cast as speculators, and Carwin both does and does not fit this mold. Elective orphanhood is the strategy he adopts to achieve the goal of independence from the marketplace. Free to be adopted by a wealthy parent figure, he relies first on his aunt, who dies without leaving him her estate, and then on the Irishman Ludloe, who appears willing to be his wealthy benefactor while demanding very little. Carwin notes that though he had none of the duties of a child, he "enjoyed the privileges of a son" (203), living in Ludloe's home, traveling together, and being tutored. Though we learn that Ludloe had met Carwin when he was practicing throwing his voice, and Brown suggests that Ludloe wishes to use Carwin's biloquial abilities, Carwin seems to believe that Ludloe knows nothing of his powers.

Ludloe takes him to Europe, and on the voyage there, as Carwin attempts to figure out his relation to his benefactor and the extent of his wealth, they discuss Carwin's future. Ludloe explains that Carwin is "due" his generosity, much as a father would support a son. Carwin explains: "His aid would be proportioned to my wants and to my merits, and I had only to take care that my claims were just, for them to be admitted" (199). Carwin seeks counsel from Ludloe as to his future plans: "Without profession or habits of industry or sources of permanent revenue, the world appeared to me an ocean on which my bark was set afloat without compass or sail" (200). Carwin presents himself as

[72] Duncan Faherty, *Remodeling the Nation: The Architecture of American Identity, 1776-1858*, University of New England Press, 2007.

one “unwilling to rely on the support of others” (200) though Brown indicates that this is exactly his desire. They discuss and dismiss “the liberal professions” as venal and the “mechanical trades” as “contributing to the spurious gratifications of the rich and multiplying the objects of luxury” (200) as well as being degenerative to the mind. Carwin notes, “When I pointed out to him the necessity of some species of labour, he tacitly admitted the necessity, but refused to direct me in the choice of a pursuit, which though not free from defect should yet have the fewest inconveniences” (201). Ludloe, like Carwin, eschews labor, but proposes that Carwin first learn how to impersonate a Spaniard to gain the knowledge necessary for his future means. Impersonation, then, is the trade Carwin is to learn. All of the forays into metamorphosis lead him toward a path where he will use his ability to reinvent himself. Despite his desire to create an identity outside of the market, the reader imagines he will eventually be led to manipulate others for material gain.

At this point Carwin, in his narration, suspects that the reader is beginning to mistrust Ludloe and goes out of his way to exculpate him, calling him a “eulogist of sincerity”[73] (204) and possessing “a judgment incapable of bias” (204). As he explains the finer points of Ludloe’s moral philosophy, the reader comes to understand that Ludloe is a con artist with a forceful rhetoric. His extremely radical views about progress and labor bring issues of self-interest and duty to the foreground, which Ludloe tantalizingly reconciles into one aggrandized ideology in which “duty” includes exploiting others for the common good. He tutors Carwin in “virtue,” twisting the republican duty of civic virtue, where one brackets self-interest for the public good, to the notion that because

[73] William Godwin, *Political Justice*, bk. 4.

“men in their actual state, are infirm and deceitful, a just estimate of consequences may sometimes make dissimulation [a] duty” (204). This view of human nature, more in line with the Christian view of human nature as fallen, appears to contradict the Enlightenment faith in man’s rationality. However, Ludloe begins to sound Godwinian when he points to economic and social inequality as the result of human nature; he explains to Carwin that, “The absurd and unequal distribution of power and property gave birth to poverty and riches, and these were the sources of luxury and crimes” (206). Ludloe desires to dissolve all structures of authority, including government and family, to promote individual liberty. His rhetoric is revolutionary, but it seems clear that he symbolizes excessive self-interest. He is a representation not of Godwinian philosophy though he talks of sincerity and aims to undermine cultural authority, but of anti-Jacobin fears of such ideology after the excesses of the French Revolution.

Ludloe’s views on family, for example, illustrate that he happily subverts all societal structures in the name of “rational independence and liberty” (201). He sees family as comprising “artificial ties” that need to be “dissolved” so that one may select one’s own companions, though he does not believe in companionate love and calls it “the strongest of all human delusions” (218). Although he advocates dissolving the nuclear family, he suggests toward the end of the fragment that Carwin wed for money, taking advantage of the institution he categorizes as a “contract of servitude” (217). He goes on to explain that Carwin will have “absolute power over the liberty and person” of his wealthy wife, his “slave” (217). Ludloe describes marriage and women’s rights in terms of property, similar to British Jacobin writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft. But he then

proposes that Carwin exploit this acknowledged inequity to gain the patrimony he desires so ardently. In presenting this possibility to Carwin, Ludloe tells him:

> You may set your understanding or your hands at work. You may weave stockings, or write poems, and exchange them for money; but these are tardy and meager schemes. The means are disproportioned to the end, and I will not suffer you to pursue them. (215-6)

As in Brown's letter to Wilkins, the "hands" or the "understanding," meaning physical or mental labor, must be a means of support. Here Ludloe devalues Carwin's pursuits and suggests that his skills do not count for much on the market. Tellingly, he describes these skills as "means" whose exchange value, or "ends," is not correctly appraised. But "means" and "ends" are terms usually called on to describe the uses of power in moral and political discourse. To say that Carwin's laboring "means" and "ends" will never be balanced suggests that Carwin has no tenable place within the market because all valuation of the self and the self's productions are ultimately only worth what they can be exchanged for. Carwin fears the commodification of his subjectivity. Therefore, as Ludloe suggests, he has no option but to exploit someone even more vulnerable, a woman. Ludloe's proposal is telling in that it lays bare the roles of self-interest, power and the market in the constellation of identity.

Clearly referencing Niccolo Machiavelli's famous motto, "The ends justify the means," Brown makes clear that the idea of "virtue" is a slippery concept vulnerable to self-interest. Machiavelli's concept of "virtú," opposed in meaning to Godwinian and republican ideas of civic virtue, suggests that flexibility, especially in terms of morality, is the best strategy to maintain power. Some critics read Machiavelli's *The Prince* as an ironic concept of virtue, especially in light of his clear statement of civic-humanist

republicanism founded on public speech and debate.[74] By using Machiavelli's rhetoric, Brown contextualizes Ludloe's manipulations within the historical register of the republican tradition, reminding us of its strengths and vulnerabilities while also hinting at the possible irony in his own narrative.

Carwin's biloquism, which at first seemed merely to fulfill his need for pleasure apart from any consideration of work, changes under the influence of Ludloe. The "Memoirs" acts to explain and justify Carwin's behavior toward the Wielands. Brown suggests that Carwin wrote it after their disastrous encounter, though it describes the years before he met them. Carwin writes to an unidentified "you," which I believe is Clara Wieland, and perhaps also her husband, Henry Pleyel.[75] Carwin refers to his intended audience only once, referencing the events in *Wieland*. "I shall not pretend to ascertain my rank in the moral scale. Your notions of duty differ widely from mine…What has happened to yourselves may enable you, in some degree, to judge of the scenes in which my mystical exploits engaged me" (205). Whereas he previously stressed the purposelessness of his biloquism, Carwin's intentions here appear to arise out of a sense of "duty" utterly absent before his adoption by Ludloe. He sees his biloquism as a tool to promote his own secular beliefs, fulfilling the Enlightenment tasks of demysification and progress. He writes about his exploits as a Spanish impostor, "They were designed as mere specimens of power, to illustrate the influence of superstition; to give skeptics the consolation of certainty: to annihilate the scruples of a tender female, or facilitate my access to the bosoms of courtiers and monks" (205). Thus his actions are, by

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[74] In Machiavelli's companion to *The Prince, The Discourses on the First Decase of Titus Livius*. http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/10827.

[75] At the end of *Wieland*, Clara marries fellow character Pleyel and they move to England.

his new standards, morally pure because "duty" for Carwin involves "deceit" for the higher purpose of "love of truth" (205). With this rhetoric, Carwin parrots Ludloe's teachings. Brown suggests that Carwin remains a cipher, an empty self.

Ludloe, who will return at the end of *Wieland* to accuse Carwin of misdeeds, not only represents what cultural conservatives in the 1790s saw as the dangers of Godwinian philosophy, but is perhaps the ultimate figure of conspiratorial threat: a member of the Bavarian Illuminati, a secret organization with plans to infiltrate and take over world governments. The Illuminati were blamed for starting the French Revolution, and in the height of Federalist conspiracy fervor, Vice President Jefferson was accused of being a member. The group supposedly used utopian rhetoric to create populist Revolutionary converts.[76] As Bryan Waterman in *The Republic of Intellect* explains, Brown and his fellow Friendly Club members Elihu Smith and William Dunlap were highly influenced by Godwin and perceived the Bavarian Illuminati threat as the conspiracy theory that it was, but their close Friendly Club associates, Jedediah Morse, as well as brothers Theodore and Timothy Dwight, were responsible for leading the religious anti-Jacobin and anti-Illuminati campaign of the late 1790s. The Dwights, relying on the transatlantic flow of information, preached that the anti-clerical Bavarian society had gone underground and had already infiltrated key centers of cultural authority in the United States. It is clear that Brown was thinking of the Illuminati when he composed Carwin's *Memoirs* because his friend William Dunlap noted in his diary in 1798 that Brown was

[76] This specific idea of the Illuminati comes out of John Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe, carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies*, (Dublin, 1798), which was one of the most widely read texts on the Illuminati in the US, and which was read and discussed by Friendly Club members, as Bryan Waterman relates.

working on a sequel to *Wieland* in which he had "taken up the schemes of the Illuminati."[77] The latter half of the fragment is focused on Ludloe's attempt to enlist Carwin into this secret society with promises of god-like power and utopian rhetoric, though he never uses the word "Illuminati."

While pondering Ludloe's secret utopian scheme, Carwin explores Ludloe's private library looking for "some marks of [his] friend's character" (223). He tells us:

> A translation of Aristotle's republic,[78] the political romances of sir Thomas Moore, Harrington, and Hume, appeared to have been much read, and Ludloe had not been sparing of his marginal comments. In these writers he appeared to find nothing but error and absurdity; and his notes were introduced for no other end than to point out groundless principles and false conclusion… (223)

These particular texts, all foundational sources of republicanism, point toward the utopian possibilities of republican ideology; one can guess by his annotations that Ludloe is conversant with, but generally opposed to the ideas they stand for. Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* foregrounds an ideal government based on communism, religious toleration and education for both men and women, and Sir James Harrington's *Oceana* recasts a romanticized Cromwell as leader of a classical republic. These texts are mentioned to provide insight into the character of Ludloe who has imbibed the tradition of republicanism only to exploit its flaws to his advantage. In addition, they lead the reader back to the most famous of republican writers, Milton, and a text mentioned earlier, his masque *Comus*.[79]

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[77] Clark, 169.

[78] While Brown clearly means Plato's *Republic*, he attributes the text to Aristotle, which may be an error or another evocation of the Greek origins of classical republicanism.

[79] That the name Ludloe, sometimes spelled Ludlow in Brown's text, was the name of a well-known English Republican of the Interregnum, a colleague of Milton's; as "Comus" is the text Carwin reads and ponders while he develops his biloquism, we can assume this is a reference. John Milton, "Comus," *The Complete Poetry of John Milton* (ed. John T.

VII.

While critical attention has been given to Carwin's imitation of a "Mohonk" while learning to ventriloquize, *Comus* has not received similar consideration, though republican texts were evidently on Brown's mind. *Comus* provides a key to understanding the way self-interest is simultaneously actuated and problematized by Carwin's biloquism. It is the first text mentioned in the memoir, and perhaps most importantly, it is what Carwin reads in the woods between discovering his echo and mastering the ability to ventriloquize. While the power of the voice's natural echo is discovered while imitating a "Mohonk" Indian, his mastery of vocal projection comes only after the "perusal" and "contemplation" of this text. These words suggest Carwin's biloquism is developed alongside his formation of ideas of self-interest.

Like Carwin when he finds himself in an echo chamber and discovers his gift, *Comus* describes a young female virgin's journey alone through the wilderness, separated from her family and tempted by Comus, who is the offspring of the lascivious Bacchus and Circe. In order to test her virtue, or chastity, Milton wrests her first from her parents, and then her brothers, who are charged with her safekeeping. This symbolic orphaning is a plot device, but it also allows the brothers to debate their trust in virtue. The elder brother views the world with overconfident moral certitude; in other words, the just are protected by god and those with bad intentions are punished. He therefore believes his

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Shawcross, New York: Doubleday, 1963, 1971) 124-153. All further references to "Comus" will be cited parenthetically in the chapter.

sister in no danger because he knows the strength of her chastity.[80] The younger brother, on the other hand, suggests to him the incommensurability of intentions and outcomes by acknowledging the virgin's dangerous position alone in the woods. In a sense, the elder brother's fixed moral code is vulnerable because it is based on faulty epistemological premises, much like Theodore Wieland's. The younger brother, similar to Carwin, acknowledges that a fixed moral code does not serve as protection. One can trace a line of influence from Milton, to Godwin, to Brown emphasizing the reader's involvement through conflicting viewpoints that propose the work of reconciling different and limited perspectives. While appearing to offer a neat conclusion on a surface reading, *Comus* contains within it a key debate on the nature of self-interest.

While her brothers debate, the virgin is confronted by Comus who disguises himself as a shepherd and offers to help her to safety though he leads her to his palace of temptation. The "rabble" joining them there is made up of people who have devolved into a sensuous and earthly existence in the woods, symbolized by their animal-like visages. When the virgin sees where she has been led and by whom, she rejects Comus and his banquets, whose entrapments are useless to a "well-governed and wise appetite" (l. 704). Comus attempts to sway the virgin with rational arguments portraying Nature as the ultimate article of consumption, for communal enjoyment. By treating beauty as property, as "coin," he extends his argument to her person, treating the self as property (which Locke would later do, as Brown perhaps knows). He tells her:

> List lady be not coy, and be not cozened
> With that same vaunted name virginity,

[80] The elder brother notes in lines 592-598 that evil and goodness do not mix, or else "The pillared firmament is rottenness, / And earth's base build on stubble" (597-8) suggesting that his ideas of good and evil are wholly black and white.

> Beauty is Nature's coin, must not be hoarded,
> But must be current, and the good thereof
> Consists in mutual and partaken bliss,
> Unsavoury in the enjoyment of itself
> If you let slip time, like a neglected rose
> It withers on the stalk with languished head. (ll. 736-43)

The Virgin responds with an argument of her own:

> Imposter do not charge most innocent Nature,
> As if she would her children should be riotous
> With her abundance she good cateress
> Means her provisions only to the good
> That live according to her sober laws,
> And holy dictate of spare temperance:
> If every just man that now pines with want
> Had but a moderate and beseeming share
> Of that which lewdly-pampered Luxury
> Now heaps upon some few with vast excess,
> Nature's full blessings would be well-dispensed
> In unsuperfluous even proportion,
> And she no whit encumbered with her store,
> And then the giver would be better thanked," (ll. 761-774).

Her argument slyly turns a courtly masque, a form used for aristocratic entertainment, into a republican text in a number of ways. Virtue is both chastity and a bracketing of self-interest through the equal division of property, "unsuperfluous even proportion." In her equation, those who have temperance have civic-virtue, the quality needed for greater equality; the virgin lays out terms for citizenship based on collectivity. In that moment she points out the flaw in Comus' concept of collective consumption, which is that it mimics aristocratic privilege, and is only possible with Comus acting the Lord in his palace. It is no mistake that she earlier rejected Comus' temptations as unpleasant to a "well-governed and wise appetite" (l. 704)—the appetite, or self-interest, is to be regulated to allow for a more just government of the civic body. This argument is one of the core staples of republican ideology as brought into the American context from the

commonwealth tradition, built into the division of the public sphere from the private in the federal period.

Yet, though her argument is so convincing Comus shudders with fear, the lady is somehow turned into stone. The virgin, from master of her body, becomes its prisoner,[81] in which she is: "In stony fetters fixed, and motionless;" (l. 818). This change in state was caused by either violation or her temptation, and is an index of her loss of power. She trusted her senses in following the disguised Comus, suggesting her moral chastity is vulnerable through the fallen medium of her body. Her brothers rush to save her, but they cannot; she can only be rescued by an outside, supernatural power, the goddess of the river Sabrina. Comus escapes unpunished. Her return to life through Sabrina's help belies the primary change in her state. Good and evil did not mix without consequence, as the elder brother earlier contended.[82] The resolution is unsettling—we are all vulnerable to the consequences of others' self-interest, not to mention our own. The poem asks whether human nature is rational or fallen, and if both, on which qualities should government be based? The forces of market, as well as the reality of (gendered) embodiment, impinge upon us no matter our reason and argument.

That Brown was thinking of appetite or self-interest when using *Comus* is suggested by his mention of the poem in an early unfinished and unpublished epistolary novel composed of letters by a character named "CBB" to Henrietta, his love.[83] The character CBB twice refers to *Comus* as a text he attempts to read but can't because of the overpowering temptation to dream of his beloved. He cannot read *Comus* because he

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[81] This is why she is often read as a symbol of the soul.
[82] See note 40.
[83] These were thought to be real letters copied into his journals but are now generally accepted as fictional.

is busy fantasizing, but also because *Comus* is itself about tempting a beautiful young virgin through imposture, in other words, about appetite and self-interest.

Read against *Comus*, Carwin's experience in the wilderness can teach him two ways of thinking of nature: as temptation to gratify the appetite or as an opportunity to apply a rational and just system of use, rejecting personal gain through exploitation. The contradiction is that Comus' model appears, on the surface, to celebrate collectivity through the sharing of property while the virgin's allows her, and her property, to remain discrete and inviolable. It is why Carwin is attracted to Ludloe's schemes but refuses to admit his secret talent despite the conditions placed on his absolute honesty. The last ten pages of the memoir describe the secret society's initiation ritual of confession, where Carwin's honesty is required "*without exception or condition*" (228). Though he desires a part in Ludloe's scheme, for which he is promised a kind of monarchical power, he admits: "Some fatal obstinacy, however, got possession of me, and I persisted in the resolution of concealing *one thing*" (229). As the virgin's beauty is called "coin," Carwin's biloquism is his dearest property, and because this property is the ground for his subjectivity, he is then put in the awkward position of exploiting himself for gain. He refuses to do this, and we are reminded of his refusal to work for a living, to participate in the market economy. Carwin's desire for pleasure and gratification and simultaneous rejection of the rules of the market explain why his motives in his memoir, and even more so in *Wieland,* are difficult to pin down—and why, against all odds, he avoids becoming the villain of *Wieland*.

Like Milton, Brown offers the reader no easy resolution but implies that moral judgment benefits from reconciling conflicting ideas, or a refusal to view any singular

perspective as complete in itself. As the reunion with her family seemingly nullifies the virgin's symbolic orphaning, Carwin's elective orphanhood is too only temporary. We find out at the end of *Wieland* from the narrator Clara that Carwin has returned to "a remote district of Pennsylvania" where he "is probably engaged in the harmless pursuits of agriculture." She adds, "The innocence and usefulness of his future life may, in some degree, atone for the miseries so rashly or so thoughtfully inflicted" (177). It appears that sometime after composing his memoir, Carwin has returned home. By becoming a Jeffersonian yeoman, he chooses the virgin's model, but only after he has revealed it to be thoroughly contrary to his, and by extension, humanity's pleasure-seeking nature. He finds that in order to be free from an identity determined by the market, he must use its exploitative power relations for his own self-interest.

Brown wrote Carwin's narrative in order to clarify and multiply the sources of instability that destroy the domestic bliss of *Wieland*. His self-fashioning through the doubling of voice problematizes a national narrative of autogenesis. By exploring the deeper social forces at work in the desire for elective orphanhood, Carwin embodies the vacuum created in the absence of civic authority only to find the market, taking its place, has already determined his path. He can embody the instability that so defines his time, but in the end it defines him.

Still, the power of Carwin's aesthetic experience was such that Brown went on to delve further into the connections between morality and the imagination in his following novels. In *Arthur Mervyn*, explored in the next chapter, Brown creates another elective orphan engaged with the vicissitudes of aesthetic experience.

Chapter Two

Arthur Mervyn and the Aesthetics of Elective Orphanhood

> "Every tie which had bound me to[home] was dissolved or converted into something which repelled me to a distance from it."—Charles Brockden Brown, *Arthur Mervyn*[84]

I.

From the time he sets out on his own from the countryside, after being disinherited by his father and his new step-mother, Charles Brockden Brown's eponymous hero of *Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793* (1799) sees himself as an elective orphan. Borrowing a trope common to Revolutionary writing, the loosening of kindred bonds becomes the means by which Mervyn gains the liberty of autogenesis. The above passage echoes Paine's *Common Sense*: "Nature hath deserted the connection, and Art cannot supply her place" (34) and suggests a palpable agency that Mervyn articulates a few pages later: "Now, said I, I am mounted into man. I must build a name and a fortune for myself" (20). Much as Paine and Jefferson write it, this self-authorizing

[84] Charles Brockden Brown, *Arthur Mervyn, or Memoirs of the Year 1793 with related texts* (1799), edited by Philip Barnard and Stephen Shapiro. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2008, 17. All further references will be cited parenthetically in the chapter.

agency is accompanied by a feeling of woundedness that Mervyn also articulates, "I am poor. I am destitute of fame and kindred. I have nothing to console me in obscurity and indigence, but the approbation of my own heart and the good opinion of those who know me as I am" (264). The elective orphan's oscillation between a sense of being an actor and being acted upon accompanies the repeated experience of self-fashioning, propelling him through a corrupt market system, and determining not only Mervyn's choices but also the way one reads and understands his moral judgment.[85]

The eponymous protagonist finds his identity transformed over and over again through his absorption into different households as he wanders between the country outside Philadelphia and the city during the Yellow Fever epidemic of 1793. The novel begins with the narration of Dr. Stevens, who recounts the story as Mervyn told it to him shortly after being rescued from death by Yellow Fever by Dr. Stevens and his wife. The tale moves from one implausible adventure to another through a series of interconnected sub-plots involving fraud, seduction, murder, and repeated scenes of finding fortunes and impetuously rescuing others. At the end, Mervyn takes over the role of narrator to wrap up the story with an utterly different kind of plot, that of falling in love with and arranging an unlikely match to an older Jewish widow named Ascha.

Each time Arthur Mervyn transforms his identity, he finds his emotions stray toward the limits of representation, an experience that comes to play a central role in his self-creation. His different identities transform him in that they provide him access to different societies, creating a kind of dynamic circulation,[86] which Mervyn claims permits

[85] Brown's "ethical sublime" was meant for readers of an early liberal society, but in my experience it remains relevant for readers today.
[86] The idea of circulation is central to Jane Tompkins reading of this novel, p. 68.

him to find new ideas which he tellingly calls "revolutions" of his mind. These "revolutions" dramatize the effects of a fluid monetary system and social fabric shaped increasingly by an emergent liberal capitalism rife with fraud, which the Philadelphia of the 1790s epitomized. As the largest city in the United States, and the location of Brown's family's own import-export business,[87] Philadelphia was a key part of an Atlantic and global trade network of the period. A corrupt mercantile system is represented in the novel as the means of the sudden gain and loss of family fortunes, forgery and bankruptcy.[88]

However, the changeable and unregulated mercantile system presents a field of possibilites for the elective orphan. Leslie Fielder, whose landmark *Love and Death in the American Novel* is partly responsible for reviving critical interest in Brown, credits him with creating a gothic tradition out of the materials of an American culture. Fielder discusses Brown's adaption of the European gothic convention where the supernatural is ultimately revealed as merely mechanical or disguise, explanations that, on the surface, act to dispel the power of the supernatural.[89] Fielder finds that in a number of his novels, Brown locates the inexplicable inside the human mind, and specifically inside the diseased mind. In my reading of *Arthur Mervyn*, however, Brown's approach is markedly

[87] For critical works that explore the ramifications of his father's and brothers' business, as well as their Quakerism: see Harry Redcay Warfel, *Charles Brockden Brown: American Gothic Novelist* (Octagon Books, 1974) and David Lee Clark, *Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America* (New York: AMS Press, 1966).
[88] Critics often attribute he vulnerability of the individual to market forces to the fact that Brown's father was put in debtor's prison.
[89] Brown's other novels reveal the inexplicable and otherworldly, gothic staples, to be a share of the human drama that science can partly enlighten for us. In *Wieland*, the multiple spirit voices that destabilize the minds of the characters turn out to be ventriloquism (which Brown calls biloquism). In *Edgar Huntly*, it is sleepwalking that propels the plot.

different.[90] The "marvelous" is not explained away through science as a disease, but is the condition out of which the protagonist can begin to make his way through the world: a fluidity of identity inherent to elective orphanhood. Repeatedly in the novel, Mervyn invokes some new relation to market participation by entering a new household, producing the sublime pleasure of self-fashioning as a break in consciousness. Brown brands the sublime as a hallmark of elective orphanhood by making each of Mervyn's social transformations an experience of sublimity.

It is not Mervyn's mind that is diseased, but everything else. The corrupt market culture he moves through is afflicted with a plague of Yellow Fever.[91] The market is imagined as the connective tissue between the individual and society, the greater system through which all the characters connect. As recent criticism has argued, the fever and mercantile corruption are parallel pestilences affecting the world of the novel through contagion.[92] Mervyn acts within a system whose roots in slavery contaminate ideas of valuation; the many subplots explore the effects of commercial exploitation leading back to fortunes gained through Caribbean slave labor, as Stephen Shapiro argues.[93] At the same time, however, Mervyn's changeable identity is engendered by this same commercial system, which allows for social fluidity for those (white male) characters able to take advantage of it.

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[90] There is, however, a terrifying dream that also summons the sublime for Arthur, later on in the novel (323).
[91] Brown had yellow fever in 1798, and his friend Dr. Elihu Hubbard Smith died of the disease while trying to nurse others back to health.
[92] The introduction to the 2008 edition of *Arthur Mervyn; or Memoirs of the Year 1793 with related texts* (1799) presents this as a central way of reading the text.
[93] As Stephen Shapiro argues in *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel: Reading the Atlantic World System*.

Mervyn confronts this exploitative world with "benevolence," an intent that acts like the plot's engine. Benevolence, as a republican mantra of the age, describes the rational act of civic virtue that would protect the nation against the vices of self-interest built into the system of commerce. The question of the changing economy's impact on morality was a highly debated topic of the time, and one personally relevant to Brown whose father and brothers were mercantile exporters.[94] Republican ideas of civic virtue were aligned against free market re-definitions of self-interest as necessary and vital components of moral action.[95] Mervyn selflessly and repeatedly rescues others from the dangers of a world structured by commerce; thus, his benevolence positions moral judgment and motivation at the center of the novel. He himself remarks,

> Good intentions, unaided by knowledge, will, perhaps, produce more injury than benefit, and therefore, knowledge must be gained, but the acquisition is not momentary; is not bestowed unasked and untoil'd for; meanwhile we must not be unactive because we are ignorant. Our good purposes must hurry to performance, whether our knowledge be greater or less. (242)

When he speaks these words, Mervyn has just committed the crime of breaking and entering into private, female domestic space in order to "rescue" a fallen woman named Clemenza, whom he suspects may be living in a whorehouse. He suggests that good intentions are enough to justify any action, no matter one's ignorance (hence Clemenza, though fallen, is deemed worth rescuing). If one's knowledge of the world is limited, and good intentions often lead to injury, on what ground are moral judgment and action based?

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[94] As Stephen Shapiro explains on p. 5, the 1790s was a period of transformation in the world-system of trade was in flux, in part because the French Revolution caused re-exporting to be a lucrative practice for the United States.
[95] Adam Smith in particular writes about self-interest in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as that which prohibits "carelessness' and "want of economy."

In this way, Brown asks his reader to consider how moral judgment, and therefore just action, occur within an emerging and corrupt market economy. He points to the reliance on benevolence and enlightened self-interest, two safeguards of the moral condition of the nation, as contingent upon agency. For Mervyn, acting within the social sphere is the ground of moral judgment—our actions toward one another must "hurry to performance." And yet, he also suggests that humans are often unaware of what motivates us in the first place, a point that Brown goes to great lengths to make in many of his novels. This focus on the mysterious arena of self, which I will return to, reverses the usual gothic formula of demystification. Instead, Brown works to reinscribe the imagination and mystery into the rational, and to posit their central place in reasoning and judgment. Brown deconstructs the binary of rationality and imagination in his essays, and creates, in *Arthur Mervyn*, a reading experience that uses aesthetic experience as a means to rationality and moral judgment. The aesthetic experience he privileges is a direct adjunct to the individual's fluidity of identity in terms of market relations—the sublimity of elective orphanhood. In order to unpack Brown's reconfiguration of the sublime, we will examine his ideas of rationality and the imagination, how they relate to the tradition of aesthetics Brown inherited, and the many examples of the sublime caused by self-fashioning, the hallmark of the elective orphan.

II.

Brown illustrates the pulling apart of this binary of rationality and imagination in his poetics of fiction, advanced in two essays, "Walstein's School of History: From the German of Krants of Gotha" and "The Difference Between History and Romance," both

published around the time of *Arthur Mervyn*'s publication (1799, 1800). In these essays writing provides an example of virtue deployed in the interest of mankind.[96] This republican idea of literature emphasized the civic virtue of writing, and was key to the Friendly Club's interest in establishing venues to bring the most advanced and current scientific and literary information to the public. In his essay, Brown describes the character of Walstein, a fictional professor of history, to philosophize on the nature of the writing as a progressive force. Walstein possesses the ability to imagine a "structure" or system to contain the myriad facts he observes. Brown conceives of a system as an imaginative construct that reveals laws upon which facts rest. A writer is like a physician or "moral reasoner" who finds: "No fact, falling within his observation, is useless or anomalous. All sensibly contribute to the symmetry and firmness of some structure which he is anxious to erect" (332). Brown goes on to show the importance of the imagination in disciplines generally thought of as factual; in effect he deconstructs the binary of history and romance, or fact and fiction.[97] According to Brown, by using narrative to link events, historians make use of the "affections" to connect and interpolate facts, making meaning from disparate bits of information. Thus writing done well, even the writing of history, can be considered romance. Associative sentiment and the imagination, then, are fundamental to disciplines that are usually defined against these more subjective faculties.

[96] We can see the influences of Godwin and Wollstonecraft in this Woldwinite conception of fiction. Woldwinite is a new term that combines their names—thanks to Barnard and Shapiro, editors of the 2008 edition of *Arthur Mervyn*, as stated in their introduction.
[97] By refusing this binary, Brown's ideas about romance are patently different than the later views of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James that will prompt Richard Chase's discussion of the romance as an American genre.

In “The Difference Between History and Romance” Brown further imbricates the categories of fact and fiction by pointing to the importance of imagination in the work of the greatest scientists of his day, Buffon, Linneus, and Hershel, calling them romancers as well as historians. A writer who deals in truths observes “appearances” while he who interprets, analyzes, arranges and compares them is necessarily making use of “probability” to create meaning. Therefore, “An historian will form catalogues of stars, and marks their positions at given times. A romancer will arrange them in clusters and dispose them in *strata*, and inform you by what influences the orbs have been drawn into sociable knots and circles” (“The Difference Between History and Romance” 341). In this example, Brown seems to suggest that systems, such as natural history, make sense of information by means of the imagination. Imagination is part of the scientific method, which proceeds by experiment in a process of educated guesswork. And here in theorizing romance as built on imaginative thinking, Brown explains that writing about the actions of men inherently involves guesswork about matters beyond the senses.

> Curiosity is not content with noting and recording the *actions* of men. It likewise seeks to know the *motives* by which the agent is impelled to the performance of these actions; but motives are modifications of thought which cannot be subjected to the senses” (342)

To this way of thinking, human motivation is the province of the romancer, who works with likelihood and possibility instead of information conveyed by the senses. The novel writer makes meaning by using the imagination to construct a world, or system, that can explore human motivations, which are ultimately first present as unknowable and mysterious. He suggests that one can be certain about very little, which means that romance, as a narrative category, reflects the mystery and uncertainty of the senses in its reach.

