INTRODUCTION

> Women, wake up; the tocsin of reason sounds throughout the universe; recognize your rights. The powerful empire of nature is no longer surrounded by prejudice, fanaticism, superstition, and lies. The torch of truth has dispersed all the clouds of folly and usurpation. Enslaved man has multiplied his force and needs yours to break his chains. Having become free, he has become unjust toward his companion. Oh women! Women, when will you cease to be blind? What advantages have you gathered in the Revolution?
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> Olympe de Gouges, *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (September 1791)

Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond; or The Secret Witness* is perhaps the most self-consciously radical fiction written in the United States before *Moby-Dick* or the later phase of modernism. Brown's novel deserves this kind of reading not only because it affirms radical perspectives on women's lives and the revolutionary age, or because its interest in radical positioning extends to the level of literary form as it builds a repudiation of the period's novelistic strategies of conservative containment into its narrative frame. In addition to all of its remarkable thematic and formal features, *Ormond* deserves to be read in this manner because it also explores the active, dynamic constitution of radical thinking and society.

Most progressive Enlightenment-era fictions seek to illustrate a relatively static set of ethical positions or themes, in which the corruption and immorality of the old regime can be denounced, replaced, and, in a narrative sense, resolved. Brown's novel, by contrast, emphasizes the process through which individuals change and develop new forms of political and social consciousness. In *Ormond*, characters develop new ways of thinking and relating to the social order through an often-uneven assimilation of radical ideas, and through a series of realizations that help them resituate themselves within alternative networks. The novel's primarily female characters experience processes of self-transformation and incorporation within new social forms that occur in the crucible of ongoing history, as their efforts at self-education are shaped by and respond to the violently partisan and rapidly changing conditions during the 1790s.

All of Brown's novels employ formal and thematic complexity toward their artistic, intellectual, and wider political ends, but *Ormond* makes more demands on the reader in this respect than Brown's other fictions. From its earliest reception to the present, the novel has fascinated and puzzled readers who have responded on the one hand to its revolutionary thematics, and on the other to its insistently challenging

narrative form and theatricality, which even for readers familiar with Brown constitute one of the most intriguing aspects of the novel.

First published in January 1799, after being composed in about four to six week's time beginning in late November 1798,[1] *Ormond* tells the story of Constantia Dudley, from her family's catastrophic financial collapse in New York and subsequent suffering during the epic Philadelphia yellow fever epidemic of 1793, to her encounters with cosmopolitan revolutionaries who connect her with the currents of circum-Atlantic social and political upheaval in the 1790s. While the tale's surface action follows Constantia as she surmounts a series of crises and obstacles, its backstories, subplots, and narrative frame develop a sustained meditation on late-Enlightenment debates concerning political liberty, women's rights, conventions of sex and gender, and their relation to the reshaping of an Atlantic world in the throes of transformation.

This Introduction is intended to orient the reader to the world of *Ormond* by providing tools for understanding Brown and his novel. A sketch of Brown's life and the novel's late-1790s context, and a discussion of Brown's understanding of novels as instruments of political education, will provide general background. Information on central motifs and emphases—from theatrical masquerade and the 1793 yellow fever epidemic to contrasting models of womanhood, female transvestism in the revolutionary era, responses to the French émigré community in the period's U.S. urban culture, and the fate of radicalism in a time of reaction—will lead to a discussion of the ways that the novel develops its primary social, psychological, and political concerns.

Brown's Life and the Context of the 1790s

Brown was born into a Philadelphia Quaker merchant family on January 17, 1771. Philadelphia, the capital of the newly formed United States during the 1790s and then the largest, wealthiest, most culturally and politically diverse city in North America, was his home for most of his life. Beginning in the mid-1790s and particularly during the intense 1797–1800 period when he was writing his novels, however, Brown also lived in New York and moved in a cosmopolitan circle of young upper-class intellectuals who circulated and debated the latest medical-scientific, political, and cultural information, and produced writings on a wide variety of subjects.

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[1] There is little information in Brown's correspondence, the diaries of his friends, or other sources, concerning details of the novel's composition. Timing suggests that composition did not begin before late November and, in a letter to his brother James on December 20, 1798, Brown writes:

"What excuse to make for my long silence I know not, unless the simple truth be sufficient for the purpose. Some time since I bargained with the publisher of Wieland for a new performance, part of which only was written, and the publication commencing immediately, I was obliged to apply with the utmost diligence to the pen, in order to keep pace with the press. Absorbed in this employment, I was scarcely conscious of the lapse of time, and when the day's task was finished, felt myself thoroughly weary and unfit for a continuance of the same employment in any new shape.

I call my book Ormond, or the Secret Witness. I hope to finish the writing and the publication together before new-year's day, when I shall have a breathing spell."

Growing up a Philadelphia Quaker (members of The Religious Society of Friends are commonly known as "Quakers" or "Friends"), Brown was shaped by that community's history of dissenting relations to mainstream Protestant and Anglo-American culture, and by Philadelphia's importance as both a political center and a major port connected with Atlantic and global mercantile networks. Brown had a classical education at the elite Friend's Latin School in Philadelphia and seems to have taught briefly at the Friends Grammar School in the early 1790s, but did not, like male friends in his New York circle, attend a university, since many Quakers and other dissenters in the U.S. and England did not patronize the educational institutions that served dominant Protestant groups. Although Brown's adult years led him from his Philadelphia origins to the intellectual world of the radical Enlightenment, his Quaker background nonetheless marks his development in fundamental ways. Quaker traditions and doctrines concerning egalitarianism and equal authority for women in the Quaker community contributed to Brown's lifelong commitment to female education and equality.[2] Similarly, Quaker leadership in antislavery organization is part of the background for the implicit and explicit reflections on slavery and African American experience in *Ormond*, the novel *Arthur Mervyn*, and other writings. Interestingly, after having grown up as Quakers in the increasingly diversified Philadelphia of the late eighteenth century, Brown and all his siblings but one married non-Quakers (Brown's youngest brother, Elijah Jr., remained unmarried), an increasingly common trend for Quakers at this time. Consequently, Brown was formally dissociated from the Quaker meeting in Philadelphia when he married Elizabeth Linn, daughter of a Presbyterian minister, in 1804.