Brown ends “The Difference Between History and Romance,” by turning the metaphor around and suggesting that romance is not only the means of exploring human motivation but itself exerts power over human action. He writes,

> How wide, then, if romance be the narrative of mere probabilities, is the empire of romance? This empire is absolute and undivided over the motives and tendencies of human actions. Over actions themselves, its dominion, though not unlimited, in yet very extensive. (342)

This faculty of the imagination, which is what allows for the connection and interpretation of disparate facts, is therefore an active and “extensive” part of how one interprets the world. Brown is subtly suggesting what the Romantic writers across the Atlantic, Coleridge in particular, would find in their renovation of the imagination as the source of creation rather than a mere reflection of elements of reality. Romance, as a category of writing that uses the imagination’s power of creation, is a primary means through which we learn how people think, or the “modifications of thought which cannot be subjected to the senses” (342). The imagination is the vector of the work of the understanding. Sublimity, or the most extreme imaginative state, then contains untapped possibilities for inciting moral judgment and action.

III.

In his novels and essays Brown complicates the rendering of rationality and imagination as separate functions of mind as they were portrayed in eighteenth-century aesthetics. The tradition Brown inherited, at the time a relatively new area of philosophy, focused on the effects and affects of perception—concerns Brown would explore throughout his work. Aesthetics had a long history beginning with Longinus but flowered with the study of discernment and taste in eighteenth-century Britain by The Third Earl of

Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, Joseph Addison, Edmund Burke, Lord Kames, and others. One of the most influential of these texts, published in 1757, changed the field of aesthetics by valuing the sublime as the highest effect of art. In "A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful with an Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste and Several Other Additions" (1757), Edmund Burke opposes the beautiful and sublime, arguing that the beautiful excites love and pleasure, while the sublime produces astonishment borne of self-preservation. Burke privileges the sublime as the highest aesthetic for its engagement with the imagination rather than the understanding, likening it to our experience of divinity and infinity. For Burke, the sublime is:

> …that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that, far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. (96)

The force of the sublime causes a disjunction in the mind of the subject. Though Burke associates the sublime with horror here, he otherwise notes that its effect is similar to the (awe-inspiring) terrible in the strength of emotion produced.

Burke's ideas influenced Immanuel Kant, who would come to define the sense of the sublime central to Romanticism. Kant gives us the example of the mathematical sublime in the imagination's attempt to imagine infinity, which it cannot represent. This play of mental faculties is a powerful force that highlights the energy of limits in spite of the imagination, and that which lies beyond the senses—a break in consciousness only repaired by the work of the reason. Kant writes that the sublime "is that, the mere capacity of thinking which evidences a faculty of mind transcending every standard of

sense."[98] Though Brown would not yet have read Kant's writing on the sublime, like Kant he reconfigures the perceiver as active rather than passive, and the sublime as the placeholder for those enthusiastic experiences suppressed by Cartesianism. This is perhaps not surprising as both Brown and Kant were responding to a combined sensationalist-rationalist philosophy.[99] Their pathways of thought originated in the work of Longinus, who laid the groundwork for this shift in the conceptualization of the sublime from an innate quality of objects to an effect on the mind of the viewer, an effect he too connected to powerful writing.

In his essay "Terrific Novels,"[100] Brown discusses his desire to wrest the prevailing association of sublimity away from the gothic, or terror novels, as he calls them, and connect it with another kind of literature, one with a moral purpose. While he writes of his admiration for Ann Radcliff, he disparages gothic novels in general for their predictable and obvious stage effects, their "trapdoors, black robes, and pale faces" (*Arthur Mervyn, Related Texts* 345). He suggests how his own writing differs when he complains that "There is, besides, no *keeping* in the author's design: fright succeeds to fright, and danger to danger, without permitting the unhappy reader to draw his breath, or to repose for a moment on subjects of character or sentiment" (*Arthur Mervyn, Related*

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[98] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Part I, Book II: 7.
[99] David Kazanjian examines the similarities of Brown and Kant in his essay "Charles Brockden Brown's Biloquial Nation: National Culture and White Settler Colonialism in *Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist*," *American Literature* Volume 73, Number 3 (September 2001): 459-496. In it he explains, "Brown was one of the earliest critics of his contemporaries' devotion to a rationalist-sensationalist psychology that blended Locke's extreme sensationalism with the rationalism of the Scottish Common Sense school, a psychology Kant too can be said to have challenged" (13).
[100] Originally published in *The Literary Magazine and American Register* 3:19 (April 1805), reprinted in *Arthur Mervyn* (2008). All cited page numbers refer to this 2008 edition.

Texts 345). Brown's aim is to relocate the sublime from what he saw as a limited focus on external mysteries related to the past and the abuses of power to internal unknowns, by fathoming the depths of such ideas as "character" or "sentiment." Though he claims these subjects could provide moments of rest from the experiences of terror found in "Terrific Novels," he also suggests that exploring "character" and "sentiment" would further the effect, in essence allowing the reading experience to sink in, or "keep." The sublime is not merely the state of shock that overtakes consciousness through the perception of an outside force, it is evidence of the working of the imagination. In suggesting that gothic novels should depict character and sentiment, Brown opens the "trap door" of sublimity on identity.

By emphasizing character and sentiment alongside sensationalism, Brown Americanizes the sublime. Brown and other writer and publisher members of the Friendly Club, and especially Brown's close friend William Dunlap, wrote about the need to create a particularly American literature. Attuned to the transatlantic and cosmopolitan exchange of ideas, Brown uses British aesthetic theory to posit, "new springs of action"…"growing out of the condition of our country" (2). In his novel *Edgar Huntly*, Brown wrote explicitly of his desire to create an American literature, to explore the wilderness and cave rather than the ruined castle, to transpose the conventions of the gothic onto American soil. Ezra Tawil suggests that it is the topography, the "condition of our country" that provides a useful idea of an American aesthetic, more particularly the recess or uncultivated wilderness as the location for sublimity. He writes, "The American

landscape doesn't only inspire, it effectively authors an American literature.[101] In *Arthur Mervyn*, I would argue that Brown further stretches the convention of the sublime with a turn toward the American culture of commerce rather than the uncultivated wilderness. The sublime is produced by the vulnerabilities of a culture shaped increasingly by the vertiginous effects of the market on an unmoored identity, with its mercantile fraud, finding and losing of family fortunes, forgery and bankruptcy.

IV.

Tawil argues that Brown "bring[s] the gothic 'home' and collaps[es] the distance between the reader and the story-world"[102] for Americans. Brown resituates the transformative sublime of Burke and Rousseau, where the besieged individual turns to the imagination in nature for solitary reverie away from commercial society, bringing it into the world of commerce and social interaction. He figures the subject's capacity for change, on both an internal and external level, as productive of the sublime.

Brown's resituation of sublimity from nature to culture is suggested in an early work of Brown's called *The Rhapsodist* (1789), which consists of four anonymous fictional letters written to the editor of the *Columbian Magazine*. Brown writes in the persona of a rhapsodist, whom he describes as a person living in solitude with heightened sensibility. The rhapsodist, like Mervyn, experiences the vertiginous sublime upon

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[101] Ezra Tawil, "'New Forms of Sublimity,': *Edgar Huntly* and The European Origins of American Exceptionalism," *Novel* Vol. 40, No. 1-2, (2004): 104-124, 115. Tawil illustrates how Brown plays out a European conceptual framework in order to create a "unique" and "new" native literature. His argument persuasively contends that by relying upon the eighteenth century aesthetic view of the sublimity of the New World and its habitat, Brown provides the required distance to make the sublime pleasing to British readers used to gothic novels in foreign settings.
[102] Tawil, 119.

reentering society: "hence upon my entrance into the city I experienced a temporary paroxism of phrenzy, my fancy was altogether ungovernable, and I frequently mistook the scene which was passing before me for the lively representation of a dream" (*The Rhapsodist* Installment No. III, 16). The rhapsodist's sensory experience is expanded in *Arthur Mervyn* to highlight the dizzy giddiness of identity in flux, an elective orphanhood recalling a Revolutionary promise that the false distinctions of class would be eradicated in favor of a meritocracy.

The episodes of sublimity in *Arthur Mervyn* have not been critically examined as such in any great detail, perhaps because Brown himself does not consistently describe them as sublime. They suggest that Brown makes use of sublimity less as an effect to be exploited for entertainment value, than as a powerful tool that contains the possibility of educating readers through aesthetic experience. As Cathy N. Davidson has noted, gothic novels in the young American republic were largely viewed as sensationalist popular entertainment, but Brown self-consciously aimed to affect the moral and sympathetic capacities of his readers rather than merely amuse them. Brown and his circle[103] believed that rationality and the exchange of information were the keys to social change. However, rather than privileging rationality over the imagination, Brown saw the imagination as vital to rationality itself, as well as the work of envisioning both individual and cultural transformation.

There are at least six important examples of Brown's re-vision of the sublime in *Arthur Mervyn,* and by considering them together we can explore in what way Mervyn's

[103] For a wonderful study of Brown's literary association, see Bryan Waterman's *Republic of Intellect: The Friendly Club of New York City and the Making of American Literature*.

mental disjunction opens a dynamic space for the reader's ethical consideration. Each sublime experience happens in the moment when the projection of a new identity, and its market relations, are at odds with the character's former experience of self. In other words, sublimity is the bridge between identities, a transformative, terrifying and freeing break in consciousness that acts like a kind of vertigo of metamorphosis, analogous to the experience of deep familial change that occurs with the loosening of kindred bonds. It reveals the work of the imagination in constructing identity. In Brown's version of sublimity, much as in his essay, "Walstein's School of History: From the German of Krants of Gotha," the imagination is the faculty that connects disparate ideas and facts. Sublimity therefore reveals the imaginative leap in the foundational mythos of autogenesis.

At a time when traditional patterns of inheritance and apprenticeship for male youth were giving way to new models of self-determination and vocational experimentation, Mervyn, like many male youths, turns to the city to find employment. Soon after entering the city he is miraculously invited into the household of Welbeck to work as a secretary. His mysterious resemblance to another man, whose expensive clothing he donned, causes Welbeck to invite him in. Finding himself suddenly part of a new household, with a new job and appearance, he looks in the mirror and reflects on the sublimity of metamorphosis:

> Twenty minutes ago, said I, I was traversing that path a barefoot beggar; now I am thus. Again I surveyed myself. Surely some insanity has fastened on my understanding. My senses are the sport of dreams. Some magic that disdains the cumbrousness of nature's progress has wrought this change. (40-41)

In addition to highlighting the mutability of social position, his transformation of identity provides Mervyn with a troubling aesthetic pleasure. He looks at himself in the mirror

and the impact of his new identity registers visually as something beyond the senses, and beyond his understanding.

Mervyn's senses present him with himself in a moment of (mis)recognition and extreme aesthetic pleasure. He finds this act of seeing oneself anew transformative, as if the rational explanations for these events (new clothes signifying new social status) cannot explain the full impact of seeing oneself as another. Rationality itself is inadequate in that moment and Mervyn can only find words to describe his feelings, such as "dreams," "insanity" and "magic," that suggest experiences beyond his comprehension. Though he hyperbolically wonders what "insanity" has tampered with his "understanding," Mervyn's reason is in no way threatened. And this experience, of seeing himself as another, moves Mervyn beyond reason in part because of the social standing that the clothes signify. He is transformed both internally and externally by the heady experience of projecting a newfound persona, a new self that bears a different relation to the market and his sense of identity.

Brown's portrayal of his mental state as he sees his new self in the mirror can be read as a collision between agency and passivity in that he himself wills his new identity, but then feels its effects acting on him. In Burke's quotation, the sublime is a state that places the subject within a seeming paradox, conjuring both suspension beyond understanding, and a hurried jump into a rush of emotion. The encounter is so large it seems to be both prior to and engulfing of reason, dwarfing the individual until s/he feels outside of a typical experience of time and space: "it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force." Compare this to Mervyn's assertion that "Some magic that disdains the cumbrousness of nature's progress has wrought this change." The

“magic” of encountering his new identity is outside of Mervyn’s experience of the normal course of nature; it represents an epistemological leap.

Mervyn calls up the exact effects of the sublime, the pause of the understanding with an experience beyond sense so strong that the course of nature is interrupted, without relying on any nomenclature to contain the description. Brown will go on to use the word “sublime” at least three times later on in the novel; however, he presents this initial transformative experience without naming it. He focuses on the pleasure of aesthetic experience, much like Longinus, who also noted the effect of delight on the subject. Familiar with Frances Hutcheson’s philosophy on the pleasure of the moral sense, Brown would seem to pose a new class of sublimity to engage and trouble the moral significance of self-fashioning.

V.

That this first instance of sublimity brings pleasure to Mervyn puts the reader into a quandary. Mervyn continues to experience the sublime as his motives become increasingly difficult to comprehend, and what Brown might mean by the repeated experience becomes more complex as the novel progresses. However, the change in consciousness occurs repeatedly at moments where Mervyn’s self-interest is a specter haunting the text, disrupting the logic of Mervyn’s narrative.

Mervyn’s second experience of sublimity occurs when he hears Clemenza Lodi play the piano, an experience that signals and confirms his entrance into polite society. Adopted into Welbeck’s seemingly wealthy and refined household, he has access to a beautiful young woman, practiced in the arts that exemplify female charm. There is no

clearer signal that Mervyn has changed his situation from a rustic to a respected gentleman of social standing than the leisurely occupation of the women in the household. Mervyn's reaction, as one might imagine, is intense. As a new person, he finds previously unknown capacities for enjoying the music. He describes it by recalling a famously sublime image from Milton's "Comus," a text that also figures in Brown's *Memoirs of Carwin*, of a storm magically turned to a banquet hall. Mervyn says:

> Heaths vexed by a midnight storm may be changed into a hall of choral nymphs and regal banqueting; forest glades may give sudden place to colonnades and carnivals, but he whose senses are deluded finds himself still on his natal earth. These miracles are contemptible when compared with that which placed me under this roof and gave me to partake in this audience. I know my emotions are in danger of being regarded as ludicrous by those who cannot figure to themselves the consequences of a limited and rustic education. (42-3)

Thus, to describe his heightened encounter with Clemenza's piano forte, Mervyn rhapsodizes that the "midnight storm," by Brown's time a traditional image of the sublime, may be transformed into a social setting, a "hall of choral nymphs and regal banqueting." Nonetheless, it still fails to describe his emotional and perceptive state. Though "forest glades" magically become "colonnades and carnivals," the heights of civilization's skill and artifice, these abrupt transformations are not what convey the shock of Mervyn's imaginative experience. It is not the poetic transport beyond sense, but the awareness that these changes can occur while here on "natal earth" that shocks him. Again, Brown presents Mervyn's experience as an epistemological leap or disjunction, so strong that to be on one's "natal earth" is shocking. Existing inside his new identity leads him to such an extreme state that he is ripped out of his usual experience of space and time.

For Mervyn, to glimpse himself experiencing such imaginative transport in the drawing room with Clemenza and Welbeck is thus sublime. Yet again, this experience is conveyed in terms other than the sublime of the British gothic, though here it becomes clear that Brown means to call up the sublime explicitly with his use of Milton's dark imagery. Brown transforms the notion of the transcendent from one that is experienced alone in nature and inside the imagination into a social phenomenon, dependent on both an experience of interiority and the simultaneous awareness of it as a shared occurrence. It can be brought to light only by interaction in the social fabric. And more sublime than these poetic references of both nature and the social is his actual self-fashioning, of which Mervyn reminds the reader in calling up "the consequences of a limited and rustic education." His identity change is made possible by his prior identity as a rustic. Thus the fluid American social fabric, woven on the framework of revolution in its creation of governmental and individual independence, is particularly evocative of the sublime.

VI.

Mervyn's moral identity is tested most extremely by the third illustration of sublimity in the novel—he finds Welbeck standing over the corpse of Captain Amos Watson. Caught red-handed, Welbeck tells Mervyn his story. The narrative that follows echoes the larger narrative of the novel: one man's attempt to vindicate his actions by relating a story that begins with a thirst for knowledge and journey from home in search of greater horizons. Welbeck makes Mervyn promise never to repeat the story, and then tells him,

> There was no difficulty in persuading the world that Welbeck was a personage of opulence and rank. My birth and previous adventures it was proper to conceal.

> The facility with which mankind are misled in their estimate of characters, their proneness to multiply inferences and conjectures will not be readily conceived by one destitute of my experience. (75)

Here Welbeck describes how easily he changed his identity by distancing himself from his past. By having his villain exploit the social fluidity of the culture through means of the personal capital of appearances gained on credit, Brown compounds cultural anxieties about a nation framed around the erasure of what Jane Tompkins calls "markers that define and fix the self" (52). The traditional markers that define identity are those inherited from family, exactly those aspects of identity that are fluid for the elective orphan: family name, social class, patrimony, religion, vocation. Elective orphanhood is the narrative of this erasure.

In order to exploit this lack, Welbeck embodies the character of the elective orphan. Welbeck tells a tale Mervyn knows intimately, one of entering a new household, of being adopted and removed from his friendless state, which produces the pleasure of self-fashioning. Welbeck's confession forces the reader to consider Mervyn's sublime transformations in the light of self-interest. It also presses the issue of good intentions, for while Welbeck's intentions are motivated by lust and greed, and Mervyn claims only pure purposes, they use similar means to create identity anew. Welbeck's tale of seduction ends with the murder of Watson who had come to avenge his dead sister.

Welbeck's narrative has a profound influence over Mervyn, who comments, in the fourth example of the sublime:

> For a while the wondrousness of the tale kept me from contemplating the consequences that awaited us. My unfledged fancy had not hitherto soared to this pitch. All was astounding by its novelty, or terrific by its horror. The very scene of these offenses partook, to my rustic apprehension, of fairy splendor, and magical abruptness. My understanding was bemazed, and my senses were taught to distrust their own testimony. (84)

Brown makes it clear that Mervyn's perceptual experience of Welbeck's narrative is both extraordinary, and at this point in the novel, familiar to the reader. He uses the hallmark terminology of the sublime: the flight of the fancy, the experience beyond the senses, the "fairy splendor, and magical abruptness" of a "bemazed" mind. His reason has been put on pause, so much so that he is able for a moment to forget the dead body at his feet, or "the consequences that awaited us." Such is the power of language. The influence of the sublime has a strange consequence that prompts the reader's own wonder and surprise: Mervyn helps Welbeck bury the murdered man and escape. Why does he, despite even Welbeck's remonstrance that he may leave without harm, become an accomplice to Welbeck's misdeed? This act severely strains Mervyn's credibility as a virtuous and ethical citizen. He claims that he felt a sense of gratitude to Welbeck that stayed his departure, despite the fact that "some fear was connected with his presence" (84). He commits an act that becomes a moral aporia for the reader who is forced to reconsider Mervyn's reliability. Is it benevolence or duty to the man who took him in that stays his escape and enforces his silence afterward? Is he acting out of self-interest? After the deed is done, he himself acknowledges that he does not know why: "I had acted long enough a servile and mechanical part; and been guided by blind and foreign impulses" (88). This statement from Mervyn is a crucial revelation; he obeys the "impulses" of a self he is not in touch with and cannot understand. The terms "mechanical"[104] and "servile" compound the notion that Mervyn is merely a passive and unaware participant in his own actions.

[104] Associationism stressed the mechanical or passive interrelatedness of thoughts, though passion tempered the mechanistic quality.

In “The Difference Between History and Romance” Brown suggests that romance, or the imagination, influences the actions of men. Mervyn’s third sublime experience, by mimicking the language of the previous two encounters with sublimity as incidents of magic and amazement, reveals the imagination’s forceful exertion over the mind. The first two sublime experiences were brought on by transformations of identity; therefore, this third sublime episode suggests the possible dangers of such metamorphosis. If identity is fluid, this experience shows Mervyn that he is not in control of his own self-fashioning. Indeed, through his “choice” to help Welbeck, his new identity is accomplice to murder.

Mervyn seems at first to use reason to compose himself from a state of sublime disjunction. As he descends into the basement, he experiences a number of terrifying imaginative flights: he suspects Welbeck first escapes and then locks him in with the dead man; he imagines he sees the corpse convulse; terrified, he tries to escape in the dark, gets lost and bloodies himself in the process. He only regains his reason when he realizes the Welbeck intends no harm. He notes: “This discovery overwhelmed me with contrition and shame, though it freed me from the terrors of imprisonment and accusation” (88). Here one can see that the horrors of the imagination appear to him more terrifying than the reality of burying a corpse. The progression of events and their relation to the experience of the sublime is surprising: Mervyn is overcome by sublimity on hearing Welbeck’s tale and seems to give in to imaginative flights of fancy in the basement, but he finds his complicity with Welbeck’s demands and the actual burying of the corpse completely reasonable acts. Rather than assert the primacy of reason over imagination, Brown destabilizes rationality, revealing the imagination’s role in reasoning.

Not only is reason a thing outside our control, Mervyn has ceased to control his self-fashioning. The repetition of sublimity accompanying each of Mervyn's transformations suggests that he exists inside a proliferating series of selves initiated by, and the condition of, elective orphanhood.

VII.

Brown's next two treatments of sublimity are immediately juxtaposed against each other to highlight his revision of the concept. Soon after Mervyn leaves Welbeck, he returns to the country and finds abode with the Quaker Hadwins. While there he attempts to translate from the Italian a book he stole from Welbeck's house that belonged to Vincent Lodi, one of the characters that Mervyn resembles. As he reads a narrative about a Lodi ancestor finding a treasure he discovers a fortune in hidden bank notes glued into the binding. Upon coming across the bank notes, Mervyn undergoes another transcendent moment of possibility:

> My sensations, at this discovery, were of an inexplicable kind. I gazed at the notes in silence. I moved my finger over them; held them in different positions; read and re-read the name of each sum, and the signature; added them together, and repeated to myself—Twenty thousand dollars! They are mine, and by such means! (98)

Brown foregoes literary reference and instead portrays the sensations of being dumbstruck as a kind of sublime. Though perhaps less clearly mimicking the language of sublimity, it is a moment first described as "inexplicable." This is an important choice in diction for a writer intent on mapping the workings of consciousness; it recalls Burke's sense of sublimity as the mysterious just beyond representation. First he "gazes" at the

notes as he had looked at himself in the mirror. That he gawks silently only emphasizes that he is performing a different kind of looking. His repetitive actions and the short staccato rhythm of action phrases that follows ("I gazed," "I moved," "held," "read and reread") show, rather than tell, a state of mind both hurrying forward and in suspense, one that must read and then reread. In this way, finding the money produces a kind of sublime disjunction.

Mervyn pauses the action of the narrative to dream of taking this money for himself. He fantasizes that it is not a chance act that the money came to him:

> My fortune had been thus unexpectedly and wonderously propitious. How was I to profit by her favour? Would not this sum enable me to gather round all the instruments of pleasure? Equipage, and palace, and a multitude of servants; polished mirrors, splendid hangings, banquets, and flatterers, were equally abhorrent to my taste, and my principles. The accumulation of knowledge, and the diffusion of happiness, in which riches may be rendered eminently instrumental, were the only precepts of duty, and the only avenues to genuine felicity. (99)

Though he rejects the gaudy materialism of Welbeck, he fantasizes about keeping the fortune. After allowing himself a moment to dream, he rejects the idea by telling the reader that, "abundant means of knowledge are possessed by me, as long as I have eyes to gaze at man and at nature, as they are exhibited in their original form or in books" (99). Mervyn's self-interest, rising to the surface of the text and his consciousness, prompts an avowal to be happy with knowledge instead of material wealth. Directly after, Mervyn decides to restore the fortune to Clemenza by traveling to a city rumored overcome by the plague, another selfless act that illustrates Mervyn's unconventional judgment.

If Brown shows, rather than tells, Mervyn's dumbstruck mental state when finding the money, the next sublime experience, in contrast, merely tells. It is upon hearing rumors of the plague, the occasion of Mervyn's fifth experience of sublime

amazement, that Brown finally uses the word "sublimity." Mervyn notes that at first he was indifferent to the rumors of suffering but he soon comes to find their effect pleasurable: "THIS rumour was of a nature to absorb and suspend the whole soul. A certain sublimity is connected with enormous dangers, that imparts to our consternation or our pity, a tincture of the pleasing" (101). In his first direct reference to the sublime, Brown utilizes only impersonal and general terms, a weak description rather than the powerful illustration of disjunction of the four previous sublimities as they played out in Mervyn's mind.

Brown invokes the nomenclature of the sublime to undercut its power, as he illustrates with the following example only a few pages later. Mervyn explicitly problematizes the standard Burkean concept of sublime pleasure, finding it superficial, even a subtle exploitation of real emotion. He writes,

> Hitherto distress had been contemplated at a distance, and through the medium of a fancy delighting to be startled by the wonderful, or transported by sublimity. Now the calamity had entered my own doors, imaginary evils were supplanted by real, and my heart was the seat of commiseration and horror. (104)[105]

In noting the distance required to transmute terror into pleasure, Brown reminds the reader of his/her role as onlooker and its safety.

VIII.

Mervyn's claim, as he stood with Welbeck over the corpse, that through the experience of sublimity, his "senses were taught to distrust their own testimony," hints at

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[105] Another example of this kind of undercutting of the standard idea of the sublime is Brown's use of the term to describe Arthur's emotions upon inexplicably deciding to bury the corpse of Susan Hadwin without any ceremony. He calls his emotions "awful and sublime" and says of his state of mind: "…as if insensibility and not reason, had occasioned that clearness of conceptions…" (213).

the possibility that the sublime can play a pedagogic role. Brown greatest re-configuration of the sublime is his employment of it as a pedagogical tool to help the reader consider the ethics of the transformation of identity, an "ethical sublime," as opposed to the pleasing sublime of gothic novels. Acting against Common Sense philosophy's treatment of the imagination as degenerative and dangerous, Brown posits the aesthetic experience of the sublime as a possible catalyst for moral progress. Edward Cahill notes this ambiguity and hopeful role for the imagination in all of Brown's fiction:

> Indeed, the principal tension in Brown's novels concerns the imagination's mutable status as both the source of the various possibilities of irrationality and the faculty through which art finds its moral ends. The imagination in Brown's fiction is the site of fanatical delusion and deceptive error, to be sure, but also correct judgment, rational speculation, and transformative sublimity. (32)

The "ethical sublime" is the means through which Brown aims to accrete ethical dilemmas stimulated by aesthetics. Thus the aim of the repetition of mental disjunction is to educate the reader to learn from aesthetic experience, and to differentiate between different kinds of imaginative states.

The "ethical sublime" depends on the active participation of the reader. Returning to "The Difference Between History and Romance," Brown formulates human thought as a broad category is mysterious and unknown, but in addition, Brown suggests that "human actions," including one's own, are beyond the sphere of certainty and understanding. Mervyn is not only out of touch with his own self-interest, he seems ignorant of himself in many regards. This deficiency of self-awareness is precisely why some critics have read Mervyn as an unreliable narrator.[106] Mervyn's lack of self-

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[106] See Warner B. Berthoff, "Adventures of the Young Man: An Approach to Charles Brockden Brown," *American Quarterly* Vol. 9 (1957): 421-34; Patrick Brancaccio, "Studied Ambiguity: Arthur Mervyn and the Problem of the Unreliable Narrator,"

awareness is betrayed most clearly by his professions about his mind. When reading the novel one gets, as Brown alluded to in his essay, a clear sense of Mervyn's mind in action. He acts impetuously at every opportunity despite his ignorance, which he readily admits, and yet he claims,

> My existence is a series of thoughts rather than of motions. Ratiocination and deduction leave my senses unemployed. The fullness of my fancy renders my eye vacant and inactive. Sensations do not precede and suggest, but follow and are secondary to the acts of mind. (202)

This understanding of the mind reverses the configuration of thought in the popular theory of association as linked to sense impression, a philosophy Brown had come into contact with through the writings of Hume and Hartley.[107] By claiming to be a person wholly of mind as opposed to body, Mervyn distances himself from temptations of the body, such as those that come to define the villain Welbeck (sexual temptation and material wealth) and the other corrupt characters in the novel. Being merely "a series of thoughts" is a witty reminder to the reader that Mervyn is a fictional person whose matter is literally made of thought. To an active reader, this begs larger questions about the kinds of experiences involved in reading and thinking—are we not all "a series of thoughts"?

This small reminder plays a large role in a novel that emphasizes the reader's role as authority and active participant. Reading about and thoughtfully considering the actions of Mervyn can influence the reader, who must judge them over and again as

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American Literature Vol. 42 (1970): 18-27; and Michael Davitt Bell, "'The Double-Tongued Deceiver': Sincerity and Duplicity in the Novels of Charles Brockden Brown," *Early American Literature* Vol. 9.2 (1974): 143-63.

[107] Associationist psychology influenced Brown, specifically the writings of David Hartley who proposed that ideas, which form associative trains, are linked to sensory impressions.

different kinds of information become available. Brown's essays "Walstein" and "History and Romance" reflect this stress on writing as a morally engaged activity partaking of both history and romance—in order to be good, writing must do both. Composition in these essays, viewed as the self-conscious arranging of one's ideas, uses both reason and the imagination in order to present "a model of right conduct, supplying men not only with knowledge of just ends and just means, but with the love and the zeal of virtue" (334).[108] Certainly Brown asks the reader to play an active role in making meaning, to arrange the ideas for herself. While Dr. Stevens asserts the truth-value of Mervyn's narrating as visible on his face, a common convention of sensibility, the reader hears the narrative second-hand. Removed from Mervyn's performance of his narrative, unable to judge the reliability of his tale, and therefore his ethical motivations, the reader is left with empty space where conviction of his morality should be.[109] In trying to read Mervyn, one must judge different narratives against one another through their sources, weighing Mervyn's own sense of himself against his actions. Perhaps Brown foregrounded the question of Mervyn's moral judgment in order to engage the reader in a debate. This Woldwinite approach to fiction, where the materials for debate are contained in the text, asks us to examine Mervyn's imagination and reason, his "ratiocination" and "fancy" in his terms. Brown's aim, then, is to place the reader in a condition that requires the mental attention of composition, as Bryan Waterman and Frank Shuffleton suggest. Brown makes his writing an exercise in learning democracy through "the act of reading itself and

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[108] This recalls Plato's idea that using words improperly does damage to the soul.
[109] See Jay Fliegelman's study on Thomas Jefferson and rhetoric and perfomance: Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993).

the continuous judgments it simultaneously necessitates and problematizes."[110] In this way the reader, merely by reading, is active in the public sphere through his or her own thoughts, where "judgment" becomes "a form of public action."[111] The role of fiction in the American public sphere was deeply contested precisely because the moral and aesthetic in the eighteenth century were linked in their ability to produce sound judgment. Brown exposes this overlap by turning the aesthetic experience of sublimity inherent to elective orphanhood and self-fashioning into an ethical consideration.

The "ethical sublime" provides a way of understanding a novel whose plot and characters are so excessive and repetitive. The world of *Arthur Mervyn* is full of others who inexplicably resemble the self. Every major character is echoed in other (sometimes minor) characters, causing a highly implausible network of plot events. Brown proliferates versions of characters whose fates are linked, which suggests that the use of repeated characters and plot events, as Tompkins argues, provide another way to interpret the world of the novel. This sense of overload haunts the plot as a feeling of inevitability but also foregrounds the possibility of learning from the mistakes of others. To provide just one such repeated plot event that structures the novel, I offer the theme of seduction: after he has murdered Captain Watson who was attempting to avenge Welbeck's seduction of his sister, and after he has seduced Clemenza Lodi, whose brother resembles Mervyn, Welbeck escapes drowning in the river through the random kind offices of Colville, who is the villainous seducer of Mervyn's sister. But rather than turn *Arthur Mervyn* into another seduction novel, so popular in the 1790s, this repeated event is only one of numerous examples of excess where every action is reflected in a gothic hall of

[110] Shuffleton, 91.
[111] Ibid., 110.

mirrors. The plot events are like fractals, in that their repetition seems to equate miniscule interactions and the entire world of the novel as interdependent reflections of each other.