Growing up the fourth of five brothers and seven surviving siblings total in a merchant family,[3] Brown's life was shaped by the mercantile culture of Philadelphia during the revolutionary era. The merchant careers of Brown's father and four brothers made him intimately familiar with the circum-Atlantic import-export commerce that was the main business of Philadelphia's port.[4] Brown's father Elijah came to Philadelphia as a young man from Chester County, Pennsylvania, and had a checkered business career mainly as a conveyancer, a broker and manager for real estate, mortgage, and other transactions. In 1777–1778, during the American Revolution, he was arrested and interned in Virginia as one of a group of Quakers deemed "dangerous to the State" for refusing on religious grounds to sign oaths of allegiance. In 1784, he was humiliatingly imprisoned for debt. Through all this, the father struggled to

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[2] See Fleischmann, *A Right View of the Subject: Feminism in the Works of Charles Brockden Brown and John Neal*.

[3] Kafer, *Charles Brockden Brown's Revolution*, provides the numbers we use here, i.e. five brothers and two sisters who survived to adulthood, plus three siblings who died at birth or in early infancy (45, 210n36, 221n25).

[4] See the accounts of Brown family business interests in Warfel, *Charles Brockden Brown*, 16–18, 23, 204; Clark, *Charles Brockden Brown,* 108–9, 194–95; and Kafer, *Charles Brockden Brown's Revolution,* 26–37, 45–46, 162, 214n15. Brown's brothers Joseph and Elijah, Jr. voyaged throughout the Atlantic and Mediterranean worlds as merchant importers.

continue in business, partly sustained by the real-estate holdings and financial interests of Brown's maternal aunt, Elizabeth Armitt.

Although his family intended for him to become a lawyer, Brown abandoned his Philadelphia law apprenticeship in 1793, complaining that the language of law existed to deny rather than enact justice, and moved toward the circle of young, New York-based intellectuals who helped launch his literary career and, with Brown as one of their group, enacted progressive Enlightenment ideals of conversation, intellectual inquiry, and companionship.[5] The New York group included a number of young male professionals who called themselves The Friendly Club, along with female relatives and friends who were equally invested in progressive intellectual exchange and enlightened models for same-sex and other-sex companionship. This progressive model of companionship based on "reason and desire" expressed through a "republic of letters" is a crucial context for Brown's astonishing burst of novel writing between 1798 and 1801. The key figure in this group was Elihu Hubbard Smith (1771–1798), a Yale-educated physician and writer who met Brown in Philadelphia in 1790, and helped catalyze his literary ambitions. Aspects of Smith's life, from his abolitionism and Deism[6] to his efforts to treat yellow-fever victims and other progressive political and social positions, figure as models for characters and events in Brown's novels *Edgar Huntly* (1799) and *Arthur Mervyn* (1799–1800).[7]

As one of this circle, Brown developed his knowledge of like-minded British radical-democratic writers of the period—above all William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft (whose books were already in Brown's household as a youth, before he met Smith)—as well as medical and physiological knowledges drawn from the Scottish Enlightenment (notably Erasmus Darwin), the French Naturalists, and other streams of continental Enlightenment thought. The circle was committed to abolitionist activism and many of the male members of the group were officers in abolition societies and free schools for African Americans. The circle's interest in similar groups of progressive British thinkers was strong enough that they established contact through correspondence with scientist Erasmus Darwin (via Smith), novelist Thomas Holcroft, and Godwin himself (via Dunlap and Godwin's ward Thomas Cooper, an

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[5] For discussions of this circle, see Waterman, *Republic of Intellect* and Teute, "A 'Republic of Intellect'" and "The Loves of the Plants." The diaries of William Dunlap and Elihu Hubbard Smith provide detailed records of Brown's activities and relations within this circle.

[6] "Deism" is a progressive eighteenth-century response to Christianity. It affirms the existence of a "supreme being," but rejects revelation, supernatural doctrines, and any notion of divine intervention in human affairs. Reason and science, rather than scripture and dogma, are the basis for religious belief. Late-eighteenth-century writers often adopt a deistic stance as part of their general secular and rationalist critique of earlier institutions. Deism is associated with "natural religion" and the well-known metaphor of the deity as a "clock-maker" who creates the universe but makes no further intervention in it. Many leaders of the American revolutionary generation were Deists, notably Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. See Walters, *Rational Infidels: The American Deists.*

[7] For more on E. H. Smith, see the excerpts and discussion in Related Texts, and Waterman, *Republic of Intellect.*

actor who emigrated to the U.S. and moved in Brown's circles). Thus Brown's interest in European developments led him to participate in a network of like-minded endeavors, but his progressive, modernizing ideals meant that he felt little or no need to emulate Europe or the past as superior cultures.

If Brown's intellectual circle in New York constitutes one part of the context for his period of novel writing, the other crucial element in this context is the explosive political atmosphere of the revolutionary 1790s as it culminated in the reactionary backlash of 1797–1800. Throughout the decade, events and discussions in New York and Philadelphia were closely intertwined with the ongoing processes of the French Revolution (1789–1798), the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), and events leading to the Irish uprisings of 1796–1798. Refugees and participants from these revolutionary events filled the streets of 1790s Philadelphia and New York with émigrés of every stripe and color, from Royalist French aristocrats and planters from the Caribbean fleeing ongoing revolutions, to enslaved "French negroes" or "wild Irish" revolutionary activists and intellectuals.[8]

By the end of the decade a severe reaction against the period's progressive ideals spread through the Atlantic world and was especially powerful in England, Germany, and the recently formed United States. During the administration of the second U.S. President, John Adams (1796–1800), the ruling Federalist Party presided over a partisan and repressive response to real and imagined threats of revolutionary subversion and potential conflict with France.[9] Enacting the now-infamous Alien and Sedition Acts (1798), for example, Federalists made it illegal to criticize the Adams administration and legitimated the arrest and deportation of those deemed enemies of the state (i.e., primarily recent French and Irish émigrés). Paranoid countersubversive fantasies about conspiracies led by mysterious groups like the Illuminati (a secret society ostensibly plotting to overthrow church and state institutions), as well as panic by ruling elites about newly articulated ideals of universal democracy, including female equality and slave emancipation, contributed to this crisis. Traces of the Illuminati scare are evident in *Ormond,* as well as in *Wieland* and its "prequel" *Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist.*[10] Although these excesses led to the Federalist's defeat and the election of their Democratic-Republican opponent Jefferson in the 1800 election, this conservative convulsion nevertheless helped put an

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[8] For more on the period's émigré culture, see "Portrait of an Emigrant" and selections by Moreau de Saint-Méry, Watson, and C. F. Volney in Related Texts.

[9] In the political party terminology of the 1790s, Federalists are the more Anglophile, moneyed elite, and conservative party (the party of the Washington and Adams administrations), and Democratic-Republicans are the more socially and regionally heterogeneous Francophile party (which comes to power after 1800 in the Jefferson and Madison administrations). See the discussions of this backlash and its implications in Cotlar, "The Federalists' Transatlantic Cultural Offensive of 1798"; Elkins and McKitrick, *The Age of Federalism*; Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism*; Miller, *Crisis in Freedom: The Alien and Sedition Acts;* and Tise, *The American Counterrevolution.*

[10] For more on the scare and the period's counterrevolutionary activism, see "Illuminati Debates" in Related Texts.

end to the revolutionary era and laid the foundations for the more staid cultural order of the early nineteenth century.

Brown's efforts to establish himself as a professional writer in this period of action and reaction were impressive indeed. After several years of experimentation with poetry and literary narratives that remained unfinished, Brown's novelistic phase began with the 1798 feminist dialogue *Alcuin; A Dialogue* (included in Related Texts here), a text that is closely related to *Ormond*'s focus on women's lives and ideologies of sex and gender, and continued unabated through the composition of eight novels by late 1801. Throughout this period, in addition to work on his novels, Brown was editing the New York *Monthly Magazine* (April 1799–December 1800) and publishing numerous essays, tales, and reviews. As noted earlier, the four "gothic" novels for which Brown is best known—*Wieland, Ormond*, *Arthur Mervyn*, and *Edgar Huntly*—were all published between September 1798 and September 1799 (*Mervyn, Second Part* appeared in September, 1800), and there was a period in 1798 when all four were under way at once.

Although Cold-War-era commentators often presented Brown as a writer who renounces his literary and progressive political ideals when he stops publishing novels in 1801, a more plausible explanation for Brown's subsequent shift toward other forms of writing is that his novels did not make money, the particular conditions that fueled the intense novelistic burst from 1798 to 1801 changed (who could sustain such a rhythm of production?), and he became interested in new literary outlets. Like his older counterpart Godwin in England, Brown moves away from the novel because he feels it no longer offers an effective mode of argumentation in the increasingly conservative cultural and political environment that emerges after 1800. Had Brown lived longer, he may conceivably have returned to novel writing, as Godwin did in the later 1810s.

Brown's later literary career builds continuously on the novels and earlier writings. Between 1801 and his death from tuberculosis in 1810, Brown edited two important periodicals: *The Literary Magazine* (1803–1807), a literary and cultural miscellany that renewed his experience with the earlier *Monthly Magazine* and which he filled with his own essays and fiction; and *The American Register* (1807–1809), a historical and political periodical that featured Brown's "Annals of Europe and America," a comprehensive narrative of Napoleonic-era geopolitics. In addition, he undertook a novel-length historical fiction known as the *Historical Sketches* (1803–1806) that was published only posthumously; a now-lost play; and several lengthy, quasi-novelistic pamphlets on expansion into the Louisiana territory and Jefferson's embargo policies (1803, 1809).

These writings continue Brown's career-long concern with the link between historical and fictional ("romance") writing, and extend the earlier program of "reason and desire" that makes writing an instrument of progressive, educational principles in the public sphere. Rather than dramatizing the ways individuals are shaped by social pressures and crisis contexts, as he did in his novels, the later Brown explores forms of historical narrative and the larger historical world that made up the allusive backdrop of the earlier fiction. The critical perspective on global webs of imperial warfare,

colonialism, and revolutionary change that figures in *Ormond*'s backstories, for example, becomes explicit and is explored in detail in the later historical writings and essays.

The Woldwinite Writers and Brown's Novelistic Method

The world of *Ormond* and Brown's other novels, with their gothic emotional intensities, disorienting psychological and social violence, and embedded backstories and subplots, may be difficult to sort out on first encounter. Understanding some basics about Brown's primary intellectual and political sources, and his well-defined novelistic method, however, can help the reader understand features of his novels that might otherwise seem difficult to grasp.