Brown literally uses the mirror to reflect the deep fear that accompanies the pleasure of a fluid self. When he first came to the city, Mervyn gazed into the mirror, amazed at his transformation from a country rustic into a city gentleman. This sublime misrecognition of self happens again, though the city has metamorphosed into a pestilential nightmare. Mervyn enters the house of a dying man, and says while in the room with the body:

> A moment scarcely elapsed, when some appearance in the mirror…called my attention. It was a human figure, nothing could be briefer than the glance that I fixed upon this apparition, yet there was room enough for the vague conception to suggest itself, that the dying man had started from his bed and was approaching me. This belief was, at the same instant, confuted, by the survey of his form and garb. One eye, a scar upon his cheek, a tawny skin, a form grotesquely misproportioned, brawny as Hercules, and habited in livery, composed, as it were, the parts of one view. (113)

If one views this episode in conjunction with Mervyn's early transformation, the mirror is given the power to reflect the vertigo of a fluid social order.[112] When he left home, Mervyn was about to be apprenticed out by his father. The leap from rustic to city gentleman would have been less likely than the drop to servant wearing "livery." The person reflected in this scene, a black man whose "tawny" skin is possibly scarred from

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[112] The editors to the 2008 edition of *Arthur Mervyn*, Philip Barnard and Steven Shapiro, note the congruence of these episodes on n2, p. 113. They write: "This episode doubles the mirrored self-contemplation that Mervyn enacted on his entry into Welbeck's service in Chapter 5 and repeats, in a more violent form, that moment's uncanny condensation of class, gender, and ethno-racial tensions."

abuse, represents the terrifying reality of a market built upon slavery. Mervyn goes on to say, “To perceive, to fear, and to confront this apparition were blended into one sentiment” and then the man delivers a blow to his temple that knocks him unconscious (114). Looking in the mirror this time, Mervyn experiences the gothic possibility of becoming a slave and the perception is painful both physically and psychically. The recurring plot event of looking in the mirror adds to the overwhelming sense of excess, which becomes almost violent as Mervyn grapples with the repeated scenes of pestilential death.

Each occurrence of repetition and chance only adds to our sense of the novel as a system vast in its interconnectedness. Brown achieves this effect through a palimpsest of narratives and sub-plots, many of which seem digressions from the “action” of the novel. But they are meant to lend the reading experience a particular effect, to inspire the vertiginous “ethical sublime” in the reader. The reading experience, then, is posited as a means to help the reader consciously fashion sounder moral judgment through an experience both rational and imaginative.

The penultimate occasion of the sublime in the novel is the clearest statement of Brown’s revision of sublimity and an unusually lucid declaration of the problem of Mervyn’s moral judgment. Brown uses the word as a verb: “To be tranquil and stedfast, in the midst of the usual causes of impetuosity and agony, is either the prerogative of wisdom that *sublimes* itself above all selfish considerations, or the badge of giddy and unfeeling folly” (214). Here the verb “sublimes” implies the transition to a more exalted state, recalling the term’s scientific meaning as a change of state of an element, i.e., water to steam. In other words, one who is tranquil despite a chaotic and fraudulent world is

either irrational and insensible or possessing a wisdom that lies above self-interest. What then, Brown asks, is the place of self-interest in a culture burdened and blessed with the task of continually creating itself anew, which ultimately leaves it dangerously fluid? This is the moral dilemma that the reader must work out to make meaning of Mervyn's actions. Brown proposes that engaging these questions by reading fiction can help the reader better understand a national culture initiated through the dissolving of symbolic kindred bonds to Mother England. Sublimity is both a symptom and possible means of repairing the break caused by elective orphanhood.

Chapter Three

"Like a New Planet in the Solar System": Picara Elective Orphans of the 1790s

"Let 'The History of Constantius and Pulchera' be in your libraries like a new Planet in the Solar System."[113]
—Publisher, *The History of Constantius and Pulchera*

I.

In the preface, the publisher of *The History of Constantius and Pulchera*, *or Constancy Rewarded: An American Novel* (1793) requests that the novel be considered "a new Planet in the Solar System," both a discovery of something already present and a paradigm shift for American literature. He dedicates the "American composition" to "The Young Ladies of Columbia," (v) and suggests that as a species of entertainment for women, the novel is an adjunct to "Party Spirit" and politics. He writes, "Party Spirit has created and will create many emotions in the political world; how much better then would it be, were we firm in mind respecting politics, whilst acting for the amusement of the Fair Sex" (vi). On the one hand, this is a plea to keep emotion out of politics, to be "firm

[113] Anonymous, *The History of Constanius and Pulchera, or Constancy Rewarded*: *An American Novel*, Digital Archive of Early American Imprints, Evans, series 1 (Leominster, Mass.: Prentiss for Thomas, 1793), vi. All citations from the novel are from the original edition, through the NYPL. All further references will be cited in the body of the chapter.

in mind," reserving the emotions excited by the political sphere to the world of entertainment. This can seem like a request to the "Fair Sex" to stay out of political affairs altogether in favor of pleasing entertainment. On the other hand, the novel that follows suggests that literature, through its emotional dimensions, may be a means to explore and perhaps further the intellectual and imaginative work of political rhetoric. It features a female character who acts as representative of the nation, and furthermore, donns the elective orphan narrative, encoding the ambiguous revolutionary promise of autogenesis.

Of the thirty-three novels written during the brief flowering of early American fiction from 1793-1800, *The History of Constantius and Pulchera*, *or Constancy Rewarded*, is not the only one to present a female elective orphan. Another volume written in 1793, Herman Mann's *The Female Review*, also features a female elective orphan; moreover, both are set during the Revolutionary War. Like the other elective orphans in this study, they re-invent their name, class, and vocation—the markers that define and fix identity. In addition, these elective orphans go one step further and craft new genders for themselves by crossdressing as men. In order to do so, they must step out of the sentimental genre altogether, which they do as easily as stepping out of their dresses and into breeches. By thus crossing the threshold of gender and genre simultaneously, these heroines expose the links and slippages between gender, genre, and agency in the early republic.

II.

The questions surrounding agency and gender haunt the beginning of a self-conscious American literature. The political rhetoric of the Revolutionary War unsettled accepted notions of authority, and in the decades after the war Americans worked to balance civic authority with formal citizenship and liberal ideas of equality. This work included reconsidering structures of power in a deeply inequitable society. Coming into focus, gender relations appeared as yet another hierarchy to question, another battle between liberty and its enemy, despotic custom.[114]

Women's role in the new nation was debated through the questions of women's independence, education, rights, and innate natures. A few strong American voices such as Judith Sargent Murray and Abigail Adams, who were largely influenced by the transatlantic writings of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, espoused expanded roles and independence for women in society, and some intellectual networks began to include women.[115] With calls for female education came the claim that women could be independent, self-supporting, even a greater part in the public sphere, where many of them already conducted business for their husbands. Women began publishing their writings in greater numbers, the great majority of which were novels, but some, such as Judith Sargent Murray's *The Gleaners,* used other forms to create public spaces for women's voices and concerns. These concerns register in much of the writing of the

[114] Herman Mann and Judith Sargent Murray both call custom in relation to gender "despotic," a radical idea, though both saw gender subordination as necessary.
[115] The Friendly Club, which included Charles Brockden Brown and William Dunlap, included women in their meetings, and they also discussed female-authored texts. See Bryan Waterman's terrific study, *Republic of Intellect: The Friendly Club of New York City and the Making of American Literature*.

1790s[116] and indicate that this narrative of women's moral influence and biological gender difference had not yet been fixed in the ascending ideology of separate spheres. They assert instead that women had important and instructive roles to play in the public sphere, and that the private sphere was itself not immune from politics.

The family, in a world of economic, cultural, and political flux, became imbued with tremendous political meaning as the penultimate symbol of the republic; and in accord with republican ideas, Americans envisioned contractual and affectional relations taking the place of patriarchal authority.[117] Between the Revolutionary War and the turn of the nineteenth century when domesticity's separate spheres became the dominating gender topos, the republican model envisioned the husband and wife as "conjugal equals"[118] and marriage as the path to republican citizenship. Though gender subordination was considered necessary for maintaining order in the home and therefore the nation, cultural norms of deference and contract took the place of overt hierarchy. The republican vision of deferential equality between husband and wife was perhaps useful ideologically but it did little to change the societal position of women. Women's legal status remained invisible under the system of *feme coverture*, which granted women no

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[116] Such as in Charles Brockden Brown's *Alcuin* (1798) and Hannah Webster Foster's *The Boarding School: or, Lessons of a Preceptress to her Pupils* (1798) as well many other texts of the decade.
[117] To understand the role of Lockean contract in the reshaping of the family during this period, see: Gillian Brown, *The Consent of the Governed: The Lockean Legacy in Early American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Russ Castronovo, *Fathering the Nation: American Genealogies of Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*; Caroline Levander, *Cradle of Liberty: Race, the Child and National Belonging from Thomas Jefferson to W.E.B. Du Bois* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Cindy Weinstein, *Family, Kinship and Sympathy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[118] Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 44, No. 4 (Oct., 1987): 700.

legal identity separate from their father's or husband's, and no right to property, similar to the British model. Despite this lack of legal and property rights, women's political role in the new nation was in flux. The gathering winds of domesticity and the emerging liberal market economy accorded more and more emphasis to women's moral role as civilizing agent for men. And yet the roles women were to play in the new American republic were not yet reduced yet to that of influence.

In the late 1790s, responding to the bloody French and Haitian Revolutions, the Irish uprisings, as well as the second Great Awakening, the mainstream reacted with a reactionary backlash. With Godwin's publication in 1798 of the revealing *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Women*, the cultural space for the topic of gender equality appeared to close.[119] Jefferson's election in 1800 regarded class equality, as opposed to gender (or race), as the predominant direction for Enlightenment discourses of liberty. As the symbolic nexus of the emblematically co-equal "republican wife" morphed into the "republican mother," ideas of female agency and independence were increasingly confined to the private sphere, and gender difference was viewed as biological rather than performative.[120] The 1790s can be viewed as a moment where the broader concerns of female agency in the culture were still publicly relevant and pressing, a question explored in the profusion of novels published sometimes by, and about women at this time, for both male and female audiences. This is perhaps why we find not one but

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[119] Judith Hitner, "'Like a Bewildered Star': Deborah Sampson, Herman Mann, and Address, Delivered with Applause," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 29.2 (1999 Spring): 5-24.
[120] Clare A. Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1830*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2006), 2.

two novels that pose the revolutionary motif of elective orphanhood as a means to imagine agency, and its limits, for female characters.

III.

If we consider literature as a way of reasoning through the crises and problems of a specific cultural moment, of making legible its different modes of thinking and feeling, then American post-revolutionary depictions of female agency can be understood as projecting ways of imagining women's roles in the republic. Genres, then, become specific means of ordering and organizing experience in provisional parameters, parameters that determine even what counts as an event or a detail, or as knowable.[121] Each genre asks the reader for a different kind of reading, to pay attention to different things and to expect certain problems and therefore, analysis, actions and emotions. Continually changing, genres can be considered, as Wai Chee Dimock suggests, analogous to kinship structures, where "likeness here is probabilistic and distributional; it has less to do with common ancestry than with an iterative structure of comparable attitudes, issuing from environments roughly similar but widely dispersed."[122] The affinities between one work and another that provide a generic link are sometimes specific formal conventions, at other times loose parallels, but these affinities necessarily order the attitudes (as Dimock calls them) that structure the textual world. These attitudes, to the critic peering in from a later age, are inextricably linked to the ideological work that genres perform, and seem to arise out of and to condition the way the text is

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[121] Raymond Williams in *The English Novel: From Dickens to Lawrence*, (NY: Oxford UP, 1970) illuminates the importance of the knowable to the novel.
[122] Wai Chee Dimock, "Genre as World System: Epic and Novel on Four Continents," *Narrative* Vol. 14, no. 1 (Jan. 2006): 87.

read. But from a writer's perspective, perhaps generic conventions serve as a kind of familiar shorthand. Authors continually reinvent those conventions to make them relevant to the problems and crises of their time.

Most if not all of the genres popular in the post-revolutionary period in America render female agency solely in relation to the home and marriage, addressing female independence, judgment, intelligence, and emotion through an interrogation of the concept of female virtue.[123] The notion of virtue in the first few decades of the new republic had a specifically gendered and political resonance—which suggests that representations of female agency posed particular and relevant questions for a nation entrusting civic authority to the morality of virtuous politicians and citizens.[124] One's virtue, rather than any determining structure like culture, was responsible for safeguarding not only one's soul and life but also the moral and ethical state of the nation. However, many of the novels published in the 1790s critique or undermine the notion that virtue is sufficient to produce order, safety or happiness. The exploration of the limited power of virtue, and its inability to overcome all, can be read as an expression of anxiety about republican models of citizenship, in which fellow-feeling for the common good would overcome the human tendency toward self-interest, and rationality would win out over passion and vice. As Jan Lewis writes, "Hence we must read the era's

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[123] Novels of the early period borrowed much from the contemporary novels of Europe, so much so that literary works of the Federal period, until relatively recently, have been generally dismissed as derivative and unoriginal.

[124] Stephen Shapiro in *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel: Reading the Atlantic World System* warns that it is a mistake to read novels of the 1790s as about the state of the new nation, and instead points to the Enlightenment context's disregard for regional affiliations over universal paradigms. However, the novels discussed in this chapter show that the concerns of gender (and race) are inextricably linked to, and defined by, the national and regional,

popular literature of seduction not merely as cautionary tales addressed to young women but also as political tracts in which men and women explored the possibilities for virtue in a corrupt world."[125] For example, by suggesting that human motives, even one's own, are impossible to know, and that history is grounded on romance, Charles Brockden Brown posed self-fashioning as a revolutionary imaginative act with ambiguous consequences. For Brown, the condition of elective orphanhood is one means through which the roles of virtue, self-interest and rationality themselves problematize republican models of citizenship.

Virtue, while traditionally considered a masculine quality, came to signify female chastity after the Revolution.[126] As Ruth Bloch explains, under the influence of both Christian and Scottish moral philosophic ideas, virtue as public benevolence and manly courage shifted to the private realm of emotions as it came to signify female chastity and personal morality. The Constitution positioned public virtue in the private realm, which had the effect of fixing the feminization of the concept. As Bloch writes, "Indeed, the representation of public virtue as a feminine trait hinged on the exclusion of women from institutional public life. If virtue was regarded as outside politics, what better way to conceive of it than as feminine?"[127] Therefore, ideas of female citizenship became interconnected with those of chastity in ways that wholly conditioned representations of female agency. Female virtue and therefore agency could only exist within the confines and representational conventions of the private sphere. Paradoxically, these depictions of

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[125] Jan Lewis, 717.
[126] Ruth Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America," *Signs* Vol. 13, No. 1 (1987): 44.
[127] Ibid., 57.

virtue, and the codes that expressed it, were by their very nature, public, echoing the resonance of virtue with national politics.

While seduction novels tested the possibilities for virtue, sentimental novels explored the political nature of sympathy as the capacity to arbitrate between the needs of the individual and the larger community. As the means of uniting the larger national family, sympathy relied on the capacity for feeling and interiority, abilities especially attributed to women. Lori Merish argues that sentimental discourses produced a model of subjectivity based on property relations in this period, with the female as consumer, and where consumption "both facilitates and domesticates women's political agency."[128] Merish defines feminine agency as "feminine consent," or: "a new category of feminine agency, derived from pietistic Protestantism, defined as voluntary or emotional orientation or affiliation."[129] Sentimental novels, then, generally explore female agency as emotional affiliation directed toward marriage and family. The majority of novels published during the 1790s attempt to imagine female liberty in these terms, solely in relation to the home and whether the heroine accepts or rejects her feminine role by finding some way of housing (or disciplining) her subjectivity within its affective capacity.[130]

And yet, here are two novels that use many of the conventions of the seduction and the sentimental alongside other genres, most notably the captivity narrative and the picaresque, as if to highlight the limits of each genre in figuring agency. By utilizing the

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[128] Lori Merish, *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 18.
[129] Ibid., 19.
[130] Most follow either a pattern of accommodation to a lack of agency, due to fate or another's vice (as in *Charlotte Temple*, or *The Hapless Orphan*) or punishment for not accommodating (for example, *The Coquette*).

elective orphan narrative, these novels ask what kinds of narratives of liberation were available for the "daughters of Columbia." Considering the position of women in society, one would expect that autogenetic liberty would have been exclusively figured as male, yet writers in the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary periods often represented the nation as female. As Thomas Paine wrote, the new nation "has it in her choice to do, and to live as she pleases."[131] In figuring the country as a feminine entity with unconstrained agency, an analog of the goddess of liberty, Paine imbricates the language of feeling and a narrative of liberty into one powerful paradoxical figure. Elective orphanhood serves as the means to explore this paradox; by figuring female elective orphans, women's lack of political agency could be replaced by the fluidity of identity, physical and social mobility that the elective orphan represents.

IV.

It would seem surprising that two early American novels about cross-dressing, ripe for the feminist project of textual rediscovery, have remained mostly obscure.[132] While there has been renewed interest in the figure of Deborah Sampson Gannet, the most famous novel about her, *The Female Review*, has been devalued as a flawed source of information against the historical record.[133] Most other critics have mentioned these

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[131] Tom Paine, "The Crisis, No. 15," *The Selected Work of Tom Paine and Citizen Tom Paine* (Howard Fast, ed., New York, 1946), 84.
[132] Though, notably, Cathy Davidson picked these two novels out as examples worth revisiting.
[133] The exception is Judith Hiltner, who has written a number of illuminating articles about *The Female Review*. Otherwise, see Karen A. Weyler, "An Actor in the Drama of Revolution: Deborah Sampson, Print, and Performance in the Creation of Celebrity," *Feminist Interventions in Early American Studies* (Mary C. Carruth, ed. Tuscaloosa:

novels only to leave them in the dustbin of history, accusing their authors of bad writing or of re-inscribing normative gender codes, or failing to imagine an alternative to conventional gender power relations. These two novels are of interest, I would argue, because they imagine liberty as constructed by, articulated through, and ultimately circumscribed by the various kinds of agency different generic conventions provide. They strain against the possibilities of thinking shaped by and expressed through familiar narrative structures. Try as they might with one genre after another, they are unable to reason though the contradictions of agency embodied in the figure of a female elective orphan. Each novel can be seen to embody what Michael McKeon calls a "microhistory": "a narrative attempt to refashion the contradictions besetting contemporary readers."[134] Despite these attempts, they are mis-fits, failing to suit the desire to narrate female liberty within the codes able to express such an idea, failing to contain their paradoxes and contradictions, and failing to suggest alternate models or forms. This is all the more reason to pay attention to these novels, for the ways they attempt to reconcile national identity, gender, and autogenesis into stock narratives speaks to the inadequacies of conventions to represent experience, even symbolic or imaginative experience.

The History of Constantius and Pulchera, or Constancy Rewarded, anonymously published, went through eight editions between 1794 and 1802. Originally published as a magazine serial from June 1789-Jan. 1790 in *Gentleman and Ladies Town and Country Magazine*, it was translated into German and reprinted in 1821 and 1831. It even had a later life plagiarized as *History of Lorenzo and Virginia; or Virtue Rewarded* by T.H.

University of Alabama Press, 2006), 183-196; Alfred Young, *Masquerade*: *The Life and Times of Deborah Sampson, Continental Soldier*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2004).
[134] Joseph Fichtelberg, *Critical Fictions*, *Critical Fictions: Sentiment and the American Market, 1780-1870*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2003), 31.

Cauldwell, D.D., in 1834. This long publishing history makes it "one of the best-selling novels of the early national period."[135] The protagonist is a young woman named Pulchera who challenges cruel parental authority by refusing to marry the wealthy French aristocrat her father suddenly prefers over the young neighborhood farmer, Constantius, he had originally blessed to be her mate. While the novel opens with Pulchera lamenting her position with melodramatic sentiment, she quickly seizes her opportunity to escape and runs away with her lover. From that moment on, she is subject to one outrageous turn of fate after another, almost all involving different kinds of captivity, many at sea depicting naval adventures during the Revolutionary War. She survives by dressing as a male sailor named Valorus; in some ways she actually becomes a male character, as the author generally refers to the protagonist as "he" from that point onward. From shipwreck and naval battles, probable cannibalism to avoid starvation, accusations of pirating and imprisonment, to escape through a sewer, the adventures are piled on one after another until the narrative almost combusts under the strain of its excess. In the end, Valorus, still in male dress, manages to find the lost Constantius in France and decides, in an act of agency, to return to female dress to convince him to marry her, which of course he does.

The Female Review, by Hermann Mann, is the fictionalized memoirs of Deborah Sampson Gannett, a woman who enlisted and served in the Revolutionary War by cross-dressing. First published in 1797, the novel came about as part of her three-decade-long appeal for a soldier's pension, which she won in 1805, after completing a lecture tour in 1802, the first of its kind by an American woman. While the first edition of 1,500 sold out, Deborah Sampson Gannett stipulated that a second edition should only be published

[135] Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and The Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*, (New York: Oxford UP, 2004), 270.

after her death, which it was, along with two other editions. Sampson became a regional celebrity and later, a national icon, memorialized in a poem by Freneau, a Beadle tale and a famous speech by John Quincy Adams. The novel begins with her genealogy and long descriptions of her formative impressions in childhood and experiences with religion before addressing her cross-dressing as a man and enlistment under her brother's name. As a soldier, she takes part in a number of skirmishes and battles. Eventually, the heroine falls prey to the plague and is discovered to be a woman at the army hospital. After having a series of fantastic adventures involving Indians and a female love interest, she returns to the theater of war, where General Patterson honorably discharges her after discovering her sex. Upon returning to a relative's home, she remains in uniform, flirting with the neighborhood girls, until she decides to return to female dress and marry a farmer. Mann added an appendix that provides a number of miscellaneous anecdotes and updates, an unrelated seduction tale, evidence of her military service, and one of her pension petitions.

Both novels are generically polyglot, a form Sarah F. Wood calls Quixotic fictions,[136] mixing tropic conventions such as the sentimental tear with stock characters and plot devices from a number of genres outside the sentimental, such as the women warrior ballad, captivity narrative, adventure story, war history, and picaresque. This multiplicity, common to the novel in general but resounding anew within the American context prior to the antebellum period, speaks to the difficulty of articulating a cultural situation in inherited forms. It also, as Wood notes, speaks to its improvisatory

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[136] Sarah Wood, *Quixotic Fictions of the USA 1792-1815*, (New York: Oxford UP, 2005).

possibility.[137] Genre conventions are treated much like clothing by these authors, for both genre and gender identity are presented as knowing performances.[138] Though novels of the 1790s were written to audiences comprised of both male and female readers, genre was inevitably ordered though constructions of gender that posited differing relations to private interiority and public agency. While there are a score of other genres that appear in these two novels, three genres are instrumental to their form and content: the sentimental, the captivity narrative, and the picaresque. Each of these particular genres codifies individual agency and gender in different ways; mixing them provides the reader with multiple frameworks to interpret the actions of the elective orphan within the boundaries of every generic world.

The sentimental novel viewed sympathy as a force able to connect the reader to the character, much as it could arbitrate between the individual and the community, in order to extend the scope of affect. Engaging discrete individuals in sympathetic identification could enact what Joseph Fichtelberg describes as a "stable moral economy,"[139] as a way of evoking harmony or re-imagining social collapse. Sympathy could lessen the differences between the reader and the object of emotion, creating a kind of "experiential equivalence."[140] The effect is an extension of fellow-feeling and

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[137] Ibid., 233.
[138] Daniel Cohen reminds us that gender was assumed to be a performance in this period in the introduction to *The Female Marine and Related Works: Narratives of Cross Dressing and Urban Vice in America's Early Republic*, (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); Clare A. Lyons make the same point in *Sex Among the Rabble*.
[139] Fichtelberg, 8.
[140] Hendler, 7.

humanity to others, which would bind the citizens of the nation together.[141] It is also a simultaneous obliteration of the object of sympathy as the reader's own emotions are privileged in his or her place.[142] At the height of the sentimental culture of feeling in the mid-nineteenth century, Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous injunction to "feel right" was a statement of the social power of feeling to create change. The authors of the two novels examined in this chapter strategically use conventions of the sentimental in these two novels to create an identification with the reader, but rather than creating change, the sentimental conventions provide stabilizing plotlines, emotions, and ways of reading. By grounding the novels in the conventional sentimental framework, the authors free themselves to forge different paths for their protagonists to take, literally, as these heroines roam far and wide.

V.

The novels make use of the conventions of sentimental literature in vastly different ways. The tear of sympathy is one useful index of the treatment of sensibility, especially as it is meant to register a self-conscious emotional transaction with the reader. *The History of Constantius and Pulchera, or Constancy Rewarded* begins with a preface that already suggests the spirit of the novel is a burlesque of the conventions of the sentimental: "The repeated misfortunes of PULCHERA will cause the tear of sensibility to fall upon the cheek of the Fair, whilst at the same time, it affords them a peculiar source of amusement" (vii). The tear here indicates the performance of emotion as a kind of

[141] Many key writers of the era, James Madison and Adam Smith among them, wrote about nationality and sympathy.
[142] See Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in the 19th Century*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

entertainment, acknowledging the pleasure of amusement in the emotional transaction of suffering.[143] In a period that viewed fiction as detrimental, in which prefaces generally worked to declaim non-didactic fiction, a preface that clarifies the suffering of the heroine for purposes of entertainment rather than moral instruction makes this novel rather extraordinary.[144] The novel begins in Philadelphia in the home of Pulchera, and opens with her lamenting her father's decision to marry her to the French aristocrat Le Monte; she is in love with and promised to Constantius, a young American farmer her father had accepted as her future spouse. She cries her first tear while railing against her father "one who is totally unworthy the name of 'father'" (12). As in the preface, the tear here functions as a parody of the conventions of sentiment with its excess of emotion. At the same time, this explicit echo of Paine's *Common Sense,* in which he accuses the King of "the pretended title of FATHER OF HIS PEOPLE" (37), supplies a revolutionary resonance for Pulchera's character and the requisite emotional framework of elective orphanhood.

Pulchera next seizes her liberty and escapes with Constantius by climbing down the balcony[145] with a rope and running away with him. While this reads as a surprising act for a sentimental heroine, it is a matter of course for an elective orphan, and initiates Pulchera in a condition of unmoored identity. Her act of agency seems an instinctual deed

[143] The violence of this economy and its relation to race and nation have been addressed by many: Julie Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion*; Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Dana Nelson, *The Word in Black and White: Reading Race in American Literature, 1638-1867*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994; Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
[144] See Michael Warner, *The Republic of Letters*, Cathy Davidson, and Terrence Martin, for explorations of the danger of fiction.
[145] The balcony scene between lovers is one of many Shakespearean references in the novel, including the crossdressing of the protagonist.

rather than a planned action, as can be surmised from the narrator's comment on Pulchera's naïve surprise that her father would send a search party after them. Soon after their escape, British soldiers capture Constantius and impress him onto their ship. The unlucky Pulchera again breaks down in tears, irrational with grief; she is quickly recaptured by her father and brought home. These tearful episodes situate Pulchera within a narrative of victimization, at once parodying her familiar position in a stock plotline and asking the reader to identify her powerlessness as part of the emotional oscillation of the elective orphan.

While the novel begins by figuring Pulchera as a conventional sentimental heroine, and as such the sport of a cruel fate, she is not passive. She escapes from her home in a love-struck emotional act, but she then presents a well-argued and rational justification for her actions in a subsequent discussion with her father. She claims filial obedience, but argues that her father no longer possesses the right to give her away, as he "ratified the contract" of her emotional union with Constantius. By borrowing rhetoric from the constitutional debates, and basing her argument on power instead of love, she divests him of his patriarchal authority, telling him that he: "cease(s) to possess the right or power of disposing of [her] again" (23). Though her argument is logical, he in turn reacts emotionally, calling her a "poor silly creature" whose "folly would be her utter ruin" (25); and then he tells her, "to reason with a person void of rationality is no part of my business. Remember you are under my government and my will is your law" (25). As a victim of patriarchal injustice, she legitimizes her right to escape, not through the language of sentiment, but the language of contract. Using exactly the same argument that Whigs used, Pulchera emphasizes that the natural kinship bond can be broken by an

unjust use of authority, and that both parental rights and filial obedience were thereby severed. Even her father's reaction mimics the British press, which figured the child colony as a spoiled daughter, ungrateful and silly, desiring to leave the protection of the parent.[146]

If it wasn't clear earlier that Pulchera is an elective orphan, this insertion of revolutionary rhetoric renders it unmistakeble. Though Pulchera's escape was the rash act of a young lover, her justification for it can be read as a declaration of independence from her father's control. In contrast to the other elective orphans examined in this study, Pulchera's act of agency is motivated by romantic love rather than adventure and social mobility.[147] The motive for her escape in itself speaks to the problem of imagining any kind of freedom of self-invention for women other than that of the marriage choice: as a symbol of the American republic, she must achieve liberty; as a woman, her desired liberty is to marry the man she loves, a man contractually established as her mate. Her declaration of liberty, built on rational grounds, is dismissed entirely because she is a woman, and therefore irrational. This absurdity is meant to be ironic, certainly, but it also speaks to the way that the lens of gender influences political rhetoric. Though her escape is ineffectual, and she is indeed forced onto a ship with Le Monte as his bride, the conversation with her father gives Pulchera a rational republican character. The display of the sentimental tear becomes a manifestation of her gendered lack of power and her plight for republican liberty, at the same time these tears also ironically point to the

[146] Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, 95.
[147] I will go on to discuss Pierre in Herman Melville's *Pierre* as an elective orphan motivated by love, but his love is primarily filial.

power of emotion underlying the most rational of arguments, the woundedness of the elective orphan.

As a conventional sentimental heroine, Pulchera's agency is rendered non-existent through fate and chance.[148] But rather than center on the enclosed space of the home, the novel mainly depicts the boundary-less world of the sea, with fragmented, implausible and unpredictable plotlines. Once at sea, the enemy British board the French ship she is on, and as a result of the visibility of their love on their faces, she is reunited with Constantius, who is a prisoner on board, while Le Monte is made a prisoner in turn. They are shipwrecked, and she alone reaches shore, where she is soon rescued by an American ship. The enemy in turn boards this ship, but in order to escape ill-treatment, she assumes the dress of a male sailor, and the male moniker Valorus—self-fashioning again in both name and gender—and though a prisoner, is treated well. The farther away from land and home, the further the novel drifts from the gendered concerns of virtue, love, and marriage. In some senses, by the time Pulchera is dressed as a man, the novel has already become about one. Accordingly, as Pulchera moves through this chaotic world, her displays of emotion become muted, until the author conveys her subjectivity through actions rather than displays of affect. The emotional outbursts of the first few pages are noticeably subdued once Pulchera assumes male dress.