Unlike many authors of eighteenth-century fiction, Brown had a well-developed methodology and set of themes for writing novels. His method draws on and further develops the ideas of the British radical-democratic writers of the period. Brown's enthusiastic reception of these Woldwinite[11] ("Anglo-Jacobin") writers—above all Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft, Robert Bage, and Thomas Paine—undergirds his entire literary project after the mid-1790s. The British "Dissenter" culture of highly educated middle-class professionals and the clubs and academies from which these writers emerge is the wider context of Brown's own Philadelphia Quaker community. Brown was exposed to the Woldwinite writers through his father's copies of their works even before he moved into the New York circle and explored their writings in greater detail.[12]

The Woldwinite agenda rests on three basic arguments that draw together the main strands of knowledge and critique in the late, radical Enlightenment. Drawing on well-established eighteenth-century arguments and themes such as associative sentiment (the idea that emotions are communicated from one individual to another and may be used to encourage constructive, progressive behavior), these arguments sum up this group's rejection of the pre-revolutionary order and their conviction that social progress may be achieved by altering dominant ways of thinking through peaceful

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[11] We use the term Woldwinite to highlight, through an abbreviation of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, this group's special place among the British radical democrats of the 1790s. The term "Godwinians" erases the crucial role of Wollstonecraft and other women in this group, a role that was particularly important for Brown and many other writers. Similarly, these British writers are also discussed as "Jacobins" or "Anglo-Jacobins," a name used by opponents to demonize them by association with the Jacobin faction in the French revolution, but the group explicitly rejected the "Jacobin" position in favor of its own distinct set of cultural-political positions. For the distinction of "Jacobin" and "Girondin" in the culture wars of the period, see "Narratives of French Girondin Heroism" in Related Texts. For studies of literary Woldwinism, see: Pamela Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel*; Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780–1805* and *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789–1830*; Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*; and J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England, 1770–1800*.

[12] For the Woldwinite writings in Brown's household, see Warfel, 17–18, 27; Clark, 16; Kafer, 46, 66–72.

cultural means such as literature. First, the social order of the old regime (monarchy and feudalism) is to be rejected because it is artificial and illegitimate, violating the natural equality of humanity by imposing coercive hierarchies of caste and faith. Second, given that the old regime maintained its domination through an obscurantist mythology of territorialized race, priestly tricks, and a politics of secret plots, conspiracies, and lies, a new social order will require the development of more rational, constructive, and transparent institutions and practices. Third, the illustration of progressive behavior, in print and other media, will multiply to generate larger social transformation because society works through chains of associative sentiment and emulation. These cultural relays generate progressive change as the illustration of virtuous behaviors and results spreads through imitation, with each individual learning and transmitting new and improved ways of acting by observing others. Proceeding from these assumptions, the Woldwinites' critique leads to their antistatism, their distrust of institutions, and their use of cultural forms such as literature to advance their program. Because they believe in the natural propulsion of cooperative behavior and the guidance of critical reason, these writers see social change as resulting from the amplification of transformed local, interpersonal, or intersubjective relations.[13] Thus, as we say today, the personal is political.

In their assumption that global historical change begins from the bottom up with the premeditated transformation of relations among a small circle, the Woldwinites are an early instance of the belief in a cultural avant-garde that aims to develop means of worldly social revolution through arts and manners rather than political parties or state institutions. In contemporary terms, the Woldwinites introduce a relatively straightforward, albeit limited idea of environmental or social construction, the notion that individuals are shaped or conditioned by their social environments and circumstances. Their ideas about social construction are limited in that they position themselves as innocent participants and do not always recognize the dilemmas implicit in their own social program (particularly its assumptions about sentiment, benevolence, and associative imitation, for example), and insofar as they direct their critique mainly at the hierarchical inequalities of the old regime while neglecting new modes of inequality that are part of the emergent structures of liberal capitalism. Brown adopts their environmentalist argument but also, as a second-wave Woldwinite, recognizes that these ideas about social construction and action are incomplete. His fiction attempts to think through their limitations and implications in ways that we will explore in greater detail when we turn to the plot of *Ormond* in what follows.

Building on these basic Woldwinite ideas, Brown's fictional method is articulated in several key essays on narrative technique and the social role of the novel that appear at the height of his novelistic phase, notably "Walstein's School of History" (August–September, 1799) and "The Difference between History and Romance" (April, 1800).[14] To summarize this method, we can say that Brown's novels combine

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[13] For more on Wollstonecraft and Godwin, see the discussions and selections in Related Texts.

[14] These essays are included in Related Texts.

elements of history and fiction, placing his characters in situations of social and historical distress as a means of engaging a wider audience into considerations of progressive behavior. His novels explore how contemporary subjects—whether relatively elite actors such as *Ormond*'s narrator Sophia Courtland or relatively lower status or disempowered individuals like protagonist Constantia Dudley—respond to damaging social conditions caused by defects in dominant ideas and practices. Through their interconnected patterns of socially conditioned behavior, dramatic suspense, and gothic intensities, Brown's fictions urge readers to reflect on how to overcome corruption in order to construct a more "virtuous," more equal and fulfilling society.

This approach begins with Brown's understanding of the relation between historical and fictional ("romance") writing. History and fiction, he argues, are not different because one deals with factual and the other with fictional materials. Rather, they are intrinsically connected as two sides of one coin: history describes and documents the results of actions, while fiction investigates the relations between actions, speculating on the possible motives and circumstances that cause and explain them. Fictions are thus narrative experiments that tease out possible preconditions and consequences of historical events or behaviors, and that reason through social problems presented as hypothetical situations; they are a form of conjectural or counterfactual history. Whereas history describes events, romance analyzes and projects the probable causes, conditions, and preconditions of events.

The "Walstein" essay builds on this distinction and develops a three-fold plan for novel writing, providing a fuller account of the rationale and essential themes that inform Brown's fiction. In the essay, the historian Walstein combines history and romance in such as way as to promote "moral and political" engagement while rejecting universal truths, stressing the situatedness of engaged political response in noble and classical figures such as the Roman statesman Cicero. Walstein's pupil Engel then modernizes and develops the theory by adding that a romance, to be effective in today's world, must be addressed to a wide popular audience and draw its characters not from the elite, but from the same middling and lower status groups that will read and be moved by the work. History and romance alike must address issues and situations familiar to their modern audience, notably the common inequalities arising from relations of sex and property.