Strikingly, the novel goes one step further than other cross-dressing tales in its attempt to change how the heroine's gender is read: not only is she dressed as a man and

[148] Susanna Rowson's novels most often use a conventional sentimental plot of her time, which Henri Petter describes as "that of mishaps, coincidences, retarding events, misunderstandings, hardships, and a host of vices opposed to lonely and single-minded virtue." Henri Petter, *The Early American Novel* (Ohio State University Press, 1971), 28.

given a male name, she is now referred to with a masculine pronoun. No longer Pulchera, Valorus is a "he," even when it seems surprising and inconvenient, such as when the narrator is simply reporting mental dialogue. For example, "Valorus did not think proper to make known his sex, though he informed them he was an American, and that he was a prisoner when he had the misfortune to be shipwrecked" (67). The effect is to bring the readers' experience of the character in line with the other, unknowing characters in the text who see Valorus as male. Less a story about a woman in masquerade, we begin to read a narrative about a sailor, and the action begins to overshadow the concerns of gender. Simultaneously, as the gender of the character morphs, the genre does as well; from a woman afraid of "ill usage" (43) by her captors, she becomes an actor in a maritime adventure story.

Most interestingly, the change in pronoun is not continuous, though there is a clear pattern. While the affective displays that previously characterized Pulchera are all but gone, when they do recur, the character is figured as female: "None but her pillow was a witness to *her*[149] immoderate grief" (45). This creates an unnerving oscillation in the text; if one has accepted the change in pronoun, it seems very pointed to change it back momentarily for a singular display of emotion. The sentimental tear, and its affective interiority, here delimits the extent or boundary of containing a female within a masculine adventure narrative. As opposed to the excessive sensations of the characters of Charles Brockden Brown, such as the sublimity of self-fashioning in *Arthur Mervyn*, the adventures of this novel fail to produce much in the way of narrated response. When acting, the character is male, when thinking about her love, female. This alternation

[149] My emphasis.

highlights the lack of interiority expressed otherwise, even when the adventures seem to warrant extraordinary displays of affect. For example, while the naval battle ensues, the narrator mentions the fear of "the oldest veterans" but not that of Valorus: "In a few moments the combatants were at no more than sixty feet distance, which an incessant discharge of cannon, many of which were loaded with langrage and grape shot, was sufficient to have effectually tried the fortitude of the oldest veterans…" (44). While shipwrecked yet again, surviving a blizzard with no supplies, almost starving to death and agreeing to be shot and cannibalized for the sake of her two fellow sailors, the heroine's emotions are kept out of the text. It is only romantic love that necessitates the convention, and brings an awareness of gender back into the picture. The sentimental tear reminds us of the artifice of the protagonist's performance of the male gender through clothing, while it also points to the artifice of the performance of female gender through conventions of the sentimental.[150] I would like to suggest this movement between gendered genre conventions mimics the elective orphan's oscillation between agency and victimization. By laying claim to both of these subject positions, Pulchera is able to fully inhabit the affective dimensions of the revolutionary rhetoric she earlier parroted.

VI.

In Herman Mann's *The Female Review*, the protagonist is also portrayed within fluctuating and layered gender codes. Mann displays Deborah's subjectivity through a mix of male and female republican models. Judith Hiltner argues that this allows him to

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[150] Though Cathy Davidson argues that the novel would not have been read as a burlesque because of the emotions of the readers, I contend that burlesques are meant to evoke real emotion as a means of effecting their critique, and the effects of those emotions are not always lost when made ironic.

combine both male and female concepts of virtue into a singular republican ideal, one that paradoxically emphasizes her rational choice to cross-dress.[151] In the description of Sampson's childhood, Mann stresses her love of learning and proclivity for natural science, painting her as a self-taught intellect. He emphasizes her rationality in terms of religion, making her into a Deist and Unitarian, and purposefully leaving out the details of her short-term conversion to the Baptist Church. These traits emphasize the *masculine* republican ideal of the self-taught citizen, which Judith Hiltner argues is the persona that Mann often projected for himself.[152] Not surprisingly, Mann also makes her into a Deist like himself, able to resist the passion for revivalism then sweeping her neighborhood, though the historical record shows she temporarily converted to Baptism. His portrayal of her position toward religion stresses her character as self-fashioning: she is "a free agent" (95) beholden to no tradition for the sake of tradition alone. He writes that she finds many sects appealing and would not question a religion to which half the nation belongs, but finds, "being bound, to any set religion, by the force of man, would not only be an infraction of the laws of Nature, but a striking and effectual blow at the prime root of that liberty, for which our nation was then contending" (98). Thus "Nature" is constructed as that which allows agency over one's identity, the liberty at the heart of elective orphanhood. Sampson's freedom from binding convention is consequently linked to her masculine rationality, rather than any affective faculty. When he comes to the transgressive act of her enlistment, Mann frames her decision in terms of male sentiment—it is love that causes her to transgress the bounds of gender, but a selfless love of liberty, the kind that motivates all patriotic soldiers.

[151] Hiltner, 195.
[152] Ibid., 193.

Though Sampson is figured as a male republican ideal, the narrator repeatedly asks the reader to excuse, though not to emulate, Sampson's actions. These asides constitute, for the most part, an affective exchange between the narrator and the reader, on the subject of Sampson, but rarely do they portray Sampson's own emotions. However, there are a few asides that serve to inscribe her character with sensibility. For example, when she first witnesses death on the battlefield, the narrator interrupts the narrative of action with this address: "Perhaps, by this time, some may be ready to tax her with extreme obduracy, and, without mercy, to announce her void of all delicacy of sentiment and feeling" (139). After reminding the reader that patriotic soldiers such as Sampson deserve gratitude, he evokes the sentimental tear. However, her outburst of emotion is in the moment of the tale's relation rather than the battlefield: "She now says, no pen can describe her feelings experienced in the commencement of an engagement, the sole object of which is, to open the sluices of human blood. The unfeigned tear of humanity has more than once started in her eye in the rehearsal of such a scene as I have just described" (141). In this way, the image of the soldier in uniform on the battlefield is overlaid with the image of the older and decidedly more feminine image of a married matron telling of her past experience. In this way, her male "character" can remain one of agency and judgment rather than sentiment, though her sensibility is recognized and overlaid by the sensitive male narrator as a pedagogic tool. Sentimental conventions in this novel serve to neutralize the transgression of Sampson's transvestism by framing Sampson's narrative through the narrator's interpretive lens of emotion, even if Sampson's own feelings are mostly left undepicted.[153] This results in a multi-layered

[153] Mann also uses sentiment to convey his own antiwar agenda; when the British earlier

narrative in which gender roles do not correlate with the varying emotional expressivity of the character of the soldier, the woman relating her tale, and the male narrator shaping it. It is genre, not gender that determines the way emotion is expressed. The large exception to this rule is when Sampson contemplates the effects of her self-fashioning on her mother, which she does twice in the novel, a subject I will return to.

Mann's use of the language of sentiment to make a female soldier acceptable to a polite audience becomes more and more ironic as the narrative veers into fantasy. These episodes have often been dismissed by critics as incidental to the novel because they appear to be pure invention rather than linked to historical experience. While Mann subtitled the novel "Memoirs of an American Young Lady," he added a disclaimer in the preface that noted his addition of "moral reflections" as well as "literary and historical information" (ix). The more fantastic episodes are clearly recognizable to an audience now, as they must have been then, as forays of the imagination. Rather than dismiss them, though, I contend that they are important to the novel as a whole because they resituate the protagonist within other genres. As genres shape how texts are read, recognizable changes of convention do much to shift the interpretive lenses of the reader. The addition of stock plotlines from a mix of genres, a kind of textual vaudeville common in the early American novel, revises the very ground of reading, so that a reader must change her horizon of expectations, especially when the genres are inflected with gendered forms of agency. In *The Female Review*, the changes in genre work, surprisingly, to familiarize the heroine with her reader as a stock American hero,

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march upon Boston, all of nature is "convulsed" in a pathetic fallacy as the earth, sheep, and birds react to the "dis of war" (72) in their own display of emotion.

emphasizing her manly courage, even her ability to attract beautiful young women, and thereby compounding the portrayal of Sampson as a brave soldier. And still, even as Sampson plays out a scenario designed to be incredible, the narrator apologizes for its effect upon the ladies, reinserting the gender of the hero into the narrative. In some sense, at these moments of interruption Mann apologizes for his imagination, which continues to present Sampson in ways that are inappropriate for her gender, but are conditioned by genre. It is a game played by both reader and narrator, providing permission to leave the standard script behind.

Mann makes use of clear-cut captivity conventions in two fantastic episodes to justify and elaborate on Sampson's initial cross-dressing transgression, which he relates back to an American notion of liberty. Sampson yokes cross-dressing and elective orphanhood as she initially reacts to the Revolutionary War and considers her desire to dress as a man in order to leave home and possibly enlist. In this soliloquy she thinks through the liberties and vulnerabilities of self-fashioning:

> Though independent and free, custom in many respects, rules us with despotic sway: And the person who deviates from it, exposes himself to numberless dangers…But on the other hand, liberty gives us such ascendancy over old habit, that unless it bind us to some apparent or permanent good, its iron bands are subject to dissolution. (106)

The American charge, as contemplated by Sampson at this juncture, is wrapped up in the Enlightenment task of challenging custom in the name of individual liberty. Challenging gendered limits on public action, then, is a patriotic act. While Mann clearly aims to connect these ideas, he also stresses Sampson's desire for adventure and travel, to leave "the prison"(108) of the domestic sphere. In the same soliloquy, she thinks: "Must I forever counteract inclination and stay within the compass of the smoke of my own

chimney? Never tread on different soils; nor form an acquaintance with a greater circle of the human race? Stifle that spirit of heroic patriotism…" (107). Looking closely at this passage, patriotism is not the first or most important reason she considers leaving home. She is, like every elective orphan, driven by a desire for experience outside of the lot parceled to her.

VIII.

There are two episodes in *The Female Review* that borrow genre conventions from the sensationalized captivity narratives popular at the time. After being wounded in battle, but before she gets sick with the plague, Sampson volunteers for a mission to fight the Indians at Saratoga. Her party comes upon a scene of bloodshed by Indians, related in the conventional vocabulary of sensationalized captivity narratives, or penny dreadfuls: "they found the infernals had not finished their hellish sacrifices" (184). A white woman and two children lay dying, one scalped. The brave Sampson, somehow recognizing that one of the captured Indians is in racial masquerade, "thrust her hand into the bosom of one and rent his vesture" (184) to discover "the complexion of an Englishman, except where he was painted" (184). In this short episode, encompassing only a page of text, Mann reminds the reader that the heroine is herself in masquerade, therefore "teasing his readers"[154] with the drama of another's unmasking. I would argue that this scene also shifts the ground of the narrative by featuring Sampson in another recognizable genre; only this time, unlike in conventional captivity narratives, she is of the rescuing party instead of the party under attack.

[154] Alfred F. Young, *Masquerade*, 135.

Indian captivity narratives of the 17th and 18th centuries narrated the psychological and physical journeys of whites held captive through the religious concepts of divine punishment, test, and eventually, redemption through return. Toward the end of the 18th and during the 19th centuries, the narratives veered more toward the sensational and became the subject of fiction for popular audiences. At its heart, it is a genre in which women in particular have served to narrate their affective struggles with powerlessness. In this brief episode Sampson does no such thing; acting the part of an adventure hero, she does not comment on the atrocities she witnessed, neither the slaughtered whites nor her party's execution of the captured Indians.

A second Indian encounter elaborates on the captivity narrative, this time placing Sampson in actual captivity in order to more clearly differentiate her character. After suffering the plague, she takes a short break from the theater of war and travels west on a mineral expedition, still disguised as a man. While in the presence of an Indian tribe, she eats some fruit that causes a relapse of her fever, and is therefore left by her company for one month's time. This experience begins to read like a captivity narrative, despite its peaceful origin, in the way that it conveys the hero's archetypal separation from a familiar culture, transformation through the acquisition of knowledge, and return.[155] She experiences a "barbarous servitude" (213), and is threatened with cannibalism by her "master," a common plot device in both religious and sensationalistic narratives. Sampson responds by replying that "he must keep her better, or she should never do to eat" (213) a remark that causes the Indians to view her as extraordinary brave and accept her into their tribe, ritualized by her participation in the coronation of their King and its

[155] Richard VanDerBeets, *The Indian Captivity Narrative: An American Genre* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984).

festive meal and dances. On a hunting expedition with two Indians, an old man and a boy, she performs and excels at male skill, using her marksmanship to hunt turkey and buffalo, which serves to make the old man jealous. After he tries to attack her in her sleep with a hatchet, she kills him in self-defense. This is the only account of Sampson killing another human being; though in self-defense, the violence of the act is also minimized by the racism of the representation, in which Indians are utterly dehumanized and infantilized.

Mann uses the captivity narrative to structure this clearly fictional episode, which contains all the requisite elements of the genre: the threat of cannibalism, ritual acceptance into the tribe, and the acquisition of skills; even the dreaded scalping hatchet makes an appearance. However, these plot elements are divorced from the religious or sentimental scrims of reading and interpreting, making this Indian captivity more like Daniel Boone than Mary Rowlandson.[156] By upsetting the reader's gendered expectations of the genre, Mann emphasizes Sampson's agency and power, her difference from female captives. The switch in genre allows him another opportunity to present a powerful hero recognized and celebrated for bravery, where the concerns of gender fail to determine her actions in the world at large.

And yet, just when it seems that Mann has broken free from the sentimental, he returns Sampson to her identity as a daughter. And at this moment, the language of sentiment expresses her elective orphanhood. Lost in the woods with the Indian boy, Sampson is given a rare soliloquy, in which she thinks, "Why did I leave my native land to grieve the breast of a parent, who has doubtless shed floods of tears in my absence, and

[156] And indeed Judith Hiltner suggests that Boone was one of the models for the text.

whose cup of calamities seemed before but too full!" (219). Actually, this is not the first time she has tearfully imagined her mother suffering from her absence. These recollections of the maternal stand out in the text, in part, for their emotional tone, but also because they both prompt Sampson to compose letters to her mother. Her interior monologues, in which she imagines the tears and worry of her mother, call up a biological parent whose presence Mann exaggerated, as Sampson was, in her actual life, separated from her mother and apprenticed to other families from the age of five. He emphasizes the mother figure in order to make Sampson's orphanhood a matter of choice, questioning her previous decision to "leave [her] native land." For then, as an elective orphan, she becomes an inheritor of a recognizable narrative of American identity, and her transgressive transvestism becomes part of what makes her so. The female elected orphan, like her more common male counterpart, leaves home in order to find opportunity and adventure and in order to fashion herself apart from her identity and past, which her cross-dressing allows her to do.[157] Sampson's elective orphanhood is specifically constructed as a separation from the maternal, made clear by the continual insistence on her relationship with her national identity as example of this bond, referring to her as "Columbia's daughter," and the nation as "Columbia, her common parent" (vi). As Karen Weyler suggests, this has the effect of providing a chaste female symbolic lineage:

> The 'orphan' label further emphasizes Sampson's purity as the progeny of virginal Columbia, herself the orphaned daughter of England, and hence inheritor of an unsullied female lineage—a lineage just as compelling as the competing masculine Pilgrim lineage that Mann likewise claims for her.[158]

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[157] Sampson's self-fashioning is literal, as she wove the fabric for her male suit herself.
[158] Karen Weyler, "An Actor in the Drama of Revolution: Deborah Sampson, Print, and Performance in the Creation of Celebrity," *Feminist Interventions in Early American*

The daughter of Columbia is able to self-invent because of both the simultaneous presence and absence of a parental figure (whether figured as her mother, the nation, or the nation's mother, England); stressing the continuing presence/absence of these maternal figures renders the break from a knowable tradition an act of agency, which would not be possible for one left an orphan. Mann constructs Sampson's elective orphanhood by using conventions from different genres to provide her character with an oscillating sense of agency.

Sampson's brief emotional soliloquy in the wilderness is interrupted with a fitting end to the captivity narrative as such: she finds a large party of Indians with a young white female captive among them. She makes a plan to buy the girl, saving her from death, by pretending to desire her as a wife. They share the ruse of a marriage bed, but the girl's virginity is unthreatened, and then Sampson and her returned travel companions send her home to her family. By using the young girl to demonstrate the generic powerless position of the female captive, a slave for sale, Mann turns the convention on its head, imagining Sampson's female agency in the terms of male benevolence and privilege. By working against the reader's horizon of expectation, the author playfully uses genre to reveal the ways in which Sampson surpasses gender limitations. In doing so, he suggests that these limitations are cultural and not biological at a time when ideas of sexual difference were being reconfigured anatomically to justify existing power relations.[159]

Studies, (Carruth, Mary C., ed., Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 189.
[159] Clare A. Lyons, in *Sex Among the Rabble,* suggests that this reconfiguration was in place by the early nineteenth century.

Though Mann implies that gender limitations should be set aside for exceptional circumstances, his narrator explains and apologizes for Sampson's actions, cautioning his female reader that she should not attempt such a transgression. Despite his ambivalence toward his message, or maybe because of it, he invents episodes in order to redraw the radical implications of transvestism, to recontextualize them through the more familiar ground of narrative convention. The elopement into fantasy creates a larger-than-life heroine, who by virtue of her feminine chastity and masculine abilities possesses agency regardless of her gender or cultural conditions. In a sense Sampson is a typical archetypal hero, able to challenge natural law. Still, the depiction of a woman dressed as a man rescuing a helpless woman only serves to point to the irrelevance of gender categories, while seeming to sanction those of race.

IX.

The idea of captivity is a central theme of *The History of Constantius and Pulchera* as well. Pulchera's escape from captivity and recapture become a motif that not only repeats, but acts to structure the novel. A scene of liberty and recapture links each episode, as if Pulchera's initial act of agency and escape defines and limits the scope of action. The small liberty she wins every time she is set free from capture is rendered not only vulnerable, but farcical, as she careens from one escape to another. While she is in female dress, these scenes of capture poses a threat to her virtue, but once dressed as a man, her vulnerability is that of any hero traveling by sea during the Revolutionary War, at the mercy of fickle fortune. If the home is the conventional narrative space for women,

the sea is its counterpoint, a "frontier of masculinity,"[160] wherein males move from innocence to knowledge. Responding to the Enlightenment, post-Revolutionary stories of the sea shifted from Colonial-era examples of divine providence to narratives of individual reason and survival.[161] In the world of this novel, divine will is conspicuously absent, and there is no narrator acting as moral interpreter or mediator, as in the *The Female Review*. In essence, the novel, though it begins as a tale of sentiment, does not seek to explore the ethical, practical or spiritual ramifications of action or emotion. There is no religious or moral didacticism, but one can interpret the repeated scenes of captivity as a lengthy exploration of Pulchera's initial act of elective orphanhood. Her decisions to self-invent initiates a sequence of events that reveals the instability of her identity in a world where the most basic of human bonds, that of kinship, can be dissolved. While some critics have highlighted her lack of agency due to the overwhelming effects of fate and chance on her destiny, viewing her as a primarily passive and feminine character, they have failed to note the way her initial escape from captivity repeats over and over, in effect determining the shape of all action in the novel into that of escape and recapture.[162] As an exploration of agency, however, the text is decidedly more nuanced than critics have generally thought, in that it suggests the problems of autogenesis and the vulnerability of elective orphanhood.

Though captivity is the theme of *The History of Constantia and Pulchera*, there few genre conventions borrowed from either Indian captivity narratives or slave

[160] Robin Miskolcze, *Women and Children First: Nineteenth-Century Sea Narratives and American Identity* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), x.
[161] Ibid., 21.
[162] For example, Cathy Davidson writes that she remains innocent and passive because her many abductions force her into committing her transgressions, p. 273.

narratives coincide with those of elective orphanhood: the loss of family and identity. The novel's captivity motif mainly plays out through the formal conventions of another genre: the picaresque. There is much to say about the picaresque, but a brief summation of the characteristics of the genre may be useful here.[163]

The picturesque as a genre stems originally from the Spanish novella picaresca, written around the turn of the seventeenth century and tremendously popular in European writing a half-century later.[164] While it might seem a stretch to compare the novels in this chapter to the Spanish novella picarescas, the picaresque can be viewed as a mode of writing used to portray a kind of adventure story. The picaresque is formally characterized by a series of episodes, where every discrete episode has a beginning, middle, and end, linked merely through the protagonist's experience. The build-up of these episodes creates a sense of disintegration, so that the world of the novel feels unstable, chaotic, and fragmentary; and the genre itself repels closure and resolution, so that often endings appear to be tacked on or the narratives simply stop. The endless adventures of the picaresque seem to reveal the world as lacking in structure; without a divine plan the excess it portrays is both comical and threatening. As Stuart Miller writes,

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[163] The picaresque in its critical historiography seems to swing from being defined as either a genre tied to the economic, social and political conditions of siglo de oro Spain, or as an ahistorical narrative structure based merely on plot. I follow Stuart Miller's 1967 study, *The Picaresque Novel*, (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1967), in viewing the genre as defined by its episodic form.
[164] *Don Quixote* disparaged and parodied the genre, though this novel is now considered to a general audience its most famous example. For a great critical study of the picaresque, see Ulrich Wicks, *Picaresque Narrative, Picaresque Fictions: A Theory and Research Guide*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989); and Claudio Guillen, *Literature as System*: *Essays Towards the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971). On early American novels, see Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*.

the series of episodes, and the focus on chance and fortune, "projects a universe in a state of chaos."[165]

This indeterminacy is not only a formal feature of the world of the picaresque, it also describes the heart of the picaresque, the protagonist or picaro. Miller compares the external instability of the universe in picaresques with the inner state of the protagonist, whose "internal chaos is externally reflected in his protean roles."[166] The picaro is a mutable figure, one whose very identity is made up of masks and inconstancy. Since the genre originated as a parody of the heroic and epic, the picaro is usually a kind of anti-hero. As an outsider, he leaves his home to seek adventures, exploring the dymanic nature of capitalism, as Ian Watts explains in *The Rise of the Novel*. The picaro's outsider status is such that he has been described as a "young orphan…led to break all ties with his native city."[167] He traditionally wanders through the panorama of society far and wide, a rogue, able to use his ability to self-fashion anew in order to assist his social climb. In other words, the elective orphans in this study play out the cultural logic of Independence, and like the traditional picaro, explore self-fashioning as a new condition of emerging market capitalism.

With wanderlust as one of the primary characteristics of a picaro, one would imagine that most picaros would be male, and they generally have been. There is, however, a tradition of female picaras, one that depicts women cross-dressing as men.[168]

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[165] Stuart Miller, *The Picaresque Novel*, 131.
[166] Ibid., 131.
[167] Guillen, 79.
[168] About a female picara, *La picara Justina* by López de Ubeda (1605) is considered a foundational text to the genre, along with *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades* (1554) and *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599). By 1605, when the first

As picaros in general have been viewed as mutable in essence, it seems apropos that gender would be considered another performable identity, and crossdressing a picaresque convention. As has been noted by critics before,[169] *The History of Constantius and Pulchera* and *The Female Review,* with their episodic plots and cross-dressing adventuring female heroes, are early American picaresques. In the context of both *The History of Constantius and Pulchera* and *The Female Review*, the morally-suspicious breach of gender bounds is thus fair-play when placed within a genre that routinely includes heroes in the act of imposture. Or maybe, in an American context, the picturesque allows the heroines' transgressions to be another kind of acceptable roguery, unthreatening to their feminine "virtue" when rendered in the recognizable narrative of elective orphanhood. Paradoxically, the powerful category disruption of the cross-dressing woman is triumphantly shoved into the background during the most fantastic episodes, when the protagonists read as simply adventure heroes and the question of gender falls away. These transgressive moments in the text allow the characters to become true picaras (or picaros actually) by momentarily glossing over gender as a frame through which to understand the characters, plot, and fictional world. At these moments, then, the picaresque allows these two female characters to make use of the elective orphan narrative in order to establish them as republican representatives of the nation. They resemble Ben Franklin more than Charlotte Temple, and like Franklin, their quest

part of *Don Quixote* came along, it seems as though the genre was established as such, as Wicks notes, though *Don Quixote* has mistakenly been misrecognized as one.

[169] Cathy Davidson writes about these two novels alongside other American picaresques in *Revolution and the Word*.

for money, adventure, (and in Pulchera's case, love) has an uneasy but fruitful relationship to republican citizenship.[170]

The Female Review can be read as a picaresque novel, with Sampson as its crossdressing picara heroine adventurer, traveling through the American landscape. And there are a number of details that would seem perplexing in the narrative without the picaresque context. First, Sampson's desire for adventure, her wanderlust, which Mann stresses alongside patriotism as the motivating factor for her transvestism, would reflect negatively on her character were she not a picara. Her flirtations and courtship of young women, fantasies Mann added to the historical record to titillate his audience,[171] also substantiate her characterization as a virtuous rogue. Her flirtations with women appear both paradoxically physical and asexual, and so the flirtations do not tread on virtue's fragility but instead suggest the purity of homosocial love, a "noble, angelic passion" (204). Within the picaresque frame, her deception and imposture make sense, lending credence to the power of her gender performance. And though the novel borrows from a number of other genres, the way that Mann fabricated the plotline in an episodic structure implies that he drew upon the picaresque in order to resituate Sampson's crossdressing, to shift the contextual and conventional ground upon which her gender transgression would be read.

The History of Constantia and Pulchera can be viewed as a picaresque that burlesques the theme of captivity, as captivity and escape are the primary experiences of the protagonist, repeated ad naseum. Captivity and release into freedom acts as a link between every episode in the novel, and creates a sped-up movement through the

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[170] As Judith Hiltner writes, Herman Mann was deeply influenced by Benjamin Franklin.
[171] See Alfred F. Young's *Masquerade* for an explication of these scenes.

physical space of the sea, as well as an undeniably picaresque rhythm of action. This rhythm becomes increasingly frenetic over the course of the novel, so that the episodes become shorter in duration and more hastily described. The effect, as Cathy Davidson describes it, is “a work so diffuse, episodic, and self-contradictory as to be virtually unreadable today.”[172] One can only surmise from the popularity of the novel in its time that it was not only readable but that readers familiar with the picaresque enjoyed the way the hyper-episodic plot of the picaresque is: “left open to the fantastic, the improbable, and even the weird.”[173] As Davidson describes in *Revolution and the Word*, picaresques spoke to US audiences in the post-revolutionary period for the ways in which the genre “could exploit the diverging rhetorics of the early national period, sometimes for a serious purpose but often for comic effect,”[174] which suggests that audiences would not have necessarily been bothered by the contradictions of the text. However, I can’t imagine the novel being read as anything less than disorienting, no matter the era. This frenetic novel leaves the reader with a fantastically tattered plot, fragmented world, and a concept of identity unmoored in any stable category or character, concerns that remain foregrounded even when the hero reaches land and novel shifts back to the conventions and language of sentiment.

Pulchera’s picaresque adventure, as I have previously described, is initiated by her father’s breech of parental contract in his renouncement of his earlier agreement to give his daughter’s hand to Constantius. This rupture, one that foregrounds Pulchera as an elective orphan, is what she chooses to write about on the verge of death in one last

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[172] Davidson, 143.
[173] Which is how Miller describes the picaresque, 10.
[174] Davidson, 248.

letter home. Like Deborah Sampson's letters to her mother, the composition of a missive allows for direct access to the protagonist's thoughts without the mediation of a narrating voice, but unlike Sampson, Pulchera/Valorus is defiant and angry. Trapped by an ice storm and starving with two fellow sailors in a cave on a deserted island after being shipwrecked yet again, Pulchera/Valorus picks the short straw and agrees to be cannibalized so that her fellow sailors may live. She accepts her fate calmly and rationally and asks only to write her father the following letter:

> Dear Pappa,
> From the center of a frozen wilderness, on the border of the grave, please to receive this last token from your only child—driven from home, I have been the sport of fortune, but fifteen minutes will put me out of her power. I shall then be in a state of changeless retribution. Had I not been obliged by a Father's stern command, to forego a promise I made by his express license, I might still have lived and have been happy—as far as I am concerned. I forgive you heartily, but pray Sir, see that you are prepared to stand at the bar of the omniscient judge. Your Lost Child, Valorus." (58-9)

The letter is notable for a number of reasons, the first of which is her insubordinate warning to her father to be "prepared to stand at the bar of the omniscient judge." This remark, as far as could be from the passive feminine ideal of the obedient daughter, comes after she recasts her escape from home into a narrative of forced action (therefore she is "driven from home"), mimicking revolutionary political rhetoric wherein England's parental cruelty forced the hand of the colonies toward Independence. Most astonishing, however, is that the letter acknowledges her changeable identity by contrasting it with "changeless" death, and ends with her signing a letter "home" with her male name. Her mutability is brought about by her father's unethical use of patriarchal authority rather than contractual authority. That she chooses to stress this point as her last word to her father, her last act before death, suggests that the entire novel is an

exploration of an unmoored American condition resulting from the trauma of elective orphanhood, from revolution and rebellion against patriarchal authority.

It would be a very dark novel indeed if Pulchera/Valorus met her/his end through cannibalism; the novel, comic and entertaining, instead has her companion spot a bear as he is about the pull the trigger, which becomes his target and allows them to eat and survive. After this stroke of luck, other turns of fortune revolve around the hero's protean identity. The three sailors are rescued by a British ship, and Pulchera/Valorus is given prize money from the last shipwreck (on which she was a prisoner) and a officer's position aboard; but soon they take another ship and our hero is made prize-master before being in turn captured by the British. At this juncture our hero/heroine is suspected of imposture and taken for a rogue and pirate. The narrator then inserts an italicized and unattributed line of poetry as comment: "*Unhappy nymph, who thus art forc'd to roam. Without a kind protector, friend or home*" (69). The elective orphan's iteration of victimization here serves to stress the complex interweaving of narratives of agency with a lack thereof, of being "forc'd to roam." Our hero soon escapes prison through a sewer drain, ("it was nauseous to the last degree" (70), and after dodging a few more captivities, is finally given her freedom from a generous British captain. No one character in the novel, including the British "enemy," has mistreated her though she has spent most of her time in the vulnerable position of powerlessness; that is, except for her father. Once free, Pulchera/Valorus takes the prize money from the shipwreck and buys a male suit, sets sail for France, and continues to play the part of a man. Once on land, liberty "sticks" and the plot moves away from voyaging episodes of captivity into a singular narrative

concern with love; in other words, the novel changes back into sentimental clothing from the picaresque.

Though near its end the text resumes its concerns with the codes of sensibility and affect, love and marriage, the protagonist remains in male clothes while attempting to pursue Constantius. Continuing to be called "Valorus," Pulchera is utterly unrecognizable in male clothes, even to her former fiancé. Pulchera/Valorus only chooses to return to female dress to steal Constantius from his new betrothed in an elaborate plot that displays both her active agency and his affect.[175] As the novel moves toward her transformation back into femininity, the narrative begins to be focalized through Constantius and his sensitive emotional register. Perhaps this switch in focalization allows the reader to see the feminine Pulchera emerge back into the novel through Constantius' eyes, like one arisen from the dead. Viewing her as a woman, he is rendered passively speechless, almost apoplectic, and so it is Pulchera who speaks. Yet at her most active, she acknowledges her lack of agency over their fate together—it is up to him to determine if he loves her still. She uses the language of contract: "I plead no contract, but leave you to the free determination of your affection…" (92). At the beginning of the novel, Pulchera justifies her relationship to Constantius, and therefore her escape from home, in terms of contract. She suggests that her father brokd the contract of Constantius' claim as her original fiancé and, furthermore, dissolved the contract between parent and child by his use of unjust authority. Here at the end of the novel, she further stresses the voluntaristic and affectional nature of the bonds of kinship, borrowing from Scottish Common Sense philosophy the sense of the heart as the supreme moral arbiter. All kinship bonds,

[175] Cathy Davidson, p.271, makes this point and gives a wonderful reading of this reversal of gender roles.

including her marriage to Constantius, must be from the "internal obligation" of emotion, rather than "external obligation," a common distinction in political theory of the late eighteenth century.[176]

X.

Indeed, after Constantius and Pulchera marry, they return to America and gain the blessings of her repentant and redeemed father who regrets his misuse of authority. This neat sentimental closure is troubled by the entirety of the hero's experience. In her essay "Endings and Contradictions" Rachel Blau du Plessis points to the way that the quest narrative and the romance narrative are "a structuring dialectic" in 19th century works about women, a contradiction traditionally resolved by fulfilling the romance plot through marriage and thereby repressing the quest, the bildung.[177] If in *The History of Constantius and Pulchera*, the traditional marriage plot is meant to repress the quest plot and the utterly fragmented world of the picaresque, it can only do so unsuccessfully, so strongly has the author depicted the contingency of this textual world. The only thing that Pulchera learns in this novel is that she is, no matter her gender, subject to the effects of chance and fortune, the forceful repetition of the experience of captivity and escape, and how to reinvent her identity to seize every small opportunity for agency presented to her. These are lessons for advancing in the corrupt mercantilism of Philadelphia's emerging capitalism of the 1790s, the lessons of the elective orphan, so forefully articulated in the

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[176] Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, 102.
[177] Rachel Blau du Plessis, "Endings and Contradictions," in *Narrative Dynamic: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames* (ed. Brian Richardson, Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 287.

novels of Charles Brockden Brown. They are not lessons Pulchera can use in the married life she gains at the end. The entirety of the novel, up to this point, seemed scripted to suggest that closure in itself is temporary, and that there is another adventure just around the next page. The stability of identity and situation implied by her marriage to Constantius is too great a contrast to the wholesale instability of the picaresque world, and so the end fails to provide closure to the larger issues raised.

At the end of *The Female Review*, Deborah Sampson, like Pulchera, does not immediately shed her male identity, but continues to act the part of a young man as it suits her. The narrator tells us that she leaves the scene of war, and would return to the asylum of a parent's home, but lacking one, she simply finds some relations in Massachusetts and commences life as a farmer under her brother's name. We revisit, on the last few pages of the novel, the theme of Sampson's flirtations with the young women of the village. Though titillating for their ambiguous sexuality, an actual sexual relationship is seen as impossible, as "animal love, on her part, was out of the question" (236). The narrator here waxes moralistic, not in condemnation of Sampson for her "intrigues" as he calls them, but against the young women whose passion leaves them vulnerable to seduction. He even wonders if Sampson counseled them for the sake of their reputations. Her flirtations suggest why she decided to remain disguised as a man, and confirm her character as a (virtuous) picaresque rogue rather than merely patriotic. And then, suddenly, she "leaped from the masculine, to the feminine sphere" (238), though the narrator presents this decision as unknowable: "Whether this was done voluntarily or compulsively, is to me an enigma. But she continues a phenomenon among the revolutions of her sex" (238). The novel ends with this evocative phrase: "revolutions

of her sex," again aligning Sampson's gender "revolution" with national Independence. Coupled with the puzzlement the narrator expresses on her return to the feminine sphere, the use of the word "revolution," which connoted a natural, cyclical turn as in the revolution of a planet, suggests that the author wishes to end with the idea that Sampson's gender transvestism has become both naturalized and acceptable.

The novel does not simply end there. If it had, it would have daringly escaped the narrative resolutions of marriage or death typical of novels about women until the twentieth century. But Mann provides a strange miscellany of an appendix: it includes a character sketch emphasizing Sampson's bravery and chastity; an erotic seduction tale about a character named Fatima centered around a slightly immodest garment; a disquisition on the harmless nature of Sampson's flirtations; a teleological narrative of the progress of "Columbia" that begins with Columbus and the "savage wilderness" (250) and ends with the triumphant creation of a constitutional government, industry and economy; an antiwar diatribe; documents authenticating Sampson's military experiences leading to her pension; and finally, a gossip-laden though rosy update on Sampson that explains that she married happily and had children (though is said to deny her husband sex), and is a farmer's wife, strict disciplinarian and schoolteacher. The very last phrase of the appendix is, tellingly, "that virtue prescribes" (258). This appendix, revising the earlier, more radical ending, is an index of the ideological and didactic impulses of the novel. It anxiously attempts to provide closure to many of the loose ends or open questions the novel raises through different forms of writing. Quite literally tacked on as an afterthought and run together in a list, the appendix fails to create order or address the instability of identity in any meaningful way. This suggests that the narrator's

commentary in the text, like the appendix, attempted to add a framework of apology through the language of sentiment but could not completely reconcile the contradictions of Sampson's narrative, or the larger problematics of elective orphanhood. In its list of different types of writing and genre, it becomes clear how the conventions of genre work in the text—in both texts—as a means to try to make sense of the problem of representing an agency layered with the burden of liberty, rationality, justification, woundedness, and loss.

The reversion of the female picara back to female dress and her narrative to the marriage plot has been read as evidence of the ways the picara reaffirms conventional ideas of gender and power relations. Though Cathy Davidson is the only critic who has treated these two novels together as female picaresques, she finds of Sampson, and the female picara in general, that

> her very role in the fiction is specious and surreptitious, is conditional upon its being asserted in ways that challenge neither the status quo nor the double standard. Personal power without political power can provide a momentary fantasy but is not solution to the larger dilemma of female disenfranchisement within the polis.[178]

In other words, the novels fail precisely because the heroines must become male impostures in order to travel alone and experience the world outside of the home. I would argue that by becoming elective orphans, Sampson and Pulchera assume an autogenic liberty, a powerfully rationalizing though morally ambiguous narrative for a post-revolutionary nation contending with the epistemological consequences of an evacuated

[178] Davidson, 269. This argument is similar to feminist arguments, such an Ann Douglass', that disparage the culture of sentiment for its accommodation to power relations, and has been countered by others who see the culture of sentiment of the nineteenth century as a proto-feminist reconfiguration of the terms of power that did gain substantial cultural traction.

authority. By thinking through the emotional and intellectual consequences of the political rhetoric of the revolution, they attempt to conceptualize and represent agency free from the bounds of gender. The attempt to imagine what this would look like, and to respresent it, is surely more than a "momentary fantasy," it is a re-thinking of gender, which, like the solar system, can be imagined anew.

Chapter Four

"Absolute Irrelation:"
The Problem of Relation in Poe's *Eureka* and *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*

I.

The first three chapters of this dissertation explore the trope of elective orphanhood as it appeared in four novels from the 1790s. All of the protagonists from these texts choose elective orphanhood in order to willfully self-fashion, reproducing depictions of the new republic in revolutionary and post-revolutionary public discourse as free to make its destiny, released from the shackles of the past. As these previous chapters have demonstrated, the elective orphan figure of the 1790s simultaneously stood for the vertiginous freedom that the fiction of autogenesis could provide as well as a terrifying instability caused by this same liberty in a world of economic, political and social flux. The revolutionary potential in autogenesis, over the next half-century, would become subsumed within the triumphal narratives of individualism and self-reliance. In new iterations of the stock orphan character found in popular novels as novels themselves rose to a new height of popularity, the emergent culture of domesticity found a model of middle class mores.[179] These orphan novels generally followed plots determined by

[179] There is a well-known body of criticism on the subject of domestic novels, many of which touch on the orphan, including: Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820–1870* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1978); Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* 1977 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998); Anna May Duane, Suffering Childhood in Early America: Violence, Race, and the Making of the Child Victim (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2010);

gender: either tales of male capitalist success or female familial recuperation. Responding to this hegemonic middle class ethos, some writers sought to critique what American culture had made of the newly centralized ideologies of individualism and self-reliance. The remaining chapters of this dissertation will focus on two such writers, Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville, both of whom published novels that feature elective orphans as opposed to sentimental orphans. For Edgar Allan Poe, the elective orphan figure would serve to express both the possibility and vulnerability of a selfhood based on self-invention and self-interest, much like the post-revolutionary elective orphan. Poe writes elective orphanhood as a challenge to and exploration of the repercussions of an identity based on a rupture with the past. He recuperates the elective orphan of the Post Revolutionary period to critique his own era; in this way he uses a foundational American narrative to interrogate thinking about relation, and his relation to thinking.

II.

Before we can begin to consider the example of Edgar Allan Poe in this chapter, we must return to the iconography of the 1790s to trace its resounding echo.[180] As the Revolution receded, the sons and daughters of the revolutionary generation, with no need to justify their disloyalty to Great Britain, made the founding fathers the new parents of

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Diana Loercher Pazicky, *Cultural Orphans in America* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998); Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005); Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790–1860 (*New York: Oxford UP, 1985).

[180] I am using Joyce Appleby's notion of generations here. Joyce Oldham Appleby. *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000).

the nation, and liberty their inheritable estate.[181] The term "founding fathers" performed a great cultural work in its ability to make the recent past seem an inevitable outcome of history since it often was employed to refer to not only the Revolutionary generation, but also the colonies' founders. This broad sweep through time displaced the British as the parental line of descent and made the Revolution the teleological outcome of a continuous history.[182] In the iconography of the nineteenth century, George Washington was most often conjured as the ideal parent.[183] When Washington Irving's character Rip Van Winkle emerges from his long sleep to behold his changed culture after the Revolution, King George's portrait has been replaced by George Washington's face. In addition to the founding fathers, the virginal Columbia, that goddess-like symbol of liberty, was invoked as mother of the new republic, and the citizens, her children.[184]

The simultaneous passing of founding fathers Thomas Jefferson and John Adams on the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, July 4th, 1826, marked the ending of the Revolutionary Era. Daniel Webster's eulogy on the occasion notes:

> We should have felt that one great link, connecting us with former times, was broken; that we had lost something more, as it were, of the presence of the Revolution itself, and of the act of independence, and were driven on, by another great remove from the days of our country's early distinction, to meet posterity and to mix with the future.[185]

This sense of a lost connection to an ideologically definitive past, this time not a chosen but an imposed break, was reflected in the use of familial metaphors in early novels. As

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[181] While this idea seems ubiquitous in writings of the antebellum period, one can readily look to Daniel Webster's speeches.
[182] George B. Forgie, *Patricide in the House Divided: A Psycholgical Interpretation of Lincoln and His Age* (New York, W. W. Norton and Co., 1979), 20.
[183] Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, 50.
[184] Columbia served as a symbol of liberty, even to Phyllis Wheatley, an enslaved poet who penned a poem in her honor.
[185] Daniel Webster, Eulogy, Aug. 2, 1826.

we have seen in the last three chapters of this dissertation, in early American novels written in that first flowering of a national literature (1789-1800), the protagonists are often elective orphans whose families remain in the textual world, suggesting that a new identity without a past is a tenuous construction but useful fiction.[186] Even for those characters truly orphaned, the past remains tragically ever-present, returning to haunt the textual world with resurfacing bloodlines that further displace them.[187] But as the nineteenth century began and the Revolutionary generation died off, the (dis)connection to the past registered as a source of loss and grief, and the political institutions and ideals of the founders became an inheritance to protect and pass on.

In the span of one generation, large-scale market, technological, territorial and population changes refashioned the nation, all undergirded by changes in ideas of the individual's place in society. Political and economic theories that influenced and gave rise to the American Revolution generated a new understanding of the self. Enlightenment notions of the individual based upon Lockean ideas of contract stressed the belief that government existed with the consent of the governed to protect citizens from the laws of nature.[188] This way of thinking centered the individual, revising traditional ideas of a person as born into a web of identities and duties. Other seventeenth century political theorists popularized the notion of individualism at the heart of the

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[186] Even *Charlotte Temple,* who was conned into separation from her family, would fit this reading.
[187] As in what some consider the first American novel, *The Power of Sympathy*, where the main characters, involved in a romantic relationship, find out that they are siblings through the discovery of the female orphan's father's identity.
[188] As well as the foundational principal that men are equal and independent and should not harm another's life, health, liberty or possessions. Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York: NYU Press, 1984), 21. Also, Anna May Duane explores the child as the metaphorical figure of consent in *Suffering Childhood*.

Enlightenment and liberal democratic state. C.B. Macpherson[189] traces individualism through Hobbes, whose notions of political rights and responsibilities arose from a concept of society as composed of independent individuals, and through Bentham, who saw individuals as acting on utilitarian motives. For Macpherson, these conceptions of individualism gave rise to the belief of the individual as possessing himself, a concept of selfhood based on property relations.[190]

Capitalism depended on these same ideas of individualism, where persons were seen as rational actors guided by their own free choice and self-interest. In *Wealth of Nations* Adam Smith described economics as a natural system possessing its own regularity and propelled by individual striving. The concept of self-interest in this period, as Joyce Appleby explains,[191] was in some ways an equalizing idea, for it proposed that all men have the capacity for rational action. Smith's concept of liberty is itself tied to the "perfect freedom" of following one's own self-interested motivation, which he posited against European policies that restricted and regulated competition.[192] His concept of the free self is one that is able to participate fully in the rules of exchange. These liberal notions of individualism and commerce contradicted classical republican ideas of the body politic as held together by civic virtue, or the disinterestedness of the citizens for the good of the whole. And yet, in the 1790s these conflicting philosophies combined

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[189] C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).
[190] Macpherson's look at this particular aspect of individualism makes clear why the metaphor of slavery, in the face of actual chattel slavery, was so central to American Revolutionary discourse. To be governed without consent was represented as a kind of slavery. If the self is a thing that can be owned, then it is property, as slavery demonstrated, and always vulnerable to this relation of exchange.
[191] Ibid., 50.
[192] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, (Edited by Edwin Cannan, intro by Max Lerner, New York: The Modern Library, 1937), 124-5.

together into a forceful Republican politics that both feared and desired economic expansion.

Notions of self-determination and historical agency, so important to the Revolutionary age, were also being revised in the religious arena. The Calvinist model of history as providence shifted to incorporate notions of historical agency and free will.[193] As the Second Great Awakening gained force, the doctrines of predestination and election were minimized in favor of the importance of individual choice. By the 1830s, the religious culture of moral improvement would completely divorce the notion of salvation from Calvinism's divine election, to posit individual decision as the key to both personal salvation and Christ's second coming.[194]

Beginning in the antebellum period, and reaching a peak at mid-century, sentimental novels inevitably featured orphans as either feminine figures of the loss and recovery of an original identity or bloodline, or masculine paragons of capitalist success.[195] These figurations attempted to tame the anxieties lurking beneath the cultural narratives of autogenesis and self-determination that the elective orphan had previously expressed. Rather than critique the possibilities and anxieties of a self-determination based on vulnerable human rationality, the sentimental orphan celebrated the value of possessive individualism, whether located in the male public sphere or female domesticity. The domestic sphere and its heightened importance placed on womanhood, home, and the family provided possessive individualism its "stable value," its calm center

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[193] Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language and the Culture of Performance*, 141.
[194] See the teachings of preacher Charles Grandison Finney.
[195] The *Horatio Alger* tales are the epitome of the male orphan as capitalist success.

supposedly free from market demands, but actually created by and allowing for them.[196] In popular sentimental novels such as *The Wide, Wide World*, *The Lamplighter*, and *Hidden Hand*, the stock character of the orphan overcomes his/her exile from the domestic sphere, finding entry into the property system of the public sphere. These tales usually portray the orphan as a member of the upper or middle class whose fall into poverty is a short-lived obstacle before the orphan finds his/her "true" place in society. As narratives of class recovery, orphan tales were written for a female middle-class audience and betray an anxiety about the position of the middle class.[197] Sentimental orphans displaced elective orphans as domesticity became the governing ideological trope, with its fiction of separate spheres, and privileging of familial ties as the natural basis of identity and emotion.[198] The relation to the past had been remade so entirely that it no longer threatened to overturn identity, but offered the promise of confirming it.

The fantasy of autogenesis gained a different kind of relevance against the backdrop of a popular literary culture filled with sentimental orphans. The sentimental orphan can also be viewed as a direct outgrowth of what David Reynolds terms "conventional moral reform literature,"[199] tracts and novels popular in the antebellum

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[196] Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism*: *Imagining the Self in Nineteenth Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 3.
[197] Pazicky, 157.
[198] This is of course not true for all novels about orphans, as these persisted alongside tales of elective orphans. In the post-revolutionary period, there were some novels about orphans who turn out to have aristocratic blood, such as *Julia and the Illuminated Baron* (1800). I am speaking of a general trend.
[199] David Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

period that entertained while communicating a didactic new-light Christian message.[200] Elective orphanhood could be used to evoke not only a revolutionary impulse, but also the kinds of larger ambiguities around authority, agency and the power of rationality that surfaced as a result of the Revolution. It made the revolutionary past resonate with a critique of contemporary antebellum culture that critics have so long registered in the literature of American Renaissance writers. As Stanley Cavell writes of Emerson, Poe's contemporary and preferred object of scorn:

> And then take Emerson's question of where we find ourselves as asking how we are founding ourselves, since there is no one voyage to America. As if Emerson's self-repression is to enact the wish to found a tradition of thinking without founders, without foundation; as if we are perhaps to ratify ourselves with Foundling Fathers.[201]

Cavell's pun, "Foundling Fathers," perspicaciously combines the project and dilemma of elective orphanhood, with its problem of legitimacy, so that one must authorize, or "ratify" oneself, and ratify oneself as a foundling, or abandoned child. Emerson's creed of self-reliance, as Cavell writes, is an interpretation of Decartes' famous "I think, I am" into an argument for "authoring" oneself, of self-creation, of saying "I" which is threatened by the conformity of his culture.[202] Emerson and Poe, as Cavell writes, have in common the sense that writing must authorize itself, or "assume…the proof of its own existence."[203] These authors continue a fantasy of autogenesis inaugurated by the

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[200] Reynolds also posits other more sensational "Subversive" kinds of reform literature, which provided antebellum writers, including sentimental writers, with a body of religious imagery freed from its dogmatic context.
[201] Stanley Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 60.
[202] Ibid., "Being Odd, Getting Even," 89.
[203] Ibid., 108.

American Revolution; Edgar Allan Poe, in particular, can be read as the epitome of a writer grappling with the anxieties of the "Foundling Fathers."

III.

I would like to bridge the gap between the novels of the 1790s and Poe's later works *Eureka* (1848) and *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) by discussing Poe's *Journals of Julius Rodman*, (1840) an unfinished tale based on an imaginary expedition in 1792 exploring the regions of the Lewis and Clark voyage (1804-06) before Lewis and Clark. I hope to approach the tale through the idea of "interest," a word that occurs at key moments linking the individual, Rodman, to his larger community. In this way Poe subtly recalls the central importance of questions of "self-interest" to the political rhetoric of the 1790s, when the economic and political policy of the new nation was fiercely debated in terms of the individual's relation to the community. As Adam Smith described it in *The Wealth of Nations*, self-interest as the primary human motivating agent presumes a common rationality and therefore a common equality, while it simultaneously reduces all human behavior to categorical motives. It is perhaps this notion in particular that Poe addresses, for in most of Poe's writing, human motivation is little connected to ideas of self-preservation or self-interest.

As a hoax, the tale upon publication managed to convince some people that Jefferson's commissioned explorers Lewis and Clark were not the original ones to achieve, as the subtitle claims, "First Passage across the Rocky Mountains of North

America ever achieved by Civilized Man."[204] Written in 1840, *Rodman* provides a very particular imaginative portrait of the 1790s as a vast wilderness full of the dangers of hostile Indians, bears, and natural disasters as well as the pleasures of the explorer: discovery of the unknown, paradisiacal gardens, sublime views and male camaraderie. It begins, in characteristic Poe fashion, with two editors who establish a framework for the journals that seems to both provide and undercut credibility. The editors explain that Julius Rodman did indeed go on the expedition as the journals recount, but that his manuscript was found after his death by his grandson, James Rodman, who suffered, like his grandfather, from "hereditary hypochondria" (1187). The editors note that this condition caused him to undertake the expedition, to "seek, in the bosom of the wilderness, that peace which his peculiar disposition would not suffer him to enjoy among men" (1188). This characterization serves to make Julius Rodman, who begins narrating in the second chapter, an unreliable narrator. To compensate for this status, the editors augment the tale's truth-value by presenting historical accounts of other western explorers.

Poe begins the second chapter with Rodman narrating a very different rationale for his journey than that of the editors. He opens,

> After the death of my father, and both sisters, I took no farther interest in our plantation at the Point, and sold it, at a complete sacrifice, to M. Junot. I had often thought of trapping up the Missouri, and resolved now to go on an expedition up that river, and try to procure peltries, which I was sure of being able to sell at Petite Côte to the private agents of the Northwest Fur Company. (1196)

[204] According to Kenneth Silverman in Edgar A. Poe: *Mournful and Neverending Remembrance* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), it was cited in an 1840 US Senate document as a factual source on the Oregon Territory (147). All references to Poe's works are from *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry, Tales, and Selected Essays* (New York: The Library of America, 1969). Further references in this chapter will be cited parenthetically.

Julius Rodman is an orphan, and it is his orphaned state, made concrete in the selling of his family property, that prompts his expedition. In claiming his reason for leaving was a lack of "interest;" "interest" here is both the material sense of interest as pecuniary stake or advantage, but also as concern or attention. It is as if by turning his attention away from his familial home, ridding himself of his interest, even at a financial loss, he is able to begin a new identity as an explorer. Without the affectionate bonds of family, the home is revealed as merely an economic unit that no longer makes sense, an enterprise in which his financial stake is no longer enough. That he is willing to lose money to start anew suggests that Rodman does not act according to his interest, or that his interest is not the same kind of rational and enlightened "self-interest" based on human striving for betterment.

Accompanying Rodman is his Canadian friend Pierre, five Canadian Creoles, six Kentuckians named Greeley, a gold-seeking Virginian named Alexander Wormley who considers himself a prophet, a slave or former slave named Toby and another Virginian named Andrew Thornton with his dog. After long descriptions of all of these characters, Poe added a note from the editors describing Rodman at the time of the expedition in the words of his grandson, as about twenty-five years old, whose "physiognomy was of a Jewish cast, his lips thin, and his complexion saturnine" (1200). The descriptions of the assortment of people are quite unusual in Poe's fiction for their national specificity and American characterizations. However, this characterization follows the genre conventions of the western exploration narratives, especially the *Journals of Lewis and Clark,* from which Poe plagiarized many passages. It seems likely that Poe, who railed against

plagiarists in his reviews, meant the tale to be a parody.[205] When read as a parody of western travel narratives, it is to the mind of the explorer that Poe aims his critique, whose poor writing is composed alternately of descriptions of Indians, of wildlife, and of nature.

To borrow from Gertrude Stein, there is very little *there* there, in *The Journals of Julius Rodman*. Poe, through Rodman, presents a frontier that is itself wild and un-American, consisting of only one small town, a Canadian Creole settlement on the Missouri River, called *Petite Côte*. The name itself, as Poe notes through his editors, is "Now St. Charles" (1197), having been changed in the fifty years between Rodman's travels and the editing of the manuscript. That the name changed from a French word suggesting a woman's undergarment, to a male Saint's name in English, highlights the ways that the nation has itself rewritten its priorities into its own fabric.[206] The aim of the tale is to do exactly that, to reveal the desire of discovery and first-ness, originality, as a necessary rewriting of what has come before. With its claim to be the first, it precedes all other narratives of Western exploration, suggesting itself as the original and defining the others as copies.[207] Rodman's expedition discovers, toward the end of the tale, a cache of empty bottles big enough for one of the explorers to fall into. Rodman writes, "we did not even see any thing serving to show whether French, British, or Americans had concealed their goods here; and we felt some curiosity upon this point" (1244). The question of

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[205] For a convincing argument, see John J. Teunissen and Evelyn J. Hinz, "Poe's Journal of Julius Rodman as Parody," *Nineteenth Century Fiction* Vol. 27, No. 3 (Dec., 1972): 317-338. They point to the way that plagiarism is, in some important sense, the subject of the tale.
[206] The history of the term itself also thematizes the revision of meaning. The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that the term originally meant a male undercoat, but by the seventeenth century its routine usage was to denote female upper and lower skirts.
[207] As Teunissen and Hinz suggest.

originality cannot be extricated from questions of the printed record and plagiarism, a question the text highlights but leaves unresolved. If the name change from *Petite Côte* to St. Charles exposes the way the nation had consolidated itself in the fifty-year interim period since the journeys across the interior, it also highlights a past whose relation to the present appears to be one of discontinuity and revision.

This sense of revision extends to the familial as well. The expedition provides Julius Rodman with a new family: his band of fellow travelers. The shift in relations from familial to fraternal,[208] is cemented by Poe's repetition of the word "interest;" it again surfaces in a striking passage toward the end of the tale, when Rodman describes his relation to the men in his entourage. He writes, "On the contrary, we were all like brothers, and a dispute of any importance never occurred. One interest seemed to bind us; or rather we appeared to be a band of voyagers without interest in view—mere travelers for pleasure" (1236). Rodman's mid-sentence revision betrays the instability of the very definition of "interest"—is it necessarily connected to the market, which is defined against the notion of pleasure? His revised syntax suggests that yes, they are "without interest" in their lack of economic motivations, where "interest" evokes "self-interest" and the market economy. Perhaps their pleasure and idleness is a refusal to take interest in the kind of capital exploration narratives usually traffic in, the capital of information. Terrence Whalen notes the use of the discourses of the sublime and scientific in composing the national conversations on both slavery and imperialism, and the ways in which Poe turns the explorer's tale on its head by refusing to allow information to

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[208] This paradigm is one Joseph N. Riddel finds implicit in much of Poe's work, as I will discuss later in the chapter. Joseph N. Riddel, "The 'Crypt' of Edgar Poe," *boundary 2*, Vo. 7, No. 3, Revisions of the Anglo-American Tradition: Part 2 (Spring, 1979): 117-144.

provide an economic use value, in both *The Journals of Julius Rodman* and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*.[209] The particular way "interest" is first introduced into *Rodman* through a connection to family, and then again reiterated to describe Rodman's fraternal family of explorers suggests the familial is crucial to interest's equation. The link between "interest" and the familial appears to be self-determining and exclusive, as if they are structuring poles; the pleasures of relation can only happen outside of market relation altogether.

IV.

Poe is one of the most psychoanalyzed writers in all of American literature.[210] Few can resist reading the loss of his mother and brother, and then his wife, into his obsession with death, entombment, and the lingering presence of the dead. Poe wrote almost obsessively about characters that are themselves orphans or elective orphans in one sense or another, foregrounding issues that transect with his biography to the point that his readers must acknowledge them.

In 1827, when Poe returned home from the University of Virginia in debt, his guardian and father-figure John Allan threw him out of the house, effecting a break in their relationship that would never be repaired. Allan and his wife Fanny had requested guardianship of Edgar after his mother, a well-known stage actress in the Boston area, had died when Edgar was just three years old, leaving her three children orphans. Allan

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[209] Terence Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses: The Political Economy of Literature in Antebellum America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 19.
[210] I have purposely attempted to refrain from psychoanalytic and even biographical readings of authors in this dissertation, because of the way these approaches constrict the interpretive possibilities of a text with overdetermined lenses, but with Poe I am convinced it is necessary to delve a bit more into biography.

never adopted Poe, though he raised him with the material, if not the emotional, privileges of a son. Upon his departure from Moldavia, Allan's home, Poe wrote:

> My determination is at length taken—to leave your house and indeavor to find some place in this wide world, where I will be treated—not as *you* have treated me…
> You have…ordered me to quit your house, and are continually upbraiding me with eating the bread of Idleness, when you yourself…were the only person to remedy the evil by placing me to some business—You take delight in exposing me before those whom you think likely to advance my interest in this world— You suffer me to be subjected to the whims & caprice, not only of your white family, but the complete authority of the blacks—these grievances I could not submit to; and I am gone." (The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe 1:7-8).

In a sense this letter recasts Poe's second orphaning as an act of elective orphanhood. Poe writes that it is his "determination," his decision, to leave a home where he is treated unfairly in order to find a more sympathetic place. However, in the next line he explains that it was Allan's commandment that he leave: "You have…ordered me to quit your house." Poe choice of words suggests that the possibility exists for him not to leave, to stay, perhaps to try and appease Allan in some way. He explains that it is not only Allan's unjust authority which ruins his chances for advancement, but the extension of that authority to those who have no claim to it, Allan's slaves. Poe's assertion of elective orphanhood may have merely been a reaction to powerlessness, but it demonstrates the way in which Poe uses the emotional break from his father to seek another family who would treat him, as Poe says, "not as you have treated me."

Critics have often pointed to this letter as evidence of Poe's racism.[211] Poe was clearly humiliated by what he perceived as mistreatment by black people in his household. He writes, "You suffer me to be subjected to the whims & caprice, not only of

[211] Terence Whalen discusses Poe's "average racism" and the factors that contributed to it, both in his time, and in his critical legacy.

your white family, but the complete authority of the blacks—these grievances I could not submit to; and I am gone." However this quotation also reveals Poe situating himself in relation to these other "family" members, both white and black, as one apart. He chooses to leave rather than assent to the extra-familial place Allan has chosen for him. On this note, Poe sets off to find his own way. His decision to leave home inaugurates his entrance into a writer's life, in which he subsists solely by the pen.[212]

Poe wrote *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* in 1838 but set it in 1827, the year of his departure from Moldavia, when his family as he knew it was breaking apart.[213] Arthur Gordon Pym's (whose name is metrically similar to Poe's) relation to his family is central to interpreting the narrative, and recalls Poe's narrative of his determination to leave home. Poe writes relation as inextricably linked to discontinuity. Relation and discontinuity as a binary conceptual framework governs another of Poe's works, *Eureka: A Prose Poem*. Though it was written ten years later, *Eureka* provides an enlightening context for interpreting familial relations in *Pym*.

For Poe, discontinuity is a constitutive process of interpretation. *Eureka: A Prose Poem*, Poe's late work (written in 1848) is both poem and scientific treatise on cosmology. The text is respectfully dedicated to Alexander Humboldt, the German naturalist most instrumental in developing a romantic conception of science. Poe prefaces his work by suggesting the text is for those "who put faith in dreams as in the only realities" (1260) and should be judged, after his death, as a poem only. The form of *Eureka* is prose and the subject matter is scientific, and so Poe's request that one read the

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[212] This was not an economically self-interested decision, and would mean a life of poverty for Poe and his future wife.
[213] As Jared Gardner notes in *Master Plots: Race and the Founding of an American Literature: 1787-1845* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

text as a poem shifts the framework of interpretation quite dramatically. By *how* we are to read it, I mean both how we are to understand the content of the work and the methods by which we are to analyze it. Romantic poetry, especially of the sort that Poe read, relies on the idea that discontinuity allows for other kinds of perception necessary to intuit wholeness or unity. The clearest examples are perhaps the importance of the fragment to the poetics of the German Romantics,[214] and in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's formulation of the symbol.[215] The preface's emphasis on the text as a poem sets up Poe's approach to scientific reasoning, which aims to affect the reader sensually with its sublimity of ideas. Poe writes, "Only by a rapid whirling on his heel could he hope to comprehend the panorama in the sublimity of its oneness" (1261). Even in what may be considered Poe's most rational text, which anticipated many important scientific discoveries way before their time,[216] rationality limits the understanding. One must perceive differently, to imagine or intuit; in other words, to read as if one is reading a poem, seeing a panorama instead of a limited view. Poe explicates these ideas by describing a fictional letter from

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[214] Poe, in his preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, maintains that his "terror is not of Germany, but of the soul" (129)—to ward off attacks that he is *too* influenced by German literature.

[215] Coleridge's clearest discussion of symbolism is in Appendix B of *The Statesman's Manual*.