Thus, a modern literature will insert ordinary individuals such as Constantia Dudley, rather than elite actors like Cicero, into crisis situations in which they must negotiate contemporary conflicts involving social status and property, and erotic desire or gender relations. Finally, Brown's essay emphasizes that a thrilling style and form are crucial, since a romance capable of moving its audience to considerations of progressive action must "be so arranged as to inspire, at once, curiosity and belief, to fasten the attention, and thrill the heart." In this manner, Brown's method uses the twists and turns of his intentionally challenging plots, as well as dramatic crisis conditions including endemic prejudice, rape, catastrophic bankruptcy, and yellow fever epidemics, as ways to illustrate and think through interrelated social problems and encourage an engaged response to them.

Secret Witnessing and Transnational Forms

In *Ormond*, Brown explores questions that arise when we consider the transformation of identity less as a punctual event stemming from a single crisis or epiphany, than as a continual, multistaged process, a cascading wave that combines the consequences of multiple effects. We might say that Brown's novel, as it draws on and extends its Woldwinite models, provides an early illustration of the belief that a cultural revolution of the mind must precede a political one of society. Brown's tale of radical insight includes more elements than this innovation alone, however. Unlike some of the period's more insistent commentators, this novel does not call for an automatic rejection of the past. Throughout *Ormond*, younger female characters repeatedly gain empowering educations in spite of hostile environments and the action of psychologically damaged and damaging parental figures. Read allegorically, these examples of educational experiences that overcome dysfunctional relationships with elders seem to convey Brown's dual understanding about the conditions for growing radicalism. On the one hand, an emerging push for human liberty, conventionally depicted in the figure of an imperiled young woman, cannot simply emerge from nothing, like a modern Venus from the half shell or the fully empowered Athena from the brow of Zeus. Any spontaneous, unplanned attempt at a thoroughly new-made society will rest on a precarious, fragile foundation. In this light, progressives must learn to select judiciously from the past and endure its unpalatable aspects in order to forge intellectual instruments that may be put to good use even if the context from which they emerged must be rejected or surpassed.

  On the other hand, Brown suggests, the clothing of the past may also serve as protective cover if innovative energies are in danger of becoming overshadowed by counterrevolutionary forces, by a more powerful resurgence of dominant interests threatened by change. *Ormond,* therefore, goes beyond the affirmation of radical principles to narrate the need for tactical sophistication in response to a relatively inhospitable social ecology. In other words, it dramatizes the need for discovering a mode of operation that can allow radical spirit the time it needs to nourish itself and survive political currents such as the reactionary wave that swept over Brown and his generation in the late 1790s, when the progressive ferment of the decade's early years was pushed backward by the renewed violence of dominant monarchical and imperial-commercial interests throughout the Atlantic world.

  From *Ormond*'s first pages and opening references to Stephen Dudley's artistic education, one of the ways that Brown articulates his position on radical tactics is to emphasize the contrast between two different politicized aesthetic modes or styles, often positioning the novel's characters in terms of affinities for one or the other. Classicism, often referred to as Augustan style, emphasizes order and regularity by governing expression with formal "laws" that emphasize balance, harmony, geometrical regularity, and veneration for precedents and preexisting order. Classicism's "other" goes by many names, including romantic or gothic in this era, and prioritizes expression over its regulation, emphasizing irregularity, sensuality tied to bodily and emotional intensities, and forms that are new, surprising, or unprecedented, as op-

posed to conventional and well-established.[15] Contrasts between idealized form and materialized feeling recur frequently throughout the novel, presented as combinations of aesthetic predispositions with social and political outlooks. While relatively static neoclassical ideals are marshaled in support of existing order, forces of dynamic expression look to utopian reformulations. At several points in *Ormond* Brown alludes to the Roman poet Ovid's well-known tales of mythological transformation, the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid's poem establishes a narrative template for signaling the difference between outward, bodily form and the inward rush of desire and new identity. This divorce of form and content can be taken as an underlying theme that Brown wants his readers to "secretly" witness through the novel's frame narrative as it is presented by the character Sophia Courtland.

An awareness of *Ormond*'s formal complexity, its ruse of meaning actively constructed against, through, or in spite of formal appearances, helps explain why the novel has received the least and most contradictory commentary of Brown's quartet of best known and almost simultaneously published novels. For most of the twentieth century, scholars looked to Brown as the "founder" or "father," albeit a frustratingly unconventional one, of a uniquely American literary tradition. As long as nationalist exceptionalism and normative aesthetics were the grids through which the novel was to be evaluated, then *Ormond* surely appeared as an incomprehensibly misguided experiment or outright failure.[16] At least two basic types of information are necessary to overcome the limitations of this approach.

First, *Ormond* is the product of a tremendously cosmopolitan horizon. It draws on the progressive English political theory of the Woldwinites (itself often delivered in novelistic garb); combines its political reflections with features adapted from popular gothic and sensational novels from Germany (the *Schauerroman* or "shudder" novel); and refers additionally, specifically, and in detail, to French utopian, libertine, and pornographic fictions, as well as particular Italianate traditions in music and the visual arts. Because Brown is so thoroughly embedded in international or transnational networks, his readers are best served by coming to his texts with a working sense of his rich influences and context, which this edition attempts to convey with this Introduction and a selection of Related Texts.