[216] The best discussion of contemporary theories of science and Poe's amazing, almost prophetic, anticipation of them in *Eureka*, see the following website: Brown, Kevin. "The Thought of a Thought—Edgar Allan Poe." Mathpages. http://www.mathpages.com/home/kmath522/kmath522.htm.
Brown reports that Poe posited an approach to logic and mathematics based on intuition that would become popular at the turn of the 20th century; he intuited the theory of the Big Bang with his concept of an originary oneness, as well as the ongoing expansion of the universe; in addition he emphasized Atomism, which wasn't widely accepted in science until the 20th Century; he acknowledged the relationship between electricity and magnetism with light before light was discovered to be an electromagnetic wave; he also intuited what we now call dark matter, as well as performing other complex astronomical calculations.

the future remarking upon certain scientific thinkers, among whom are Champollion, Kepler and Newton.[217] For Poe, these three figures are the exemplars of science by intuition, rather than outright induction and deduction. Intuition is considered a process of discontinuity, where a gap in understanding is the impetus for a new discovery: "…as true Science, which makes its most important advances—as all History will show—by seemingly intuitive leaps" (1264). Poe writes that it was intuition that led Kepler to guess his laws, intuition as a kind of deduction and induction on the edges of consciousness: "of which the processes were so shadowy as to have escaped his consciousness, eluded his reason, or bidden defiance to his capacity of expression" (1270). By situating intuition in the opaque space just outside of rationality, and emphasizing the leap in understanding it implies, scientific reasoning becomes a poetics of discontinuity. This kind of intuitive leap is the method of Dupin, Poe's famous detective in stories such as "Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt."[218]

This different way of knowing is inherently connected, in much of Poe's writing, to rethinking reason. As Cavell writes of Poe's prose: "As if the task of disestablishing reason were the task of reconceiving it, or exacting a transformation or reversal of what we think of as thinking and so of what we think of as establishing the reign of thinking."[219] In *Eureka*, leaps of discontinuity enable a deeper kind of reasoning, a reasoning that uses that which is beyond reason, including intuition, to further its end.[220] One must dislodge the empirical from its place at the top of the perceptual scale in order to fully perceive; one must twirl on one's heel to see the entire panorama on the

[217] Champollion deciphered the Rosetta stone in 1821.
[218] Riddel, 134.
[219] Cavell, "Being Odd, Getting Even," 101.
[220] Much like the reasoning that prompted him to become a writer in the first place.

mountaintop. As Jonathan Edwards turned orthodox Calvinism on its head by preaching religious awakening through and not against the medium of the senses, Poe aims to give the scientific mind both a body and a sense-based aesthetic, and the shadowy regions of knowing these other realms possess; to ground the empirical in what gives rise to it in the first place, the anti-empirical. Or in Poe's terminology, to unite the "bi-part soul," or "the creative and the resolvent" faculties which he elucidates in "Murders of the Rue Morgue"[221] or "intuition" vs. "the mechanical" as he describes in "The Philosophy of Composition."[222] *Eureka* can be read as an attempt to balance the empirical with other ways of knowing, hence Poe's insistence in the preface on reading the text as a poem.

As Cavell has noted, for Poe, "the perverse," that crucial concept that pushes the thinker to act in opposition to reason and against the life-sustaining idea of self-interest, can be parsed as "per-verse,"[223] as in the verse of poetry. If poetry requires a different mode of apprehension and interpretation, then perversity is that which runs counter to reason but nonetheless exerts its own persuasive logic upon our senses. Poetry and the per-verse ultimately require dislocations to make meaning, for it is only through slight discontinuities in how we understand words (one can even think of repetitions as producing a discontinuity) that pressure is exerted on language, so that it acts upon us. Poetry, unlike scientific discourse, does not explain or describe, it acts on the body; through ultimately mechanical means it creates sublime effects. In "The Philosophy of Composition" Poe describes the writing procedure of the poem "The Raven," its use of sound and repetition to create emotional force. Yet somehow, his description, though

[221] Poe, LOA edition, 402.
[222] Poe, LOA edition, 1373.
[223] Cavell, "Being Odd, Getting Even," 104.

emphasizing the almost mechanical aspect of writing of poetry, leaves out the affect that the poem creates, which is ultimately the great work of the poem. It is sound, first and foremost, that creates continuities and discontinuities in language. Hence, Poe's great emphasis, in "The Rationale of Verse" on the music of poetry, and music itself as productive of the sublime.[224] The sublime (as discussed in chapter two) is a kind of discontinuity, or as Edmund Burke writes, "that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror."[225]

Discontinuity is also at the heart of Poe's figuration of origin in *Eureka*, which he terms "irrelative." Poe uses the term "relation" to describe the different sciences, so that arithmetic "is the science of the relations of number—Geometry, of the relation of form" whereas logic is "the science of Relation considered solely in itself" (1303). Poe then deconstructs the rhetorical particle of logic, the axiom, as too unstable to be secure, and asserts that his idea about the origin of the universe is primary, an ontological understanding, and therefore "irrelative," or lying outside of this "science of relation." Poe proposes that the "irrelative" idea is a way to ground reasoning in the immutable, to find a "reliable" ground for "any structure erected by reason" (1303). The most reliable basis for logic would be the idea beyond relation, the idea that stands alone, outside of logic. He ends this paragraph with, "and such, precisely, is the idea with which my deductive process, so thoroughly corroborated by induction, commences. My *Particle Proper* is but *Absolute Irrelation*" (1303). He goes on to explain more about the origin of the universe: "on account of Matter's having been radiated, at its origin, atomically, into

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[224] Poe, LOA edition, p. 1438.
[225] Edmund Burke, "A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful with an Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste and Several Other Additions" (1756) (New York: www.Bartleby.com, 2001).

a limited sphere of Space, from one, individual, unconditional, irrelative, and absolute Particle Proper…" (1304). Here Poe ingeniously asserts that his idea of the originary particle (which can be seen as an intuition of big bang theory almost a century before its time) is the idea of existing alone, outside of relation. If you reverse the sentence, so that "*Absolute Irrelation* is but my *Particle Proper*," then existing outside of relation is the condition that makes an idea indisputable. Thus the origin of the universe is a condition outside of a line of descent, as is the ground of knowledge.

Though discontinuity and irrelation are constitutive elements by which his cosmology is created and understood, relation is at the heart of Poe's universe. In *Eureka*'s cosmology, the dual forces of repulsion from and attraction to Unity control all matter in the universe, which arose out of a singular particle, and continues to be in motion. Poe's conception of an atomistic universe is based on relation, and in effect these *forces* governing relation are the primary principles that exist, and the sole way matter is manifested.[226] All matter is drawn back, as if through desire, to Unity, which is not a particular place but a principle, which Poe calls a center. In one of the more moving passages in *Eureka*, he explains the movement of matter towards this center: "Nothing like location was conceived as their origin. Their source lies in the principle, Unity. This is their lost parent. This they seek always—immediately—in all directions…" (1287). By describing the unity as a "lost parent" Poe gives his aesthetic cosmology a structure deeply connected to his life experience, perhaps at the heart of his way of understanding the world around him. As John T. Irwin writes, Poe was drawing on a tradition of cosmologies that attempted to express an internal reality. "Such cosmologies, though they

[226] Poe says as much on p. 1283 (LOA edition).

may not be true in terms of empirical science, represent a deeper truth, for they exhibit the fundamental character of cosmology as an imposition of human structures upon a material universe indifferent to meaning."[227] Poe, I believe, was attempting to find a way of aligning his internal and external realities. As Irwin describes it, return to a lost parent, an origin that is also an "undifferentiated ground," recurs in Poe's writings, and represents in both *Eureka* and *Pym* the ultimate limit of knowledge. In *Eureka*, the end of the universe will be when all particles of matter have achieved unity, an agglomeration, which would be suddenly "objectless"---a pun meaning it would simultaneously have no point, no more desire for unity, and would disappear from material reality. "In sinking into Unity, it will sink at once into that Nothingness which, to all finite perception, Unity must be—into that Material Nihility from which alone we can conceive it to have been evoked—to have been created by the Volition of God" (1355). This figure of merging into Nothingness acts in both *Eureka* and *Pym* as the climax of the narrative, with additional circular, extra-narrative endings. Merging into nothingness can be read as a return to an ideal, irrelative state.

In a sense, it is from the irrelative as an original category outside of a line of descent that the forces of all matter are created: the diffusion outward which inspires a sense of loss and the pull inward which is a desire for reunion. Considering the nation's independence as a rupture of a cultural line of descent, it is difficult to ignore the metaphorical connection with the revolutionary discourse against patriarchal authority and mother England, ideas that continued to shape Poe's culture. Joseph N. Riddel writes

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[227] John T. Irwin, *American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 221.

about the many Poe characters who have lost their families and their patrimonies, who form new fraternal families in their place.[228] He comments:

> Dupin, like Usher and Arthur Gordon Pym, has been all but deprived of his patrimony, and his family. But the chance meeting between him and the narrator leads to a 'closer communion' and a surrogate family, only this time a family founded upon a fraternal and not a filial relationship. The metaphorics of the double displaces the metaphorics of father-son… At the center of the library universe, as if at the center of a pyramid, is the author as analyst, the doubles who have displaced the father, the double of the king who is not there."[229]

This way of reading Poe's continual exploration of the divided self through doubling relates back to a lost father, who is ultimately, a lost king. Riddel goes on to say, "The place of authority no longer engenders and governs a biological, genealogical, or teleological history. The origin is no longer filial but fraternal, double rather than simple" (138). This way of relating the fractured self back to an absent authority or origin relates not only to Poe's history, but also to Poe's desire to make aesthetics central, rather than moral truth. In "The Poetic Principle" he famously states that poetry's finest object is not, as it is generally understood, to be truth through the relating of a moral. Poe writes:

> would we but permit ourselves to but look into our own souls, we should immediately there discover that under the sun there neither exists nor can exist any work more thoroughly dignified—more supremely noble than this very poem—this poem per se—this poem which is a poem and nothing more—this poem written solely for the poem's sake. (1437)

By displacing morality as the aim of literature, Poe gestures towards another empty center, another absent authority. These ideas also apply to language and its illusion of representation; deconstructionists have pointed to Poe for over half a century as a master of the deferral and breakdown of meaning in language, especially language that seeks to

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[228] Riddel, 136.
[229] Ibid., 136.

portray truth.[230] However, elective orphanhood complicates the simple relation between the breakdown of authority through the filial sphere and the loss of a whole self inside a teleological history; elective orphanhood suggests the complicity involved in the desire for autogenesis, *doubling* the notion of origin through the act of revision. Like the world in *Eureka*, beginning and ending with each divine breath, origins themselves are as troubled as they are fluid and excessive. Discontinuity becomes the means by which excess is generated.

V.

> "The moment, when the Soul begins to be sufficiently self-conscious, to ask concerning itself, & its relations, is the first moment of its intellectual arrival into the World—its Being—enigmatic as it must seem—is posterior to its Existence—. Suppose the shipwrecked man stunned, & for many weeks in a state of ideocy (sic) or utter loss of Thought & Memory—& then gradually awakened."
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> —Samuel Taylor Coleridge[231]

Poe's novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket,* written in the late 1830s, is a tale of elective orphanhood that could be said to work from the premises of Coleridge's musings above. Coming to a sense of consciousness is contingent upon an awareness of both the self and one's relations, which Coleridge likens to the awareness of a shipwrecked man "coming to" after a period of utter non-awareness, an "utter loss of Thought & Memory." In *Pym*, relation is broken and so the state of shipwreck is

[230] Most notably, John Carlos Rowe, Lacan, Derrida. For a good summation, see Ronald C. Harvey, *The Critical History of Edgar Allan Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym "A Dialogue with Unreason*" (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1997).
[231] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Volume 3, 1808-1819*. Edited by Kathleen Coburn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 3593.

permanent; rather than move toward recovery of "Thought & Memory," the tale moves inexorably toward a state of stunned unawareness and discontinuity. The text has been seen as a fable of interpretation itself in the way it both invites and resists analysis; perhaps it is a site of too many readings.[232] Still, many of the interpretations proffered take into account Pym's relation to his origins in some form or other, whether as a search for man's linguistic origins[233] or a return to the womb.[234] Pym's condition, as one without reflection or memory, seems to embody the vulnerability of "the breakdown in a line of cultural succession"[235] that elective orphanhood initiates. I believe that we must consider Pym's elective orphanhood in tension with the orphanhood of a culture losing its founding fathers, caught between "the given" and "the chosen."[236] Though Pym's elective orphanhood is not highlighted as a central event in the tale, it initiates a break in relation crucial to the excess of the text.

As discontinuity produced excess in *Eureka*, so too does it work in *Pym*, whose narrative arc generates a buildup of episodic plots, each more fantastic and gruesome than the last. Pym spends the first chapter on a hair-raising sea adventure with his drunk friend Augustus that ends with shipwreck and near death, though the experience somehow convinces Pym that his place is at sea. After Pym's initial shipwreck with Augustus, the

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[232] Marita Nadal, "Beyond the Gothic Sublime: Poe's Pym or the Journey of Equivocal (E)motions," *Mississippi Quarterly* (Summer 2000, Vol. 53, Issue 3), 373.
[233] Irwin's *American Hieroglyphics* advances this reading.
[234] See Marie Bonaparte's influential work *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation* (1933) (Trans. John Rodker, London: Imago, 1949).
[235] Donald E. Pease, *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 168.
[236] Here I am referencing Ann Lauterbach, who uses "the given" to refer to that which is inherited or intrinsic, as opposed to the "the chosen:" that which is consciously adopted. Ann Lauterbach, *The Given and The Chosen* (Richmond: Omnidawn Press, 2011). Originally given as a talk at the School of Visual Arts, New York, NY, Feb. 11th, 2010.

boys stow away aboard a ship named *The Grampus*. At first Pym seems secure and well provisioned in the utter solitude and darkness of the hold. He even amuses himself by reading *The Journals of Lewis and Clark* by lamplight as if caught with expeditionary passion, tellingly the last text he will read before his reason becomes compromised. Soon, however, the horror of being trapped is compounded by the noxious air, which has a destabilizing effect on his consciousness. Barely able to stay awake and unable to escape the hold, with a fever, dehydration, starvation and suffocation ravaging his body and mind, Pym's gruesome hallucinations inaugurate the concatenation of horrific episodes that make up the rest of the novel. The gothic sensationalism of this episode becomes the new normal state of mind for the narrator. Without the reflective consciousness or authorial distance usually present in exploration narratives, Pym's morbidity is "not presented as a deviation from an explicitly defined or implied norm of enlightened common sense, but as a necessary response to experience and a sufficient motive for action."[237] The excess of hallucinatory morbidity is only matched by the excess of plot, which includes mutiny and the murder of most of the ship's crew, Pym's masquerade as a corpse to surprise the mutineers, being painfully lashed to the deck to survive a hurricane which demolishes the ship, starvation, what appears to be a rescue ship full of only corpses, cannibalism, the death and putrefaction of Pym's friend (and double) Augustus. Finally, the first part of the novel ends with Pym and the other survivor, Dirk Peters, rescued by a ship called the *Jane Guy*.

Once aboard the *Jane Guy*, a vessel exploring the South Seas region on a sealing and trading voyage, the narrative tone changes, briefly becoming more akin to a

[237] William C. Spengemann, *Adventurous Muse: The Poetics of American Fiction: 1789-1900* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1977), 141.

travelogue including a history of discovery, natural history, and geography. These tonal changes feebly attempt to contain the gothic experience of the text within rhetorical gestures that suggest scientific reasoning, but they seamlessly give way to the morbid horror of Pym's experience. The captain of the Jane Guy, influenced by Pym's yearning to discover the Antarctic continent, heads further south to the polar region. They discover an unknown island named Tsalal, full of black inhabitants who appear friendly and willing to establish market relations with the crew. However, the Tsalalians turn on the crew and murder all except Pym and Dirk Peters; they accidentally survive by hiding in the mountains. Pym and Peters explore the area, including a series of caves, in search of sustenance and eventual escape aboard a canoe. Once in the canoe, the two men and a Tsalalian hostage are pulled by the current toward the pole, and are on the verge of entering a mysterious polar cataract when the narrative abruptly ends. An editor's note by another of Poe's narrator doubles, an "unknown writer," attempts but fails to tie together some of the narrative's loose ends. The utter excess of the plot, with its overtones of discovery narratives on the one hand, and fantasy on the other, has made it one of the more difficult texts of the period to classify.

Chronicling these adventures in the first person, Pym presents "no fixed point of reason"[238] and the textual world seems equally unreasonable.[239] As William Spengemann writes, there is no rational frame in place to contain the gothic instability of the novel.[240] Immanuel Kant's description of the mathematical sublime, central to romanticism,

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[238] Ibid., 141.
[239] The way these episodes compound one another brings to mind the picaresque genre, and in particular another early American novel examined in Chapter 2, *The History of Constantius and Pulchera* (1797).
[240] Spengemann, 140.

ultimately relies on reason to repair the break in consciousness caused by the imagination's attempt to imagine that which is beyond the senses or representation. For Pym, stuck in a sublime feedback loop, there is no repair.

The preface, which usually provides some kind of rational bridge between reader and author around a text, is no exception. The tale begins with a preface that asserts Poe wrote part, but not all, of the text, imbricating the fictional and the real in ways that make Poe a character in his own text. This serves to make Poe and Pym doubles, but in a broader sense it blurs the distinction between author and narrator, troubling basic categories from the very start of the tale. Signed by Pym, the preface explains that, returning from his adventure, he worries that he will not be able to construct the incidents of his trip from memory, and that no one will believe the "positively marvelous" (1007) events as true. However, a Richmond man interested in his tale, Mr. Poe, advises him to write his tale, suggesting that the public is wise enough to know a true tale when they see it. Pym explains that he decided against writing the tale himself, and so Poe publishes[241] two short sections based on Pym's facts as fictional pieces. At this point, Pym discovers the public accepts his tale as authentic despite its status as fiction, and decides to write the rest of the narrative himself. Pym then claims that it will be obvious to the reader who wrote which sections, though there is no change is style throughout the entire text. This claim of dual authorship inaugurates the tale with a doubling of the main character and author, who appears as an intra-texual character. As nineteenth-century novels conventionally contained prefaces written by the author, they affirmed the common place of the author and reader outside the textual world, a compact Poe immediately breaks.

[241] Poe did indeed publish two sections of the narrative in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1837—providing truth-value to Pym's account in the preface.

The preface claims that truth and fiction are entirely self-evident while blurring these categories by inserting Poe in his textual world, and Pym in the author's, and therefore reader's, world. The entire notion of self-evidence is undermined as it is on the surface affirmed, instituting an epistemological crisis that will echo throughout the narrative.

In addition to blurring the line between reality and fiction, the preface also undermines memory, the primary tether to identity and the past. Pym writes in the preface that he fears he cannot write the tale from "mere memory" (1007) in a way that would appear truthful. And when the character Poe writes some portions of his tale, without Pym's "minute and connected" (1007) webs of memory, the audience receives it as authentic. Memory is therefore displaced from the preface, where it would usually serve, in an explorer's narrative, as the means of cultural communication. As Donald E. Pease points out in *Visionary Compacts*, "The preface to Pym prefigures and parodies the cultural transmission that should be at work in this genealogical descent, for in that preface Poe dramatizes the disappearance from America of the scene of the transmission for what we have called a cultural memory"[242] Pease asserts that generally, the explorer's narrative, composed after the return home, makes use of a reflective consciousness that processes the experience according to the values of his culture. This reflective consciousness is all but missing in *Pym*; in its place the instant and the ongoing present are related through recurring sensational shocks to the system. This limited focus on sensation produces extreme discontinuity, one in which Pym's need for adventure allows him to leave his family and stand outside of relation, a pinnacle of self-reliance.[243] Pease

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[242] Pease, 173.
[243] Pease, 199.

argues that this displacement allows Poe to critique the American creed of self-reliance, as well as its narratives of autogenesis and progress. He writes,

> Unlike Hawthorne's twice-told tales, Poe's allegories of the instant violate a culture's collective memory. Productive of forgettable instants rather than renewable memories, impulses without either a personal or a collective memory upon which to impress themselves, these tales represent change as a sheer disruption rather than a force of progress" (167).

While I agree that these critiques are at work, I also think that the discontinuity between each episode of *Pym* is both a method and metaphor for imagining a different way of knowing. "Absolute irrelation" becomes for Poe a principle on which to embed loss, a way to incorporate the gap or void into the very essence of being. And this way of treating the state of orphanhood is in a sense a kind of elective orphanhood, a way of transmuting the break with the past into a void, yes, but an endlessly generating one. One's relationship to absence is allowed to continue, so that the void allows for, in a sense authorizes, the making of meaning. This endless generation is coincident with the way language continually defers meaning, much in the same way that the puzzles in Pym hold out the possibility of providing a key to understanding the meaning of the text, but never do. This relationship to absence predicates a different way of knowing, one that makes loss central to meaning, and displaces reason, which continually reminds us of the fact of that loss, from its position of power.

Pym's break with his past must be accomplished by devious means, as his respectable Nantucket family objects to the idea of his turning sailor. Their opposition only increases his desire to leave, as Pym tells us:

> My father made no direct opposition; but my mother went into hysterics at the bare mention of the design; and, more than all, my grandfather, from whom I expected much, vowed to cut me off with a shilling if I should ever broach the

> subject to him again. These difficulties, however, so far from abating my desire, only added fuel to the flame. (1019)

His yearning to leave is so great that he tricks his family into believing he has given up on his plan, and lies to them while planning escape. Poe directs one of the sole moments of reflective commentary in the text, if not the only one, to Pym's treatment of his family. He writes, "I have since frequently examined my conduct on this occasion with sentiments of displeasure as well as of surprise" (1019). This singular look back on his moral conduct, as well as on his familial past, is swallowed up in the detailed descriptions of his escape, which is almost thwarted by a run-in with his grandfather. Nonetheless, it shows that Pym does indeed look back upon his family (the tale is written retrospectively), though they no longer figure in his adventures once he goes to sea. Pym's decision to leave is perverse, as he makes clear when he tells of his longing for "the wild adventures incident to the life of a navigator" which include "shipwreck and famine; of death or captivity among barbarian hordes; of a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown" (1018).

As the representation of both linear descent and the handing down of wealth, Pym's grandfather holds the patriarchal authority in his family. It is therefore the grandfather that Pym must reject in order to become an elective orphan. Dressed in a dirty cloak, Pym makes his way to the ship to sneak aboard as a stowaway when his grandfather spies him. He responds to his grandfather's questions with the accent and tone of a poor sailor, and is overwhelmed with joy at the old man's confusion:

> He started back two or three steps, turned first pale and then excessively red, threw up his spectacles, then putting them down, ran full tilt at me, with his umbrella uplifted. He stopped short, however, in his career, as if struck with a

> sudden recollection; and presently, turning round, hobbled off down the street, shaking all the while with rage, and muttering between his teeth. "Won't do—new glasses—thought it was Gordon—d—d good-for-nothing salt water Long Tom." (1021)

Pym's joy at making his grandfather think he is a stranger seems particularly mischievous; he comments: "for my life I could hardly refrain from screaming with laughter" (1020). His joy is the effect of eroding his grandfather's confidence in his perceptual apparatus. The anger of (mis)recognition is enough to make his grandfather first charge him with the umbrella, and then stop short, brought low with self-doubt, emasculated and aged by the experience.

I would like to suggest that *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is in some sense an attempt to explore the state of elective orphanhood as a species of epistemological discontinuity arising out of a rupture with a genealogical break. *Pym* is a text that famously both invites and resists analysis, seeming to suggest that at the center of all interpretation is an emptiness that is perhaps the act of interpretation itself, rather than a moral or intellectual truth.[244] My analysis of Pym as an elective orphan is perhaps yet another unsatisfying interpretation to add to an already full coffer; still, as the proliferation of endlessly deferred meanings is part of the intended excess of the text, it seems possible to consider yet another way of looking at its generative figures.

Poe makes the horror of sublimity manifest in *Pym* by examining the interrelation of the concepts of relation and discontinuity in the mythic binary of black and white,

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[244] I have been deeply influenced by the deconstructionist critique of Pym, including John Carlos Rowe, *Through the Custom House: Nineteenth Century American Fiction and Modern Theory (*Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982) which claims that the test continually defers and displaces meanings, thus revealing that representation is "the illusion of truth" (95). Joseph N. Riddel's "The 'Crypt' of Edgar Poe," which asserts that Poe is concerned with Kant's distinction of the aesthetic category, which registers as a central absence. This line of interpretation has been central to the tale's critical history.

which the bodies of the characters and natural phenomenona near the pole reflect. The crew "discover" an uncharted island populated with natives who appear wholly black, without any white parts on their bodies. Poe clearly draws on both the descriptions of European and Anglo-American explorers encountering "savage" populations and stereotypically racist imagery of the black body and intellect common to the literature of the slave south of his youth.[245] Though Poe's narrative highlights the central place of racialized metaphors in American literature,[246] I also believe that Poe explores the primary mythical symbolism of black and white, and in a sense, complicates it by highlighting the way the mind conceives of relation in terms of polarity. John T. Irwin reads this opposition of light/dark as less about racialized theories of biology popular in the nineteenth century to than the Judeo-Christian symbolism that views "the human skin as the indeterminate boundary, the ambiguous limit, between inner and outer, subject and object, self and other."[247] As Jared Gardner explains, Poe was not a proponent of polygenism, a pseudo-scientific theory that proposed that the races descended from wholly different biological origins.[248] Gardner reads *Pym* as a quest for a purely white origin that reflects no racial difference. I see Pym's quest as interrogating the existence of and yet still reaching toward that which is beyond our mind's limited way of understanding the world, through binaries. Pym will go on to describe an example of this

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[245] There is a body of criticism that looks at issues of race in Pym, and a line of interpretation that reads the narrative as a parable of an apocalyptic slave rebellion. For a good overall discussion of race and Poe, see Jared Gardner's *Master Plots: Race and the Founding of an American Literature: 1787-1845* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).
[246] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Press, 1993).
[247] Irwin, 154.
[248] Gardner, 134.

other way of understanding in *Eureka* as a means of incorporating both the rational and irrational, the scientific and intuitive.

A binary, after all, is a figure for relation and discontinuity taken together, as polarities. Tsalal itself would appear to be a place symbolizing the inherent relation and discontinuity in the construction of a binary as reflected in the island's natural landscape. Pym first notices the flowing water on the island, and compares his (and his crew's) reaction to the Tsalal chief Too-wit's overwhelming fear and surprise at first beholding a mirror onboard the ship; immobilized by fear at seeing his image reflected back, the chief must be literally carried off the ship while holding his eyes. The water that occasions this species of surprise is different not only in limpidity and it's purple appearance, but, in its cohesive property:

> Upon collecting a basinful, and allowing it to settle thoroughly, we perceived that the whole mass of liquid was made up of a number of distinct veins, each of a distinct hue; that these veins did not commingle; and that their cohesion was perfect in regard to their own particles among themselves, and imperfect in regard to neighboring veins. Upon passing the blade of a knife athwart the veins, the water closed over it immediately, as with us, and also, in withdrawing it, all traces of the passage of the knife were instantly obliterated. If, however, the blade was passed down accurately between two veins, a perfect separation was effected, which the power of cohesion did not immediately rectify.[249]

This strange image of division can be (and has often been) read as a comment on the separation of the races, but I think the racial component is only part of the larger symbolic metaphor of relation. The island itself appears to reflect the polar opposition of the black/white binary: the Tsalalians themselves fear anything white, especially the large white bird they call Tekili-li, and possess absolutely no white on their bodies. Even their teeth are black. They appear fearful and disgusted by the skin of the white explorers, as

[249] Poe, LOA, 1141.

well as any white objects they spy on the ship: a pan of flour, an open book. The island is a place where black and white are the signifiers of difference, not merely racial difference, but an oppositional relation so fundamental it is reflected in the elements. The earth too is stratified in such a way that it appears no difficult thing for the Tsalalians to topple whole cliffs into the ravine in a murderous plot that kills the crewmen except Pym and Dirk Peters. Division is naturalized in the landscape, and yet Poe brings up, and refuses to answer, the question of how we are to understand these oppositional relations, and whether they are divine or man-made.

Poe does suggest that man grasps for a means of systematizing or categorizing reality even when they no longer seem relevant. While approaching the South Pole, when the basic categories of dark and light no longer apply because of continual daylight, Pym notes in his journal that he continues to use the terms "morning" and "evening" (1135). In the face of the inconsequentiality of categories of dark and light, man finds other ways such as nautical time to systematize the passage of time, insisting on a binary way of thinking even when it no longer applies to a physical reality. Poe remarks on the instability this causes with the note, "I would also remark in this place, that I cannot, in the first portion of what is here written, pretend to strict accuracy in respect to dates, or latitudes or longitudes, having kept no regular journal until after the period of which this first portion treats. In many instances I have relied altogether upon memory" (1135). Poe read and borrowed from many exploration narratives in order to lend his tale legitimacy and market it to the reading audience of his publisher.[250] He would have therefore noticed that "nautical time," meaning the time on shipboard, was a fluid system that began each

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[250] Lisa Gitelman, "Arthur Gordon Pym and the Novel Narrative of Edgar Allan Poe," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Dec. 1992): 349-361.

new "day" at noon, as recorded in ship logbooks.[251] One of the voyages he specifically mentions in *Pym* is Captain Cook's, and indeed Captain Cook's journals mark the days as beginning at noon, as did nautical almanacs of the 18th century. Poe suggests with this note that man will hold onto his unreliable and limited knowledge rather than revise his terms of understanding. He must hold to his own "nautical time," his own man-made system, though it makes little sense with his surrounding natural landscape. How then, can the question of whether oppositional thinking is man-made or divine be answered?

Poe again raises this question by introducing it as a textual puzzle innately connected with language. As the sole survivors, Pym and Peters look for nourishment and a path to escape the island when they find a series of caves. The caves themselves are so extraordinary that Pym remarks, "we could scarcely bring ourselves to believe it altogether the work of nature" (1164). He traces their paths into his notebook, finding that they form distinct shapes. Pym and Peters then find a fissure in ones of the caves that contains what looks like a representation of a human figure pointing, and unrecognizable alphabetical characters under it, etched on the wall. In Dirk Peters' opinion, they are letters, but Pym withholds this judgment when he notices large flakes on the ground of the same material and shape as the marks on the wall. He conjectures that "some convulsion" (1167) knocked the shapes loose and concludes that the writing is "a work of nature," (1167) as he faithfully transcribes their shapes into his notebook. This puzzle appears to have no bearing on the plot but Poe gives it a central place in the narrative by making it the sole object of extra-narrative interpretation in an endnote. Poe tells us,

[251] According to the Archives and Collection Society, entry on nautical time and civil date: http://www.aandc.org/research/nautical_time_and_date.html, this practice changed in 1805.

again mystifying his own authorship, that an unnamed writer purportedly wrote the endnote after Pym's narrative abruptly broke off, just as Pym and Peters sail into the South Pole. This unnamed writer then tells us that Mr. Pym died suddenly while revising the last few chapters of the narrative, which have been "irrecoverably lost" (1180), though he hopes they may someday be found. When he hints that "the gentleman whose name is mentioned in the preface," meaning Poe, might supply the missing chapters if he believed Pym's tale, the farcical nature of the whole enterprise is brought to the foreground. And still, this writer goes on to rethink Pym's conclusion that the alphabetical-appearing marks are not letters, and explains that both the marks and the shape of the chasms themselves resemble Ethiopic, Arabic and Egyptian scripts which spell out "To be shady," "To be white" and "The region of the South" (1181). He also agrees with Dirk Peters that the figure at the top is a man whose outstretched arm points to the south. This information would lead the reader to interpret that Poe ultimately wished the marks to appear man-made.

The unnamed writer/linguist then ends his endnote, and therefore the entire narrative, with a quotation that sounds biblical, though it is not in actuality: "I have graven it within the hills, and my vengeance upon the dust within the rock" (1182). This pseudo-biblical line is given no interpretation or citation, so the reader is left to interpret its relation to the text. On the one hand, if taken as the voice of God, it would proclaim that the marks were divinely created; that "shady" and "white" are a binary willed by God rather than man's fallen understanding. However, in an age and nation when the bible was universally read, Poe's use of an unidentified quotation that sounds biblical but is not seems suspicious. This dissonant quotation, so different from both the tone of

Pym's narration and the factual manner of the unnamed narrator of the endnote, necessarily leads the reader back into the caves. By creating a circular ending where the final experience of the voyage is denied, the tale defies resolution. This particular puzzle highlights one of the unresolved questions of the text: is our way of understanding relation within a system of oppositional polarities man-made or divine? Poe refuses to provide an answer; the looming center of absence remains.

And yet, if we look to Poe's *Eureka*, true genius requires more than merely relying on the known ways of thinking, it requires a leap into the absence of certainty, turning it into interpretation, or presence. For an elective orphan, absence is always also a presence, and it is with this presence that I would like to end this meditation on relation and discontinuity. Pym's narration approaches a climactic end as he escapes off the island in a canoe with Dirk Peters and a hostage Tsalalian named Nu-Nu who soon dies of fright. As the currents take them closer and closer to the Pole, the water becomes warm and milky-white, and they succumb to a state of dreamlike numbness while a white ashy powder rains down on them. Finally, surrounded by both "a sullen darkness" (1179) and a white curtain, they approach the pole at alarming speeds. The grey vapor around them resembles a "cataract" into whose "embraces" they are pulled, but at the very moment they enter it, it appears "a shrouded human figure, very far larger in proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow" (1179). Just as the figure is perceived, Pym's narration ends. What does Pym see? The answer is within the realm of human knowledge, and perhaps, the endnote suggests, Dirk Peters may one day be found and provide the missing information. But alas, the knowledge is not for us, Poe seems to say. In place of the absence of any certain

knowledge is a figural presence; to acknowledge it and interpret it is to move away from the explorer's narrative and into the realm of the purely imaginative, the visionary.

The figure's whiteness may be read in relation to race, but one can also examine white as the color light that combines every other. Unlike the separation of the water on Tsalal, the large white figure may stand for an all-encompassing state of unity. Many interpretations of this famous figure do indeed focus on the state this unity implies, whether it means death or a return to an undifferentiated state.[252] Read this way, the figure is female, a mother, and in entering the cataract Pym returns to the womb and its totalizing unity. Considering the centrality of oppositional modes of thought in the second half of *Pym*, the figure might also suggest that there is another way beyond polarity as a structuring means of our language and ways of thinking.[253] And perhaps that is why Pym's narration must end upon approaching the white figure, pulled into the abyss of the pole:[254] there can be no language in an undifferentiated state, a ground akin to what Emerson calls "spirit" and C.S. Peirce calls "firstness." Like the merging into nothingness envisioned as the planet's end in *Eureka*, the return to the "lost parent" is an end that prophesizes another beginning. It allows for a future genesis, by nature an autogenesis, according to Poe's cosmology. It seems fitting that an elective orphan like Pym should find in his travels the vision Poe would go on make central to his theory of the universe in *Eureka*: the return to a state of absolute irrelation.

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[252] There are too many different schools of interpretation to mention here. For a good summation, see see Ronald C. Harvey, *The Critical History of Edgar Allan Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym "A Dialogue with Unreason*," (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1997).
[253] Irwin discusses polarity and language in relation to Pym on p. 51.
[254] The idea that the poles were open cataracts is linked to John Cleeve Symmes' Hollow Earth theory, which had currency in Poe's time. See his novel *Symzonia*.

Chapter Five

Melville's *Pierre:* Doubled Narratives of Orphanhood

> "Buoyed up by that coffin, for almost one whole day and night, I floated on a soft and dirge-like main. The unharming sharks, they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage seahawks sailed with sheathed beaks. On the second day, a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan."
> –Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

I.

So ends *Moby-Dick*, with Ishmael floating on a coffin at sea, the sole survivor who has lived to tell the tale. It is not by accident the last word of the novel is "orphan," nor the rescuing ship named *The Rachel*, whose captain earlier pleaded with Ahab to help find his son lost at sea. Conjuring the biblical Rachel, who died in childbirth, the ship that rescues Ishmael could only represent the mortal separation of parents and children. The ship is yet another coffin floating upon the sea, an apt metaphor for Ishmael's identity as orphan, one solely defined by loss. Melville would expand this theme in his next novel, *Pierre, or The Ambiguities* (1852). As Eric J. Sundquist notes, if *Moby-Dick* can be thought of as a novel that vacates paternal authority until Ishmael ends an orphan, *Pierre*

commences with that paternal authority already absent.[255] Most critical readings of *Pierre* explore its family relations by way of incest, but it is also a novel about the orphan identity *as* a narrative of the nation's autogenic mythos. *Pierre* asks how the elective orphan narrative, with its revolutionary implications, fits into a world dominated by another orphan figure, one that had become prominent in the antebellum period, the sentimental orphan.

Pierre was written at the height of this culture of sentimentalism, within which sympathy forged a larger national family. As Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, Archibald Alison as well as David Hume proposed, sensibility could arbitrate between the interests of the individual and the community by creating a sense of fellow feeling and minimizing difference.[256] For the Scottish Common Sense philosophers, not only could emotion unite a people, but the capacity for sensibility, or "taste," stood at the heart of morality. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon points to this philosophical tradition rather than Christian moral uplift the context from which sentimentalism springs. She writes, "The didactic

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[255] Eric J. Sundquist, *Home as Found: Authority and Genealogy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 156.
[256] Much has been written on this subject; including Barnes, Elizabeth, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Bruce Burgett, Sentimental Bodies: *Sex, Gender, and Citizenship in the Early Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Kristen Boudreau, *Sympathy in American Literature* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002); Ellison, Julie, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Frazer, Michael L. *The Enlightenment of Sympathy: Justice and the Moral Sentiments in the Eighteenth Century and Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Glenn Hendler, *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Jonathan Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009); Lori Merish, *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Craig Taylor, *Sympathy: A Philosophical Analysis (*New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

and disciplinary claims of sentimentalism thus emerge in conjunction with a theory of aesthetic education."[257] Melville's exploration of sentimentalism focuses on the conventional narratives it uses to very different ends. Not only does he eschew moralizing, he critiques novels in general for their "false, inverted attempts at systemizing eternally unsystemizable elements; their audacious, intermeddling impotency, in trying to unravel, and spread out, and classify, the more thin than gossamer threads which makeup the complex web of life." (141) *Pierre*, he argues, will not laboriously spin vails (sic) of mystery, only to complacently clear them up at last" (141). Instead, Melville examines the systemizing elements of sentimental literature, which "imagined social relations as familial in an attempt to encourage the sentimental project of unity or commonality of feeling."[258] By testing the metaphor of the nation as a family, so common in antebellum American culture, he returns to the epistemological questions that aesthetics, and sentimentalism, attempted to answer. Melville incestuously pairs these two orphan narratives in *Pierre*, as if to test their *currency* as narratives in that ungrounded cultural moment. Thus, he plumbs their common genesis and the depths between them to fathom the inheritance of a nation grounded on revolutionary authority.

Pierre can be read as a culmination of the orphan plot. Melville pushes the idea to the point of excess, revealing the false mythos of the trope and rendering it sterile. All of the major characters, Pierre, Isabel and Lucy, and even some minor ones, are orphans. Pierre's cousin Glen Stanly, whom he murders, has no other family, Delly Ulver has been entirely exiled from her family, and even Plotinus Plinlimmon, the head of the society of

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[257] Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, "Sentimental Aesthetics" *American Literature*, Volume 76, no. 3 (September 2004), 509.
[258] Gillian Silverman, "Textual Sentimentalism: Incest and Authorship in Melville's Pierre," *American Literature*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (June 2002): 355.

Apostles, "seemed to have no family or blood ties of any sort" (290).[259] The plot repetition of becoming orphaned, in its different guises, suggests that one of Melville's major interests in the novel is the narrative of orphanhood and its connection to an (American) investment in autogenesis.[260] Melville extends his concern with the fantasy of autogenesis to the written word in "Hawthorne and His Mosses," where he writes of books existing as individuals without the burden of parentage: "Would that all excellent books were foundlings, without father or mother, that so it might be, we could glorify them, without including their ostensible authors."[261] Melville's anthropomorphization of books into "foundlings" speaks volumes, for the OED defines a foundling as "a deserted infant whose parents are unknown, a child whom there is no one to claim."[262] Thus the fantasy of existing without the "claim" of an author would emphasize the excellent qualities of a book without the author's life and reputation getting in the way, so that the merit of the writing itself would appear to stand apart from any historical or social consideration, any consideration apart from that which the writing itself creates. Then, the world of the book would be enough, on its own authority. Melville suggests that autogenesis is a powerful fantasy wherein authority is self-contained.

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[259] Critics generally regard Plinlimmon as Melville's negative characterization of Emerson. Clark Davis suggests that Emersonian ideas are "pervasive catalysts for Melville's grousing philosophical commentary, parodies and pastiches" in a number of his works. Clark Davis, "Not Like Any Form of Activity: Waiting in Emerson, Melville and Weil," *Common Knowledge*, 15.1, 2008.
[260] See Gillian Brown's *Domestic Individualism* for a thorough reading of this idea.
[261] Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," *The Literary World*, August 17th and 24th, 1850.
[262] OED, Second edition, 1989; online version March 2012. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/73951>; accessed 24 May 2012. Earlier version first published in *New English Dictionary*, 1897.

II.

The last word of the Epilogue of *Moby-Dick* is "orphan," and, interestingly, the first phrase of *Pierre* calls up the other side of the relation, that ultimate father figure, the king. Melville dedicates *Pierre* to a mountain outside his home in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, or rather the regal quality of that mountain named Greylock: "To Greylock's Most Excellent Majesty."[263] He names the Berkshire mountain his "own more immediate sovereign lord and king," highlighting the new world American landscape as opposed to old world courtly tradition. The tongue-in-cheek humor of this gesture, however, is anything but a light touch—it lays the groundwork for many of the themes of the novel. First and foremost, if the mountain is a ruler, the epistemology of authority is problematic. Melville addresses this when he adds, "it is but meet, that I here devoutly kneel, and render up my gratitude, whether, thereto, The Most Excellent Purple Majesty of Greylock benignantly incline his hoary crown or no." This authority figure is ever-present, but how one understands it is dependent on how one reads its blankness. As Sacvan Bercovitch describes, "that image of overbearing authority turns into a measure of distance, a figure of alienation, and finally a trope for mere absence."[264] The absent authority is an unreadable sign, which engenders the interpretation of the perceiver, and ultimately the act of self-authorization in authoring a text. American authority, as Bercovitch notes, is also founded on the act of self-authorization through language: "*Pierre* is the product of a culture founded on rhetoric—a nation invented ex verbo, by

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[263] Herman Melville, *Pierre, or The Ambiguities* (1852), (Introduction and Notes by William C. Spengemann, New York: Penguin 1996), 1. All quotations from the novel will hereafter be included in parenthetical citations.
[264] Sacvan Bercovitch, "How to read Melville's Pierre," in *Herman Melville: A Collection of Essays*, Edited by Myra Jehlen (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1994), 119.

the word, in a long procession of covenants, declarations, interpretations and re-interpretations of so-called sacred texts" (123). Melville's dedication therefore demonstrates the author's authority and locates it in his very ability to produce the punning play on the word "majesty."

The dedication's play allows Melville to tonally hit a number of registers; it is clearly a parody of sentimental novels and their extravagant prose, but also a deadly serious gesture that introduces many of the issues at the heart of *Pierre*. This play in tone makes it nearly impossible to gauge the author's meaning, much like the narrator who seems determined to lose the reader with his hyperbolic interjections most often unrelated to plot. This is one main reason why the novel has been typically read as a failure, by the readers of Melville's day, but also by Melville scholars of the last eighty years, even those attempting to argue for the novel's importance.[265] The inflated language would appear to be part of Melville's attempt to make the novel, as he wrote to his publisher, "very much more calculated for popularity than anything you have yet published of mine."[266]

Writing for a popular audience in the 1850s meant, in essence, writing a domestic novel. Melville indeed promised Sophia Hawthorne a "rural bowl of milk"[267] and the novel does indeed begin with a family setting, an exultantly happy one. This scene, however, has a particular relation to the past that undermines its happiness and suggests

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[265] Pierre sold only 1,856 copies of an edition of 2310 in 35 years, as William Charvat tells us in *The Profession of Authorship in America*, 1800-1870 (Ohio State University Press, 1968), 249. *Pierre*'s failure would haunt Melville for the rest of his career.
[266] Charvat, 249.
[267] 8 January 1852 letter to Sophia Hawthorne in *The Writings of Herman Melville 15*, (Edited by Lynn Horth, Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1993).

how the past and genealogy shape the present. The eponymous hero Pierre is the proud heir to Saddle Meadows, the estate of the Glendinning family, whose history is a mirror of American history in miniature. With one great-grandfather the martial hero of a colonial battle fought against the Indians on the meadows surrounding the family manor, and another grandfather a Revolutionary War hero, Saddle Meadows seems property gained through martial valor, as well as a possession whose deed "bore the ciphers of three Indian Kings, the aboriginal and only conveyancers of those noble woods and plains" (6). Melville begins addressing the problem of identity as a property relation with a lineage of possession that recalls both national swindling and valor. Pierre's unquestioning sense of possession of his estate appears founded upon this history so that "…in Pierre's eyes, all its hills and swales seemed as sanctified through their very long uninterrupted possession by his race" and "all that part of the earth a love-token" (8).

It is this subject that Melville addresses in one of the most striking passages of the novel, about the "anomalousness of America" (9) and the relation to the past as it concerns familial pedigree. The narrator asks, "With no chartered aristocracy, and no law of entail, how can any family in America imposingly perpetuate itself" (8); he goes on to suggest the unlikelihood of intergenerational power in cities where the fortunes of families rise and fall due to the "democratic element" (9). Like family fortune, political institutions in America gain life through a continual turn towards the new away from the old. But away from the cities exist families whose lineage can be traced back to a ruling power, much like the English system of peerage. In particular, the narrator focuses on the

"Dutch Manors" (10) sustained by the large rent roles of the entire area,[268] which lend the land and its possessors an aristocratic, almost feudal quality, seemingly immutable and outside of time. It is this kind of familial pedigree that Pierre holds, one dependent upon the genealogy of the past and a sense of title registered in his very identity, which, Melville does not fail to point out, is gained from war and class privilege.[269] For Pierre, however, these are elements that reaffirm his connection to the land. The violent roots of private property are an inescapable part of Pierre's history, but they constitute an aristocratic American lineage that the narrator turns into a caricature of innocent pride.

A simultaneous sense of timelessness and inalienable ownership pervades the descriptions of old Dutch estates such as Saddle Meadows. As the narrator tells us, "Such estates seem to defy Time's tooth, and by conditions which take hold of the indestructible earth seem to cotemporize their fee-simples with eternity" (11). "Fee-simple" is a term that originated in England's feudal system and extends the concept of property ownership toward the furthest reaches of the inalienable. Property must by definition be alienable, or transferable; but Melville suggests that Saddle Meadows has become a *property* (or quality) of the Glendinning family, rather than merely the family's property.[270]

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[268] Otter unpacks this allusion to both renter's wars and explains how Melville borrowed language from Andrew Jackson's Message to the Creek Nation (1829) in which he falsely reassured them of their claim to the land. Samuel Otter, "The Overwrought Landscape of *Pierre*," *Melville's Evermoving Dawn: Centennial Essays* (edited by John Bryant and Robert Milder, Kent: Kent State University Press, 1997), 360.
[269] Jeffory A. Clymer, "Property and Selfhood in Herman Melville's 'Pierre,'" *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Sept., 2006): 171-199.
[270] As Michaels writes, novels of the 1850s often register an anxiety about land ownership and title Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism*: American Literature at the Turn of the Century (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 90.

As Jeffory A. Clymer points out, Melville confers timelessness and inalienability not only to Saddle Meadows, but also the current "lord" of the manor, Mary Glendinning, Pierre's mother.[271] At the beginning of the novel she, like the estate, seems to defy the passage of time, existing perpetually at the height of power and health. As Clymer argues, Mary comes to represent paternal authority, not only through the exercise of her will on Pierre, but also through her title over Saddle Meadows. Pierre's father's will names Mary, not his son, as the sole heir of Saddle Meadows, which gives her power over Pierre's destiny, a power she does not hesitate to use most cruelly when he rejects her authority. Much has been written about the strange nature of the relationship between Pierre and his mother, whom he calls "sister," but it is not merely the incestuous overtones of their relation that set the stage for Pierre's fall. Like Saddle Meadows, Mary provides Pierre with an inheritance of an identity both steeped in the past and outside of historical change at the same time. His identity is tied inextricably to Saddle Meadows and what it represents, a "natal lot," complete with martial glory and the violence of Native American exploitation.[272] Clymer argues that Melville's point in *Pierre* is to explore and critique John Locke's problematic grounds for thinking of the self as property[273] and subjectivity as unitary and coherent. I would add that Melville creates an identity for Pierre that reflects the Old World past and a dependence on the "parent" country, in order to allow his radical act of elective orphanhood to register as a reflection of the nation's history. At the same time, this chapter will argue that Melville examines

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[271] Clymer, 181.
[272] In characterizing Pierre in the opening pages, the narrator notes, "An excellent English author of these times enumerating the prime advantages of his natal lot, cites foremost, that he first saw the rural light. So with Pierre" (5).
[273] John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* (1690), "every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*: This no Body has any Right to but himself."

the epistemological grounds Pierre's act of elective orphanhood implies, built upon the liberal narrative of individual self-fashioning and liberty as an extension of free will.

III.

When Thomas Jefferson in the "Original Rough Draught"[274] of the Declaration of Independence wrote of renouncing the "agonizing affection" of the kindred relation between the colonies and their Mother Country, he articulated a shared woundedness. This woundedness is a constitutive part of the elective orphan narrative, which explores the imbrication of agency and victimization as a way of understanding consent and authority.[275] Like Jefferson's intricate play of loss and choice, Pierre must too learn to turn away from the "agonizing affection" of kindred love by working through elective orphanhood. Pierre's father dies before the novel begins, when Pierre is twelve years old, therefore Mary Glendinning shares the paternal authority of the household with his exalted memory.[276] Pierre's idealization of his father is much like the narrator's regard for the unreadable, ever-present but absent authority of Greylock in the dedication. The force of Pierre's idealization is such that when he learns of his father's adultery and the existence of an illegitimate half-sister named Isabel in a letter from her, his subjectivity is irreparably fractured. Even just holding the letter a moment before reading it changes him, the mirror bearing "an outline of Pierre, but now strangely filled with features transformed, and unfamiliar to him" (62). After reading it, his father's image has also

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[274] Thomas Jefferson, "Original Rough Draught," 1950, 2004, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Princeton University.
<http://www.princeton.edu/~tjpapers/declaration/declaration.pdf>
[275] See Anna May Duane's *Suffering Childhood in Early America* for a thorough discussion of the child's central metaphorical role in understanding rights and consent.
[276] As did Melville's father.

metamorphosed, and with it, "the before undistrusted moral beauty of the world is forever fled; for thee, they sacred father is no more a saint…" (65). Indeed, Pierre, like Poe's Pym, is like "the mariner, shipwrecked and cast on the beach" (65) for Pierre from this point forward is as one severed from his past, no longer at home in his former life at Saddle Meadows, "his whole previous moral being [was] overturned" (87). Crucially, Pierre accepts Isabel's jarring revelation wholesale and does not consider the possibility that her claim is false. To verify its truth he relies on a perceived resemblance between her and a portrait of his father as a young man, as well as his father's dying ravings about a daughter.

Suggesting his father's misdeeds, the portrait plays a large symbolic role in the novel. As Pierre describes it, this "chair portrait" is a likeness of his father before he married, at exactly the time the elder Pierre involved himself in an affair with a beautiful French emigrant who disappeared shortly thereafter. Pierre's aunt, when he is an adolescent, secretly gives him the portrait and the story of a French woman, rumored to have royal connections, who escaped France during the French Revolution. Surfacing here, this story introduces an aristocratic inheritance broken by revolution, ending darkly with her mysterious disappearance. Given the portrait at age fifteen, Pierre hides it from his mother in his closet, as she dislikes it immensely, preferring instead a large stately portrait of his father that she commissioned "during the best and rosiest days of their wedded union" (83). Melville infuses the portrait with a powerful and mysterious aura, describing it as a sacred shrine to his father, a "fond personification of perfect human goodness and virtue" (68). Once having learned of Isabel, Pierre goes to his closet and turns the chair portrait around, only to find the turned portrait "symbol of thy reversed

idea in my soul" (87). He then declares, "I will no more have a father" (87) and puts the portrait in a chest.

The strong wording of his statement tells us that the severance of relation is an action he wills. At once he realizes that his relationship with his mother is also forever fractured, for he knows he cannot share his emotional upheaval with her, and furthermore her pride would not allow Isabel any place in their family. It is in this moment that he breaks with parental authority; by choosing to throw in his lot with Isabel rather than continuing the family line, he must no longer be the person his mother and father created him to be. He has consciously turned his back on his family and his past. However, he finds that instead of an absence of authority, there is "an indefinite but potential faith, which could rule in the interregnum of all hereditary beliefs, and circumstantial persuasions; not wholly, he felt, was his soul in anarchy" (87). The diction, especially "interregnum" and "anarchy," emphasize the political aspect of this break with a surprising reach back to that precursor of American political theory, British republicanism. In other words, at this moment of his turning away from the past, Pierre finds not "anarchy" or an absence of government, but a familiar political pathway based on granting himself his own authority. Melville's emphasis here on the way Pierre's overflow of passion *feels* like an enlightened decision highlights the affective potential of the narrative of elective orphanhood in its self-authorizing capacity. This is what Jefferson alluded to at the end of his rough draft of the Declaration, when he wrote, "the road to glory & happiness is open to us too; we will climb it in a separate state."[277]

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[277] Thomas Jefferson, "Original Rough Draught," 1950, 2004, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Princeton University.
<http://www.princeton.edu/~tjpapers/declaration/declaration.pdf>

Melville uses the vocabulary of republicanism to structure Pierre's passionate feelings, perhaps in order to evoke the image of the man of feeling that Jefferson conjures in his rough draft. As Julie Ellison writes in *Cato's Tears*, republicanism and masculine sensibility in popular Roman plays of the eighteenth and nineteenth century are inherently linked through the constellation of "paternal rule, political freedom, and the son's loving and guilty self-sacrifice."[278] Pierre's authority is couched in specific language that registers the kind of republicanism and masculine sensibility at the heart of elective orphanhood.

Melville goes on to unambiguously present Pierre's discovery of his authority as akin to an orphaning, though it is wholly his own internal circumstances that have changed. He writes,

> Then Pierre felt that deep in him lurked a divine unidentifiableness; that owned no earthly kith or kin. Yet was this feeling entirely lonesome, and orphan-like. Fain, then, for one moment, would he have recalled the thousand sweet illusions of Life; tho' purchased at the price of Life's Truth; so that once more he might not feel himself driven out an infant Ishmael in the desert, with no maternal Hagar to accompany and comfort him. (89)

That his blossoming awareness of his will is earlier called "an indefinite but potential faith," and here, a "divine unidentifiableness," unmistakably suggests that his new sense of identity is cast through with religious feeling as well as political import. Its quality of "potential" and "unidentifiableness" first speak to him as an open-ended potentiality. This unfixed nature of his authority is perhaps what makes it seems divine, so that breaking with the past, of "own[ing] no earthly kith or kin" is a kind of liberty. And yet, his sense of loss is overwhelming and reiterated as an orphaning in Pierre's own thoughts:

[278] Ellison, p. 57.

> Oh heartless, proud, ice-gilded world, how I hate thee, he thought, that thy tyrannous, insatiate grasp, thus now in my bitterest need—thus doth rob me even of my mother; thus doeth make me now doubly an orphan, without a green grave to bedew. My tears,—could I weep them,—must now be wept in the desolate places now to me is it, as through both father and mother had gone on distant voyages, and returning, died in unknown seas" (90).

Pierre has lost his previous unblemished idealizations of his parents. He mourns for his own lost connection to purity upon perceiving his parents as fallen humans rather than images of divine perfection. That he only understands his sense of loss as an orphaning speaks to the power of the orphan narrative and its association with a national mythos of autogenic authority. His own part in being orphaned is occluded in this formulation, where he blames the "heartless, proud, ice-gilded" world rather than his parents for their faults, or more to the point, his own decision to choose Isabel. He frames his experience as an orphaning because it lends his newfound sense of himself a legible framework, one invested with the sacred overtones of a revolutionary heritage. In this way, his newfound authority is recognizable and legitimized. By electing orphanhood, Pierre simultaneously chooses independence and is yet "robbed" of his happy relations. He is agent and victim, simultaneously occupying both positions, and neither position wholly, much as Jefferson does in his rough draft of the Declaration. In turning away from his parents' external authority and choosing instead his own internal sense of right, Pierre enacts the idea of self-government presented in Locke's "Some Thoughts Concerning Education." Tellingly, however, Pierre's decision is not based on having internalized a sense of restraint over his passions, but from an entirely different impulse. His self-government is not based on reason, but pure emotion.

Out of this emotional space of extreme victimization, Pierre explicitly elects orphanhood, choosing to recreate his identity entirely by leaving home and faking a

marriage to his sister Isabel. His claim that these deeds are selfless acts, done to legitimize Isabel within a domestic arrangement that allows for fraternal intimacy, does not seem entirely believable. One suspects that his desire for her, though unconscious, is more than fraternal and in no way motivated by selflessness. However, by following the dictates of his heart, disobeying his mother and "marrying" Isabel, Pierre loses his claim tp the family patrimony and estate. He sees the chair portrait of his father lying among his few belongings packed from his former home, and burns it. Melville writes Pierre as desperate to the point of madness in this act, reaching out into the flames to grab for his father's face as it is destroyed, and burning his hand in the process, which he fails to notice. This act of burning, done to destroy what he considers proof of his father's misdeeds so as to "hold his public memory inviolate" (199) is accompanied with the destruction of family letters and other "memorials in paper" (198), a bizarre ceremony that dramatizes his break from the past. It ritualizes his own authority as autogenic, which Pierre declares in no uncertain terms: "Henceforth, cast-out Pierre hath no paternity, and no past; and since the Future is one blank to all; therefore, twice-disinherited Pierre stands untrammeledly his ever-present self!—free to do his own self-will and present fancy to whatever end!" (199). He calls himself, "twice-disinherited"—his first orphaning the devastating loss of his idealized relationship with his parents, and the second, his burning the portrait and materially enacting his elective orphanhood as a reification of his "ever-present self." Pierre's speech to himself is a declaration of independence.

Thus, the "ever-present self" subsumes the absent past, allowing for Pierre's "self-will and present fancy," which Melville will go on to suggest provides no greater happiness or truthfulness. As in the act of interpreting Greylock's hoary crown in the

dedication, authority is built upon the way one writes the past and orients oneself to this narrative. Melville uses the political rhetoric of the family, so common in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period, to narrate this character's emotional journey to make legible the vulnerability of autogenic authority. That we ourselves write the past is one way to interpret an oft-quoted passage from *Pierre*: "By vast pains we mine into the pyramid, by horrible gropings we come to the central room; with joy we espy the sarcophagus; but we lift the lid—and no body is there!—appallingly vacant as vast is the soul of a man!" (285). The monument to the past is empty, and at the center of man's soul is a corresponding absence. As Edgar A. Dryden points out,

> At the beginning for Melville there is already an unrecoverable past signified by the empty sarcophagus, and it is the burden of the present and future architects that no matter how hard they may seek to establish an original relation to the forms of the natural earth, they must inscribe the empty tomb **within** all their monuments."[279]

The elective orphan thus acts out a condition already always in existence, making the emptiness of the past apparent with a conscious decision to write oneself, to self-fashion, to become author.

And yet, Pierre's decision to recognize Isabel does not appear a conscious act of reason at all. The narrator explains that Pierre did not deliberate over what to do with the knowledge of an illegitimate sister: "such a question never presented itself to Pierre" (87); it is his sensibility which demands he acts as he does, his "enthusiastic heart" and "spontaneous responsiveness of his being" (87). Rather than reason, it is "the magical effect of the admission into man's inmost spirit of a before unexperienced and wholly

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[279] Edgar A. Dryden, "The Entangled Text: Melville's Pierre and the Problem of Reading," *Herman Melville: A Collection of Essays* (edited by Jehlen, Myra, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1994), 108.

inexplicable element" that produces an experience of a new truth, "so that in these flashing revelations of grief's wonderful fire, we see all things as they are" (88).

While passionate feeling presented a threat, it simultaneously offered a means to unite a disparate people, and a moral compass, as the Common Sense Philosophers suggested. Sentimental literature, which had become a conventional feminized genre by the mid-1850s, comes directly out of this philosophical tradition of "manly feeling."[280] Pierre, however, takes Stowe's imperative to "feeling right" to excessive heights. Melville questions the epistemological grounds of Pierre's moral and emotional compass by suggesting that man cannot understand his own motivations. He writes,

> Far as we blind moles can see, man's life seems but an acting upon mysterious hints; it is somehow hinted to us, to do thus or thus. For surely no mere mortal who has at all gone down into himself will ever pretend that his slightest thought or act solely originates in his own defined identity." (176)

If Pierre is a sentimental hero, then sentimentalism is founded on faulty premises. We can see the satire of the sentimental tradition everywhere in the novel, but most especially in Pierre's inflamed claiming of orphanhood, which makes use of sentimental conventions like hyperbole, anachronistic ancient language, the tear, and the sense of being victimized by a cruel and unfair world. To return to the quotation, Pierre remarks, though his mother is still living, "My tears,—could I weep them,—must now be wept in the desolate places now to me is it, as through both father and mother had gone on distant voyages, and returning, died in unknown seas" (90).

Pierre is unwilling to examine his decisions and motivations, consequently he models himself on the readily available narrative of elective orphanhood, which oscillates between a language of agency and victimhood. Thus it never appears to Pierre that he has

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[280] As Julie Ellison, Glen Hendler, Bruce Coviello and others point out.

a choice in his decision to turn from his past until the end of the novel, when seeing another portrait at an art exhibit that also resembles Isabel, he realizes, alongside the reader, the flimsy basis for his impulsive actions. On meeting Isabel, however, Pierre elects orphanhood and self-fashioning without any trace of hesitation, though this act destroys not only his future, patrimony, and his mother, but also his intended bride, the loving and innocent Lucy Tartan. Facing each other as brother and sister for the first time, the narrator tell us: "Memory and Prophecy, and Intuition tell him—Pierre, have no reserves; no minutest possible doubt;—this being is thy sister; thou gazest on thy father's flesh" (113). The unreliable faculties of memory, prophecy and intuition convince Pierre of the truth of Isabel's claim, and yet Melville capitalizes these faculties to suggest their power. The reader's interpretation of this simple act of capitalization highlights the ambiguity of Melville's tone throughout the entire novel. Is it a sarcastic nod to the romantic emphasis on intuition and the sentimental conviction of the spiritual power of blood relations? Is Melville showing us Pierre's naïveté? Or is Melville suggesting that the power of emotion overwhelms reason in all of us? What is this magical feeling that so affects his "enthusiastic heart" and causes his decision not "to pry at all into [the] sacred problem" (141) of their kinship, causing his elective orphanhood? It is, at heart, sympathy, extended to its proper object, the truly marginalized Isabel, the sentimental orphan.

IV.

Critics have read the sentimental orphan as either a democratic figure representing agency or a conservative one revealing the class anxiety underwriting the rise of

domesticity. She is a democratic figure when considered in relation to her lack of kinship ties; she must choose or recuperate those ties according to sympathy rather than blood, contract rather than consanguinity.[281] By this reading, she reveals the supposedly leveling shift within the family from patriarchal authority to one based around Lockean notions of contract. At the base of the idea of contract is the notion that both parties are subjects, rather than the subject/object relation implied in patriarchal authority. As we have seen, the consequences of defining for yourself your family, and therefore your identity, were commonly tested through the narrative of orphanhood in the post-revolutionary period. As Elizabeth Dill writes, the orphan "is the ultimate democratizing force that challenges the superiority of the family in a republic as one who ever only elects a family."[282] Viewed in this way, the sentimental orphan, like the elective orphan, is exiled from the biological family, but it is her agency to elect a family, with all of the political resonance that implies, that makes her such a germane and popular figure.