Second, as a writer who can be challenging on several levels, Brown intentionally introduces additional complications in the case of *Ormond*. Even readers familiar with Brown's core beliefs and general literary techniques soon discover that these

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[15] For the dynamic historical distinction between Classicism and its others, and its relation to discussions of form and genre in wider intellectual history, see the seminal essay by E. H. Gombrich, "Norm and Form: The Stylistic Categories of Art History and their Origins in Renaissance Ideals"; Lukács, "Schiller's Theory of Modern Literature"; Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*; and Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute.*

[16] For earlier commentary concerning the novel's disjunctions and paradoxes, and readings that often attribute them to haste or other defects in composition, see for example Krause, "*Ormond*: How Rapidly and How Well 'Composed, Arranged, and Delivered'"; Nye, "Historical Essay"; Rodgers, "Brown's *Ormond*: The Fruits of Improvisation"; and Watts, *The Romance of Real Life*.

guidelines are not always sufficient to unravel this novel's maze of backstories and false identities, or to resolve the questions posed by its remarkable manipulations of narrative perspective. Hence it becomes necessary to explore Brown's strategies in narrative and argumentation, and to ask how these are related to the novel's insistent narrative frame. Partly due to his own upbringing within the Quaker (Society of Friends) community, Brown habitually abjures a belligerent rhetorical style. When he wants to indicate disagreement with other authors or critics, he often does so by formulating gentle or discrete asides that suggest that there are other ways of considering the question, or by presenting alternatives through double negatives and other rhetorical turns, including Latinate word choice and sentence construction, that detach disagreement from emotional intensity. Indeed, in keeping with this discursive pacifism, Brown's writings likewise embrace a thematic pacifism by consistently criticizing militarism and deflating the prestige traditionally connected with male rituals of "honor" in warfare and violence.

  Considered against this background, with an awareness of Brown's career-long aversion to direct political and discursive antagonism, how is the reader to approach the novel's many—and manifest—paradoxes? How is it, for example, that *Ormond*'s characters enthusiastically endorse and enact revolutionary violence, deliver intemperate reactionary denunciations at odds with the novel's underlying radicalism, and enact nonnormative pairings, all without having their ideas or actions negated by any of the period's conventional fictional techniques for signaling and containing "dangerous" or undesirable positions? Most novels condemn or punish undesirable characters and the positions they represent with a variety of conventional gestures, from symbolic expulsion in death to explicit negation by narrators or other characters.

  Similarly, how is it that *Ormond* seems to violate or obfuscate certain principles and conventions that figure as reliable signposts in Brown's other fictions? Given that Brown repeatedly takes up the programmatic Woldwinite slogan of sincerity in other fictions, and personally emphasized the need for such truth-telling even when it led to discomfort among friends, it is striking that *Ormond* presents a world in which virtually no one is sincere. Regardless of gender, social status, or political outlook, all of the novel's significant characters engage in various types and degrees of imposture. They indulge in assumed identities; the distribution of gossip, rumor, and hearsay; acts of secret surveillance bordering on and including voyeurism; the manipulation of knowledge and withholding of information; bodily masquerade; and the circulation of forged or counterfeit documents and currency. In the world of *Ormond*, a character's insistence on her or his honesty and interpersonal transparency usually signals the very opposite. Yet rather than simply condemning, satirizing, moralizing on, or raging against the universality of hypocrisy and deceit in a hopelessly fallen world, Brown's novel seems to encourage the reader to accept this dynamic, and possibly to learn to negotiate its pitfalls, or realize its hidden promise. Brown's carefully formulated position is neither moralizing negation nor cynical acceptance, but, perhaps, a reflection on the conditions of disabused action in a world where progress requires strategy and forethought, and in which new energies meet with tremendous and at times overwhelming resistance.

The development of the novel's initially disorienting complexities suggests a concerted pattern at the heart of Brown's purpose and, understood in its literary and historical context, implies that Brown imagines his readership to be a bifurcated one. He assumes, that is, that his desired, ideal audience will perceive and respond to some aspects of the novel more attentively than other, more casual readers. Using *Ormond*'s own language, we can say that Brown's manner of writing in this novel seems to seek an audience of secret witnesses. Because of the unconventional narrative strategies and twists that Brown uses to inscribe implicit meaning in a space between the novel's surface plot and an encoded or half-hidden one, however, it is difficult to discuss the novel in detail without having a full awareness of its events and structure. For readers who prefer not to know what happens before they have experienced the text for themselves, we therefore recommend that you finish reading the entire novel before continuing with this Introduction.

The Theater and its Double

One indication of Brown's double-tongued approach comes early on, as the novel's first pages introduce us to Stephen Dudley, father of the novel's protagonist Constantia. Dudley is the son of a New York merchant who has studied painting in Italy and England. When his own father dies, Dudley puts aside artistic ambition and turns his mind to commerce, even as he pines for an eventual return to his earlier interests. His hard-won fortune, however, is entirely lost, embezzled by a young con artist who fabricates an English identity and wins Dudley's trust. Dudley goes on to suffer blindness in the miserable aftermath of this financial collapse, but his sight and former mansion in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, are both later returned to him.

For Brown's expected readers, the middle-class men and women of Philadelphia and New York, this description evoked the biography of one of Brown's closest associates, William Dunlap. Dunlap was the son of a New Jersey merchant who moved to New York during the War for Independence. Blind in one eye due to a childhood accident, Dunlap went on to study painting in London under Benjamin West. Returning to the United States, Dunlap was unsuccessful as a painter and joined his father's business. On the father's death, Dunlap inherited a Perth Amboy home and invested his inheritance in a quarter-share of the new Park Theater in New York, where he worked as manager, directed plays, and endured the slings and arrows of English actors.[17]

Yet despite the similarity of their names and certain biographical details, it is certain that Dunlap was never an abusive alcoholic or victim of massive embezzlement, like Dudley at his lowest point; Dunlap would not declare bankruptcy until 1805, six years after *Ormond*'s publication. It might be expected that adding such traits to a character modeled on Dunlap and publishing them in a widely circulated novel

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[17] On Dunlap, see Coad, *William Dunlap.*

would cause some degree of scandal for Dunlap or possibly a rift with Brown. Yet Dunlap remained one of Brown's closest friends and advocates throughout his life.[18] In literature, a novel in which real people are presented as characters with fictionalized names is called a *roman à clef,* literally a novel with a key: if readers know the characters' real names, they possess the interpretive "key" to the novel's hidden meaning. Given Brown's ready use of a character that combines recognizable biographical information with extravagantly negative fictional details—details that were obviously perceived as untrue by anyone familiar with the real person—we might by analogy call *Ormond* a novel of play or *roman de jeu*, a novel in which outlandish characterizations of associates are not only unobjectionable, but even enjoyable because they are taken not literally but as a surface to be "read through," a bit like elaborate insults at a contemporary "roast" event.

In such a situation, the audience takes pleasure in their ability to recognize and focus on the difference between surface and depth, the gap between offensive characterizations and an obscured signature whose intention and effect is quite different. Considered as a formal innovation of sorts, this mechanism of openhanded forgery may be one of Brown's particular contributions to literary technique, especially as he deploys it in *Ormond,* where it signals an extended critique of the power relations hidden within an aesthetic of sentimentality, or the notion that a person or social situation can be seen and understood instantaneously and intuitively, without consideration or questioning of the context or originating structural conditions of social inequality that led to the scene or the individual's present state.

Ekphrasis is the technical, rhetorical name for using one medium of art to describe the effects of another, for example the use of a painting to represent a scene from a play, or the use of a poem to represent a painting. To an exceptional degree, *Ormond* invites its readers to imagine and experience the dynamic reception of other artistic media. The effects of painting, music, and song are repeatedly invoked and enacted in its pages. But the medium to which Brown refers most centrally in *Ormond* is drama.[19] "Theatre" is a key word repeatedly invoked by the novel's characters to

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[18] See Kafer's remarks on the allusions to Dunlap and other aspects of *Ormond* that would be legible to Brown's close circle, in *Charles Brockden Brown's Revolution*, 156–65.

[19] As a close associate of Dunlap and others, Brown was keenly aware of and engaged in theater. Dunlap was an active translator of German drama for his own productions, and Brown's close friend Smith also tried his hand, without great success, at staging an opera. Although he never brought a drama of his own to the stage, Brown tried his hand at play writing at least twice. In 1797, with Dunlap and Smith, he planned to collaborate on a never-completed adaptation of Woldwinite writer Robert Bage's novel *Hermsprong* (1796). Some years later, as we know from the account given by British actor John Bernard, Brown wrote and then burnt the manuscript of a play apparently concerning an Egyptian magician, his Persian apprentice, and a "Greek girl, who attempted to combat the magician's influence." See Bernard, *Retrospections of America, 1797–1811*, 250–55.

Brown seems to have reviewed only one staged play, his future brother-in-law John Blair Linn's now-lost *Bourville Castle; or, the Gallic Orphan* (*New York Minerva*, Jan. 18, 1797). But he developed critical and theoretical reflections on drama in numerous articles that considered the relative efficacy of different translations and both the negative and positive effects of theater (according to

describe the impact of contemporary events swirling around them, for example when Constantia arrives at her friend Sarah's home during the yellow fever epidemic in Chapter 6 and discovers a "theatre of suffering"; or when "the progress of action and opinion" are described in Chapter 19 in the "theatre of France and Poland." Beyond simply invoking a concept, however, the novel adapts the logic and machinery of theater, emphasizing its antisentimental split between actors' personalities and the characters they embody; its visual separation of space between the stage and the still visible offstage margins; the distinction between stage and audience; and different possible perspectives on the action from widely separated orchestra or balcony seats, divisions that the audience may simultaneously ignore and observe.[20]

Drama is the preeminent model for *Ormond*'s novelistic theatrics because, by overlapping different scenes onto a single space (the stage), it allows the cumulative registration of social exchanges developing through time. While it might be said that picaresque novels, with their tireless succession of scenes and episodes, achieve aspects of this effect, the medium of theater possesses an arguably unique ability to exploit artifice while simultaneously highlighting the illusory effects of this artifice, bringing out the play within the play. It is this theatrical potential that seems to become an attractive model for Brown as he organizes his novel. The witnessed masquerade stands as an early instance of what Bertolt Brecht, in the early twentieth century, described as the prerequisite for the modern theater, its ability to create an "alienation effect" for the viewer who is encouraged to both recognize the theatrical apparatus, its generated artifice, and to use this recognition as a cognitive space, a new cultural opportunity and encouragement, for critical reflection on a social conflict.[21]

Brown looks to theater not simply because it is well suited for emphasizing the difference between depiction and facticity, form and insight, or representation and reality, but because it suits his purpose in presenting specific political questions. That is, Brown may literally and rightly regard politics in the 1790s as histrionic and dependent on techniques of illusion in propaganda and the struggle over interpretations. But in a more incisive sense, he seems to adopt a theatrical model for political inquiry in this novel because sensational drama may provide a mechanism for exploring an experience and phenomenon for which analytical concepts or terminology had not yet been devised: the condition of progressive thought in retreat after an initial period of success.

Enlightenment-era political theory had well-developed ideas concerning the primary forces that retarded political progress—the heavy hand of the aristocratic, undemocratized State and the mystifying authority of institutionalized religion—but

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its content and purpose) on middle-class audiences. See, for example, "On the Effects of Theatric Exhibitions," in the Philadelphia *Weekly Magazine* 1.12 (April 21, 1798), 357–60; and "On the Flavian Ampitheatre at Rome," in the *Literary Magazine* 3.18 (March 1805), 167–69, which relates the architectural structure of a spectacular space to its social effects.

[20] For a related argument concerning the novel's theatricality, see Richards, "Tales of the Philadelphia Theatre: *Ormond*, National Performance, and Supranational Identity."