On the other hand, the sentimental orphan reveals the limitations of agency, first of all for the ways in which the didacticism of the sentimental orphan novel stresses self-control and discipline as the route to gaining familial love, rather than choice or election. Additionally, most popular sentimental novels feature orphans originally from aristocratic or upper-class backgrounds whose poverty is a temporary obstacle. As Diana Loercher Pazicky argues, the sentimental orphan figure in these novels signifies the loss and recovery of class position, and betrays an anxiety about the position of the middle class at

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[281] See note 111.

[282] Elizabeth Dill, "That Damned Mob of Scribbling Siblings: The American Romance as Anti-Novel in *The Power of Sympathy* and *Pierre*," *American Literature*, Vol. 80, no. 4 (2008: 716.

the top of the social hierarchy.[283] Thus, biological kinship ties dictate one's identity in the end, when the sentimental orphan's true genealogy is revealed. Some of the most popular sentimental novels use this formula, most notably *The Wide, Wide World* by Susan Warner and *The Lamplighter* (1854) by Maria Susanna Cummins.[284] As Pazicky notes, the sentimental orphan in most orphan tales is a conservative figure rather than a revolutionary one.[285] She is a victim whose fate is already determined by her past, which she cannot escape, an "immutable inheritance that survives all assaults upon it."[286]

However, though the sentimental orphan may elect a new family, she does not choose her orphanhood—it is thrust upon her. This difference from elective orphanhood is crucial. It suggests that the oscillation between rational agent and victim has been flattened into a single rhetoric. If the sentimental orphan is a child of familial symbolism, then what has happened to the elective orphan's volition? Without this volition there is no purposeful choice, no claim to autogenesis, but only recognition of the loss underwriting the revolutionary venture represented as a destabilized biological family.

Gender would appear to be the determining factor, so that elective orphanhood, appears almost entirely as a prerogative of male characters, and reflects masculine political and cultural agency; whereas, sentimental orphanhood, by the height of the age of domesticity, illustrates women's agency, limited to the domestic realm. However, these gender lines are not static, and female elective orphans are represented among the

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[283] Pazicky, 150.
[284] There are too many others to mention. For a good study, see Pazicky's *Cultural Orphans in America*.
[285] Pazicky notes the exception of *The Newsboy*, by Elizabeth Oakes Smith (1854), whose male orphan appears to self-fashion entirely but ends in exile, undomesticated. *The Newsboy* is indeed constructed along different premises, and I wonder if this isn't partly because the protagonist is a male that he is allowed to self-fashion.
[286] Pazicky, 163.

earliest American novels in the form of cross-dressing adventurers, as we saw in Chapter Three. Even more to the point, after the 1850s, when the sentimental orphan figure seemingly replaced the elective orphan entirely, sentimental orphanhood applies to both male and female orphans. Some famous examples of later male sentimental orphans are Horatio Alger's protagonists, and *Huckleberry Finn*. These young men are literally orphaned, rather than enacting a revolutionary autogenesis, as I claim of elective orphans.

If the broken nuclear family is always imposed rather than chosen, has revolutionary agency as a novelistic subtext gone underground? One way to answer that question is to examine how agency, like corporeal discipline, has been internalized in sentimental novels. In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault theorizes the gradual interiorizing of discipline in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, from a physical punishment enacted on the body of the wrongdoer, to more pervasive but less visible technologies of control.[287] Richard H. Brodhead and Myra Glen have discussed this cultural shift from corporal punishment to affective discipline as a major concern of the antebellum period.[288] As Brodhead explains, "Discipline through love,"[289] was the defining American middle class creation of the nineteenth century; in it, the mother, focused solely on child-rearing as her labor, builds the child's moral compass through nurture and affection, effectively internalizing her authority over the child. Sentimental

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[287] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Random House, 1977).
[288] Richard H. Brodhead, "Sparing the Rod: Discipline and Fiction in Antebellum America," *Representations*, No. 21 (Winter, 1988): 67-96; Myra Glenn, *Campaigns Against Corporal Punishment: Prisoners, Sailors, Women and Children in Antebellum America* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1984).
[289] Brodhead, 70.

novels most often focus on the orphaned child, then, to explore the elemental loss of this authority figure and the search to find an alternate authority to love and obey.

More recently, Joe Sutliff Sanders suggests that the sentimental orphan's major legacy is a formula based on learning self-control, in which orphan girls gather sympathy from those who are at first unwilling to give it, wining love from families (and readers) to gain homes of their own.[290] These novels generally use the marriage plot to tie up loose ends, once the orphan has internalized the lesson, successfully disciplined. Therefore, agency for the sentimental orphan is dependent upon her ability to accept affective discipline from others until she can successfully discipline herself into the accepted domestic role. Her agency is wholly located within her ability to gather or gain a family based on sympathy, a sympathy that teaches the orphan self-discipline, which in turn inspires sympathy. Thus, the sentimental orphan possesses a very limited kind of agency gained as the result of moral suasion and sympathy, for it is through the exchange of emotion that she finds her social, religious and affective identity.

Lori Merish names this limited agency "feminine consent" and theorizes its origins in both devotional Protestant ethics and liberalism as it was articulated in Scottish Enlightenment moral philosophy. In her convincing formulation, "feminine consent" plays out a feminine civic identity constituted through the idea of taste as feminine, posited against a rationality seen as both masculine and actively political.[291] Nineteenth century women's fiction expressed and helped create "an identificatory logic interior to

[290] Joe Sutliff Sanders, *Disciplining Girls: Understanding the Origins of the Classic Orphan Girl Story* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).
[291] Lori Merish, *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 19.

[liberal political] subjectivity"[292] based on consumption and ideas of gender formulated through consumption and "sentimental ownership"[293] generated by sympathy. The affective realm, though so often articulated in sentimental novels as divorced from a public sphere, is indistinguishable from early capitalist relations of property, where love is a form of control and ownership. Merish writes, "Constructed as an autonomous emotional response, sentimental ownership is a fantasy of intimate possession that is in fact—like the 'free market' itself—produced and sustained by laws and economic policies."[294] In this formulation, the Scottish Enlightenment redefined "freedom" as an investment in luxury goods through which one can express one's ability to evidence taste and refinement, which constituted a new liberal definition of, and role for, the feminine ideal. Conversely, "enslavement," though unstable in definition, was "interiorized and often racialized as [liberal] subjectivity's constitutive limit, producing the interdeterminations of agency and constraint characteristic of liberal subjection."[295] Subjection as a meshing of agency and constraint, as Merish uses it, following Foucault, is inherent to a female subjectivity idealized in consumer culture and expressed in domesticity.[296]

I am interested in Merish's theorization of "feminine consent" for the particular way it posits all agency as a "'consent' to capitalism" intimately connected to desire and

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[292] Ibid., 2.
[293] Ibid., 4.
[294] Ibid., 4.
[295] Ibid., 33.
[296] Merish points out that the critical debates on sentimental literature continually re-articulate these two subject positions, liberation and constraint, focusing on gender without historicizing or adequately theorizing it as a category. She writes, "Thus recent debates reenact "two different identifactory moments interior to the structure of sentimental subjectivity these texts enact: an identification with the progressive possibilities of liberal political agency and an identification with submission." (24)

emotion at its base. Narratives of sentimental orphanhood all begin with the loss of the power and property relations implied in the form of the nuclear family. They are narratives that enact what she calls "liberal subjection," or a limited agency twinned with constraint, in how they narrate accommodation to the structures of power.

Popular sentimental orphan novels of the mid-nineteenth century play out accordingly. One of the most popular novels of the nineteenth century, *The Wide, Wide World* by Susan Warner (1850), lays the foundation for the genre of children's literature in the sentimental orphan plot.[297] The title speaks to Ellen Montgomery's orphanhood, in that she "felt sometimes, soberly and sadly, that she was thrown upon the wide world now."[298] After Ellen's mother dies, her entire novel details the delicate work she must perform to build a family based on sympathy and religion, a labor of accommodating the self. As Jane Tompkins notes, novels of sentiment shift from material agency to spiritual agency around a reshaping of the concept of true action. Through self-discipline and prayer, the self is emptied out, which Tompkins suggests makes *The Wide, Wide World* "a kind of bildungsroman in reverse."[299] She finds her ultimate family and place in marriage to a man whose authority over her is both loving and total. The novel illustrates the centrality of subjection in the orphan's plot, where familial recuperation is a reward for self-discipline.[300] Agency is defined in ethical and spiritual terms, rather than political,

[297] Sanders, 5-8.
[298] Susan Warner, *The Wide, Wide World,* (reprint, edited by Jane Tompkins, New York: The Feminist Press, 1987), 381.
[299] Jane Tompkins, afterward to *The Wide, Wide, World*, 598.
[300] Warner's novel, long considered a foundational text of sentimental literature, is one of the most often discussed works of the genre, beginning with the critical attention of Jane Tompkins in *Sensational Designs*.

reflecting the delimited feminine role as "civilizing" presence with moral and ethical agency over the characters of those in her household.

Maria Cummins' best-selling *The Lamplighter* (1854) is perhaps the other best-known sentimental orphan novel of the 1850s. It has a similar plot, including mistreatment by a guardian who does not fulfill the dictates of middle-class domesticity, and the subsequent finding of one who does. Unlike in *The Wide, Wide World*, the orphan's true identity is revealed when her long-lost father comes to find her, and ends up marrying the mother-replacement, Emily, that the protagonist Gerty had come to love. Emily's love, based on sympathy, is maternal and disciplinary. Both orphans in these novels find guardians who teach them how to exert agency on themselves in order to accept the higher power of Christ that renders them suitable wives, able to defer to a husband's authority. This exploration of agency illustrates the work and logic of "feminine consent" as the engine motivating the plot. Like Carwin the biloquist, who returns to the yeoman's life he rebelled against, sentimental orphans and elective orphans alike accommodate themselves in the end.

V.

The problem of identity as a property relation plays out in a number of ways throughout *Pierre*,[301] not least in its sustained exploration of the interdeterminations of subjectivation and object-hood in "sentimental ownership." As in *The Wide, Wide World* and *The Lamplighter,* Isabel Banford's narrative is built around her quest for a family, which she gains through sympathy, despite her poor and unknown origins, or rather,

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[301] Jeffory A. Clymer explores this theme in relation to property rights and Saddle Meadows.

because of her poor and unknown origins. She is the epitome of sentimental orphanhood in that she has already been disciplined into a negativity of desire and self, save for "some one of my own blood to know me, and to own me, though but once, and then away," (158) which motivates her to write to Pierre and reveal their blood connection. Still, she cannot even claim access to the agency involved in that one act, which she attributes to a power outside of herself: "God called thee, Pierre, not poor Bell" (159). She has had no loving authority figure to teach her the ways of self-discipline, but learns to teach herself out of the utter cruelty and neglect inflicted on her by unsympathetic caretakers. For example, she explains that upon learning what she believes is her father's surname, that she "repressed all undue curiosity, if any such has ever filled my breast" (147). Having learned to conquer her desire, she is primed for domesticity, except that she lacks a family and is of the wrong class. Melville writes Pierre as the answer to Isabel's lack—he will be brother, lover and parent to her, the only one who can exert proper "sentimental ownership" over her, turning her from a wage worker into an woman whose does not labor, or whose labor is the act of love. In fact, Isabel trades places with Delly Ulver, the young woman whose house she labored in, after Delly scandalously becomes pregnant outside of marriage. Pierre and Isabel rescue Delly from her disgrace by taking her to the city with them as a servant, though they themselves are so poor they can barely afford to eat. That they employ a servant despite their dire poverty suggests their investment in the ideal of unproductive femininity.

Melville writes Isabel as a being whose main property is her emotion;[302] much like Isabel's guitar, she is a feeling object. Isabel believes her guitar belonged to her mother and was fated to end up in her possession; it serves as an emotional connection to her lost mother and appears to respond to her with a kind of loving and supernatural conversation enacted through music. This emotional call and response is so powerful that Pierre, upon witnessing it, is "[a]lmost deprived of consciousness by the spell flung over him" (150). Thus the presence of absence is very real in the novel, and furthermore, is connected to ideas of possession and property. The guitar's anthropomorphic quality illustrates the trope of domestic animism in sentimental literature, or animating objects with spiritual qualities inside domestic spaces in order to show the regenerative affective power of the home.[303]

As we have discussed, the dual positions of agent and victim, as well as the oscillation between them, are the means through which the elective orphan narrative becomes a fantasy of liberation. The movement between subject-hood and object-hood performs a similar function in sentimental orphan narratives, and sentimental literature in general, where objects become signifiers of nurturing affect.[304] Woman's role, then, is not only to act as consumer, but to foster an arena in which love is not only evident in the home and its objects, but is her main labor. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon calls this the

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[302] As Clymer writes on p. 189: "Isabel is a threat to property, and especially to subjectivity. She represents "subjectivity as a form of property under duress."
[303] Ann Douglas, *Feminization of American Literature*, p. 240-71; Shirley Samuels, *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1992); Jane Tompkins, Sensational Designs: *The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago, Chicago UP, 2003).
[304] See Lori Merish's discussion of the role of consumer culture in constructing a nineteenth century ideal of the feminine.

"pastoralization of women's labor," and argues that this fantasy of love as anti-utilitarian labor created a sense of aesthetic autonomy and accounts for the feminization of sympathy from masculine fellow-feeling.[305]

The anti-utilitarian nature of Isabel's role, and its connection to her objecthood, is made clear when Lucy comes to live with them. Immediately upon settling into their home, Lucy mentions her desire to labor, by "practicing her crayon art professionally," (330) in other words, selling portraits. Her plan to earn her keep affects Isabel strangely, who raves madly, "But she shall not get the start of me! Pierre, some way I must work for thee! See, I will sell this hair; have these teeth pulled out; but some way I will earn money for thee!" (333). In this moment of jealous rage, Isabel literalizes the self as property. Her status as object is so complete that, at first, she can only imagine labor as a dismembering of her body, something enacted on her. Furthermore, one can read this plea for dismemberment as akin to the sentimental orphan's hollowing out of her self in order to be part of the domestic sphere. Isabel quickly realizes how deranged her cry sounds, and she instead calmly requests that he find music students for her, so that she may, like Lucy, labor. Though happy to hear Lucy's plan, Pierre dismisses Isabel's request, telling her, "thou art the mistress of the natural sweetness of the guitar, not of its invented regulated artifices; and these are all that the silly pupil will pay for learning…Ah, thy sweet ignorance is all transporting to me! my sweet!—dear, divine girl!" (334). He values her unproductive role within the household, her ignorance of the market, though she is actually the only one in their household to have worked for pay. Isabel's capacity to feel

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[305] Elizabeth Maddock Dillon in "Sentimental Aesthetics" discusses this idea of the anti-utilitarian and its relation to women's labor. For a discussion of sympathy as rooted in masculine feeling, see Julie Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion*.

(i.e., the "natural sweetness of the guitar") is a marker of her new class position and the reason why she must remain outside of the market.

Lack is the defining aspect of Isabel's character, as Priscilla Wald and Sianne Ngai note. Isabel's literal orphanhood offsets Pierre's fictional one, and suggests the problematic posture of familial loss as a catalyst for self-fashioning. She is bereft of actual parents, but also a narrative of the past, which she relates to Pierre alongside this haunted, magical song that she plays with her guitar. Her lack itself contains an explicit erotic charge:

> He felt a faint struggling within his clasp; her head drooped against him; his whole form was bathed in the flowing glossiness of her long and unimprisoned hair. Brushing the locks aside, he now gazed upon the death-liked beauty of her face, and caught immortal sadness from it. She seemed as dead; as suffocated,—the death that leaves most unimpaired the latent tranquilities and sweetnesses of the human countenance. (112)

Though it quickly becomes clear that this is a description of Isabel fainting, it is unabashedly sexualized.[306] Melville suggests and denies the problem of incest with a singular stroke, leaving the issue unresolved throughout the novel, when he writes, "And Pierre felt that never, never would he be able to embrace Isabel with the mere brotherly embrace; while the thought of any other caress, […] was entirely vacant from his uncontaminated soul, for it had never consciously intruded there" (142). As he whispers his suggestion that they marry, their physical intimacy becomes even more explicit, so that "they coiled together, and entangledly stood mute" (192).

The narrative of her history, as she relates to Pierre, begins, "I never knew a mortal mother" (114). Much like the way slave narratives recall and thwart the factual conventions of autobiographical detail, such as the naming of a birthplace and birthday,

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[306] So much so that the film adaptation of *Pierre*, *Pola X*, explores their incest.

Isabel's narrative suggests the indefinite quality of all memory, especially childhood memory. Without the support of the narrative reinforcement and knowledge of self that one gains from living within a family of any sort, she can only relate physical impressions. As an adult recalling these sensations in place of autobiographical detail, she is acutely aware of this lack, and uses it to emphasize her orphanhood. She says, "Always in me, the solidest things melt into dreams, and dreams into solidities. Never have I wholly recovered from the effects of my strange early life" (117). Isabel fills even the iteration of her narrative with pauses that she commands: "Let me be silent now; do not speak to me" (118). She also narrates her lack of happiness as an inability to identify it, and her current personhood as a kind of exile. These kinds of statements have led critics to see her not only as a symbol of lack, but as "a site of textual negativity" that Ngai argues prompts in Pierre a crisis in his masculine agency.[307]

Ngai claims that Isabel's "textual negativity" prompts Pierre's own desire to be an object. She views his anxiety as a gendered response to object- and victimhood in the face of such lack. Through the symbolism of the Terror Stone, that "patriarchal rock" that Pierre (whose name literally means *stone* in French) projects himself onto and under, as well as the myth of Enceladus, an anthropomorphic stone thrown from the father mountain, Ngai reveals Pierre's fantasy of becoming a stone. As "an object that hurls itself back at the paternal mass" (244), masculine agency is restored through a turning away from the kinds of negative spaces that Isabel narrates. Ngai notes "the projective character Pierre's anxiety comes to assume, as a form of displacement marked by an implicit movement from agent to object, or center to periphery, performs a more

[307] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 236-247.

conservative function" (245) as a fantasy of "self-liberation" (246) through projection. Isabel's transition to being "owned" within the domestic structure as property is presented as a kind of liberation, existing, as it does, within the logic of liberal subjection. Pierre's desire to be an object speaks to Melville's (de)construction of the complexity and complicity of narratives of "self-liberation."

VI.

The sexual rendering, her mystery, and this dark ending make Isabel into a sensationalized, gothic version of the sentimental orphan. She is allied with indeterminacy as well as the mysterious and bodily powers beyond consciousness and memory, such as intuition, attraction, and the non-lingual power of music beyond speech. Her guitar playing casts a spell that "seemed one with that Pantheistic master-spell, which eternally locks in mystery and in muteness the universal subject world" is both "physical and spiritual" (151), an irresistible attraction. In this way she is a classic representation of the dark and Dionysian feminine, which threatens to overcome, or overcomes, rational masculinity with its powerful mysticism. The gothic trappings of her characterization alongside the sentimental narration reveal the porous line between sensational and sentimental literature.[308]

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[308] See Elizabeth Dill, "That Damned Mob of Scribbling Siblings: The American Romance as Anti-novel in The Power of Sympathy and Pierre," *American Literature*, Vol. 80, no. 4 (Dec. 2008): 707-738; June Howard, *Publishing the Family* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2001); Cindy Weinstein, *Family, Kinship, and Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997).

In contrast to Isabel's gothic portrayal, Pierre's first love and original fiancé, Lucy Tartan, is an altogether different and surprising iteration of the sentimental orphan. She is constructed as the light to Isabel's darkness.[309] In addition to opposite coloration, Lucy is wealthy and of a respectable family compared to Isabel's mysterious parentage, and she seems mature where Lucy appears child-like. She is also Pierre's intended bride, chosen not only by Pierre's mother, but also by Pierre, until his discovery of kinship with Isabel changes his path. Pierre decides to fake a marriage to Isabel and promptly informs Lucy, "Lucy, I am married" (183), breaking her heart. Lucy then disappears from the novel, while Pierre and Isabel, "married" and suddenly poor and homeless, move to the city and find refuge in a dwelling for artists while Pierre attempts to write a great mature novel.

When Lucy resurfaces near the end of the novel, we learn that she mysteriously understands that some kind of secret and selfless reason has compelled Pierre to marry Isabel, and that she is on her way to live with them in the guise of Pierre's chaste cousin, despite the consequences to her reputation. Like Isabel, she has mystical powers, which she attributes to extreme emotion outside of language: "Grief,—deep, unspeakable grief, hath made me this seer" (309). Her irrational decision to join Pierre and Isabel is articulated as an abiding faith in him, who has given her no outward reason to trust him; however it makes sense within the logic of novel—all decisions are narrated, not as reasoned and willed choices, but as the acting out of one's nature. As Mary, Pierre's mother remarks to herself, "Then I will live my nature out. I will stand on pride. I will not budge. Let come what will, I shall not half-way run to meet it, to beat it off" (131). With

[309] Isabel herself makes this comparison: "methought she was that good angel, which some say, hovers over every human soul; and methought—oh, methought that I was thy other, —thy dark angel, Pierre" (314).

this decision to live with Pierre and Isabel, Lucy becomes another orphan, willingly exchanging her ties with her family for an ambiguous and dishonest relation in a sham marriage. She tells Pierre, "thou art my mother and my brothers, and all the world, and all heaven, and all the universe to me—thou *art* my Pierre" (311).

Lucy's decision is tested in much the same way as Pierre's; she too privileges the affective realm over every consideration and, for it, confront the deep grief involved in losing one's inherited identity and loved ones. We are told that "her entire family would renounce her; and though she should be starving, would not bestow one morsel upon such a recreant, and infinitely worse than dishonorable girl" (327). The threat of dishonor and familial exile does not dissuade her in the least.

Her agency in this orphanhood is made crystal clear, for she first writes and then reads the following to her mother, "I am Lucy Tartan. I have come to dwell during their pleasure with Mr. and Mrs. Pierre Glendinning, of my own unsolicited free-will. If they desire it, I shall go; but no other power shall remove me, except by violence; and against any violence I have the ordinary appeal to the law" (328). Read closely, this recitation begins with a statement of her identity, followed by an admission that she understands the marriage of Pierre and Isabel, and still chooses to live with them. It ends by wrapping her in the mantle of the law, which provides her, according to her claim, with protection. Her act of writing it down and then reading it aloud lend it an air of legality and finality, a claim of agency made concrete. Her mother matches this dramatic finality by telling her "I forever cast thee off" (329); thus Lucy elects orphanhood.

Melville writes Lucy's elective orphanhood, much like Pierre's, as an exceedingly ambiguous act. Like him, she self-fashions outside of the bounds of respectability

dictated by middle-class domesticity,[310] though still choosing to remain inside the private realm of house and hearth. They both relinquish their class status for the affective familial space that domesticity itself enshrines. By privileging the emotional life over all else, over even basic human concerns, Lucy and Pierre fall into disrespect. In this way, Melville satirizes domestic culture, revealing respectability and societal control, rather than love, as its primary concern.

Lucy's orphanhood appears a collision of both the elective and sentimental. In classic sentimental orphan form, she uses her agency to become selfless, living for Pierre and Isabel, rather than herself. Before joining them, she writes to Pierre that she has "vowed to dwell with thee forever; to serve thee and her, to guard thee and her without end" (311); their betrothal transmuted into "one mute wooing of each other; with no declaration; no bridal; till we meet in the pure realms of God's final blessedness for us" (310). As a sentimental orphan, her own desires have been thoroughly disciplined and conquered so that she wants nothing from the relationship except to love, which means, for her, to help construct and contribute to the domestic life of Pierre.

Illustrating the conventions of both sentimental and elective orphanhood, Lucy is a figure who occupies the space between subject-hood and object-hood, agent and victim. If she were the proper center of the domestic sphere, then she, like Isabel, would not work for pay. In contrast, Lucy occupies a middle ground, where she expresses agency and is simultaneously valued for her abilities. The fact that Lucy's agency is expressed by first electing orphanhood, and then her labor as portrait-painter, is telling. However,

[310] Elizabeth Dill emphasizes her radical metamorphosis from "angel in the house into an incestrous wooer," suggesting that her transformation into a sensationalist character turns her into a figure of disruption and "mutability" (728).

though she promises some sort of compromise between the limitations of gender roles, some access to agency, she, like Pierre, has no future or place. Though she aims to break free from the limits of respectability, there is no liberation possible for her, no narrative outside of property relations that she can inhabit, no way she cannot be written as a victim.

Melville surfaces the connections between subjectivity, class position, and capitalism. Pierre and Isabel's new household in the city revolves around Pierre's labor to write the great novel that he feels within his reach, but his work, like Isabel's, lies outside of the marketplace. While still living at Saddle Meadows he acquires fame as a juvenile author selling poetry and finds that earning money makes him feel independent, so that "[h]e likes to be not only his own Alpha and Omega, but to be distinctly all the intermediate gradations" (261). However, when forced to survive upon his writing, he finds that despite his most concerted efforts he cannot, or will not, produce the desired product. After collecting cash advances for his novel, he receives a letter from his publisher calling him a "swindler" for writing "a blasphemous rhapsody, filched from the vile Atheists, Lucian and Voltaire" (356) rather than the "popular novel" he had been commissioned to write.[311] In the same post, he receives a letter declaiming his reputation. Pierre's discovery that his art and his reputation are deemed valueless in the marketplace psychologically breaks him, and shortly after he commits murder. Paradoxically, this suggests that Pierre sees no value outside of the public sphere, what he calls "[w]orlds

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[311] Much criticism has been written linking Melville's dwindling literary reputation and Pierre's, beginning with Hershel Parker's investigations into the overlap of the autobiographical and fictional in Pierre. Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, *Reading Melville's Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).

bread of life and world's breath of honor," (357) which is an unexpected devaluation of the private, domestic sphere that he has worked so hard to build, and in which he has found the love of not one, but two beautiful women. In this way, the liberatory potential of Pierre's autogenesis, and its root in the domestic sphere, are rendered empty.

VII.

Though refracting similar rhetorics, the elective orphan and the sentimental orphan narratives cannot be reconciled. As in the Enceladus myth, the novel *Pierre* is an object Melville hurls back, an attack on the kinds of narratives that engender fantasies of self-liberation. Melville ultimately "unhorses" Pierre entirely; physically and mentally weakened by his experiences and pursuit of authorship, he ultimately dies in jail in a joint suicide with Isabel, holding the dead body of his first love, Lucy.

I believe that Melville honestly tests the potential of the orphan narratives, which is why his tone is so often impossible to classify. Though clearly often satirical in content, form and style, Melville is too deeply concerned and serious about the potential opened up by the narratives themselves as well as his means of exploring them. He feels them out, probes them with a keen desire to feel them work, and ultimately it is this intention that renders the novel tonally complex and difficult. On a very real level, *Pierre* is not satire because the distance between the author and his subject matter is fluctuating and unstable, rather than at a consistent remove. Critics often point to the autobiographical qualities of *Pierre*, as if finding direct connections to Melville's life explains the continually shifting authorial distance and complexity of tone. This instability is evident in a mercurial narrator who treats his role too lightly and is yet too

heavy-handed at every turn. There is no doubt, however, that no matter the authorial stance toward the experiment that is *Pierre*, it ends without the hope of possibility. Melville asks for a reconsideration of the narratives of liberation implicit in so many of the dominant ideologies of liberalism, such as individualism, self-reliance, and self-fashioning, as well as their counterparts, domesticity and sentimental ownership as expressed through sympathy.

As Michael D. Snediker explains, the characters in *Pierre* are not believable according to the usual standards.[312] They are figures indexing their own figuration. Melville does this by making the characters figuratively unstable, and continually using figurative language to point to figuration itself, so that "Pierre's ontological constitution…is most keenly manifest as an extended rhetorical fabrication…"[313] — "continually oscillating between personhood and figurativity in a world itself barraged and barraging with personification."[314] Thus the burden of being an elective orphan and fulfilling this narrative is conveyed at the level of style, so that the characterization is heavy handed, and yet psychologically compelling in ways that point to the possibilities in fiction for exploring psychology that would come to fruition in modernism. This focus on figuration becomes part of the plot, so that the style of *Pierre* is as important as its content. Melville writes these characters as the bearers of larger narratives, larger plots. These larger narratives contain faulty premises. Melville wrote, "we are all sons, grandsons, or nephews, or great-nephews of those who go before us. No one is his own

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[312] Michael D. Snediker, "*Pierre* and the Non-Transparencies of Figuration," *ELH* 77 (2010): 217-235. Snidiker writes, "Melville's novel arguably insists that as a figurative entity—as a person who is ontologically stylistic—Pierre's psyche conforms less to standards of human psychology, than to its own idiosyncratic aesthetic criteria" (223).
[313] Snediker, 231.
[314] Ibid., 232.

sire."[315] He suggests in *Pierre* that the ethos of autonomy constructed by the fantasy of autogenesis is bankrupt as a narrative of liberation.

Elizabeth Maddock Dillon in "Sentimental Aesthetics"[316] traces the development of the liberal subject, or one who is capable of self-governing within the dictates of the law, or simultaneously free and lawful, through aesthetic theory in Scottish Common Sense philosophy. Dillon suggests that aesthetic judgment makes liberal subjectivity possible, for the way it proposes choice—volition— as central to the *feeling* of freedom and autonomy: "the liberal subject [...] becomes aware of his or her freedom through the act of aesthetic judgment."[317] Aesthetic play, then, as the experience of the imagination, is necessarily located outside the market. Dillon points to sentimentalism's origins, not only in Christian reform, as commonly understood, but also in aesthetic education with its valuation of the "nonutilitarian." The domestic, redefined as love rather than labor, at its center suggests aesthetic autonomy and choice. It is the affective space that "thus helps produce the freedom of the liberal subject through affective abundance and nonutilitarianism."[318] Accordingly, sentimental orphanhood is the logical outgrowth of elective orphanhood; it is in fact the ultimate expression of liberation and autonomy.

In *Pierre*, Melville explores the discursive bedrock of liberalism by writing into and against the affective and nonutilitarian as (self-sabotaging) keys to the illusions "liberation" and "autonomy." Neither the public nor private sphere offers transcendence for one who invests in these fantasies. The novel reenacts and empties out the mythos of

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[315] *The Letters of Herman Melville, (*Eds. Merrill R. Davis and William H. Gilman, Yale University Press, 1960), 78; as quoted in Eric J. Sundquist, p. xix.
[316] Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, "Sentimental Aesthetics" *American Literature* (Volume 76, Number 3, September 2004): pp. 495-523.
[317] Dillon, 503.
[318] Dillon, 509.

the political foundations of the nation as a narrative of familial dissolution and familial election by exploiting the two narratives of orphanhood, which together mimic the dual registers of agent and victim.

Pierre, after first meeting with Isabel, hikes into the woods to a familiar thinking place, a huge rock poised above a large vacant space, that he names the Terror Stone. He then climbs into that hollow, for the first time in his life, and speaks aloud a list of negative outcomes and damaging philosophical possibilities opened up by the thought of electing orphanhood. Daring the stone to fall on him, he says, “then do thou, Mute Massiveness, fall on me! Ages thou hast waited; and if these things be thus, then wait no more; for whom better canst thou crush than him who now lies here invoking thee!” (134). Indeed, *Pierre* ends crushed under the heavy weight of orphanhood. Narratives of liberation, like the Terror Stone, remain poised in the air, menacing and immovable. *Pierre* is Melville’s invocation to them to fall, and a dare to his readers to desire their falling.

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