[21] For alienation effect, see the essays in Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic.*

far fewer means for thinking through the lived experience of progressives in the early 1790s whose aspirations were turned back by the renewed bourgeois conservatism that emerged and became a major cultural force after 1797. Additionally, and crucially, most of the period's progressives had no theoretical language or analysis for explaining the rise of a form of middle-class reaction against the energies they themselves unleashed in the act of overthrowing the old social order. Certainly, one of *Ormond*'s principle themes is the exploration of the cultural codes of this reaction, particularly of ostensibly power-free sentiment, that an increasingly dominant middle class would use to retard the force of social change and widening human emancipation.

It is vastly oversimplifying matters to say that the novel in Brown's hands is simply the continuation or articulation of a set of progressive ideals initially put forward by Anglo-European thinkers. Rather, *Ormond*, perhaps even more acutely than Brown's other fictions, attempts to put these ideals under stress in order to see how well they can survive the period's newly emerging hostility to Enlightenment ideals by nonaristocratic or Church officials, and hostile or antagonistic conditions, and to imagine how they might be transmitted in an increasingly inhospitable environment. *Ormond* is less a didactic novel than a tutelary or educational one, in that it highlights literary techniques that analyze and enact the ways in which radical perspectives can be circulated throughout certain parts of society and transmitted across generations in the face of resurgent conservatism.

The Middle Class in Crisis

After the opening of the novel's frame by narrator Sophia Courtland, the story she tells about her friend Constantia Dudley begins with a conventional plot line immediately recognizable to the period's readers. A businessman's reliance on sentimental appearances, his trust in an associate based on honest looks and reputation, is catastrophically misplaced. The comfortable security of mercantile routine is consequently undermined by deceit and the victim's safety net consists in the insulation provided by the private resources of the family (as opposed to the public negotiation of law), in this case a dutiful and extraordinarily resourceful daughter. Thus Stephen Dudley goes bankrupt after he trusts and relies on his apprentice Thomas Craig, and the series of events set in motion by this crisis brings the novel's protagonist Constantia to the fore. But even in the novel's presentation of this initial collapse stemming from Craig's duplicity, masquerade, and forgeries, it seems to depart significantly from predictable genre conventions in order to develop a counterexplanation of the mercantile family's crisis.

It soon becomes evident that Dudley's sudden downfall is a consequence of much more than gullibility and misplaced trust. On a literal reading, it follows from Craig's dishonesty and additionally from Dudley's more subtle inclination to resort to strategies of masquerade and secret surveillance himself, instead of confronting Craig with straightforward questions. Thus a conventional didactic lesson might be the

importance of sincerity, an implication that the crisis could have been averted had Dudley himself refused to engage in duplicity. But this reading silences the force of class antagonisms, especially the resentment of a man born into the laboring class against the assumed privilege of the mercantile elite's comfort, seen in Dudley's openly declared "prejudice" against labor. Brown, does not, however, allow the libertine Craig to declare his hostility overtly, perhaps because he perceives the risks of open complaints against the social group from which his own readers are drawn. Instead, he broaches the theme obliquely in two ways: first by arranging for the Dudleys themselves to experience the heartless distrust to which those with Craig's class origins are subjected, and, second, by staging a refusal to uphold the behavioral codes and social arrangements that the middle class uses to distinguish and protect itself.

After Constantia and her father are thrown from their previously unexamined professional-class levels of comfort and privilege, they experience a brutal and brutalizing world that mixes them with heartless landlords, impoverished laborers, other low-prestige status groups, continual exposure to the degrading force of prejudice, and close brushes with death. The family falls into abject poverty and indigence despite the presence of wealthy former business associates nearby, and Constantia and her father are forced to pawn their last remaining comforts simply to survive the winter cold. The Dudleys must struggle to gain a modicum of security because, seen as poor, they are assumed to be disreputable and untrustworthy. While the social death that the Dudleys experience might initially be felt as a consequence of Stephen Dudley's own prideful shame, the onset of the yellow fever epidemic reveals that his "theatre of suffering" is more determined by class and ethno-racial conflict than by natural disaster, especially as the damage strikes unequally throughout American society.

The fever scenes in *Ormond*'s Chapters 3–7 are not as elaborately developed as the better known ones in *Arthur Mervyn* (published two or three months after *Ormond* in April or May, 1799). But in both cases this dramatic setting juxtaposes the biological corruption of the fever with the rampant commercial and social-economic corruption of a society that makes it easy for the wealthy to escape the fever in summer homes outside the urban center (like the landlord M'Crea in Chapter 8), but that abandons the poor to either little more than the modest support that they can offer one other or, conversely, a survival of the fittest as class and status gradations emerge even amongst themselves.[22]

Late-summer yellow fever epidemics were a periodic feature of life in North American cities at this time, and the 1793 Philadelphia episode fictionalized here became the best known and most frequently evoked of any in American accounts. This was

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[22] For the relation between fever and market crisis in Brown and his context, see Anthony, "Banking on Emotion: Financial Panic and the Logic of Male Submission in the Jacksonian Gothic"; Christophersen, *The Apparition in the Glass: Charles Brockden Brown's American Gothic*; Ellis, "Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond*, Property Exchange, and the Literary Marketplace in the Early American Republic"; Gould, "Race, Commerce, and the Literature of Yellow Fever in Early National Philadelphia"; Ditz, "Shipwrecked; or, Masculinity Imperiled: Mercantile Representations of Failure and Gendered Self in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia."

partly because of its sheer magnitude and devastation (about 5,000 died and 17,000 fled a city whose population was roughly 55,000) but also, just as importantly, because it became a flash point for struggles concerning race, class, and immigration. Because the disease's etiology and transmission by mosquitoes was not yet understood, for example, many debates racialized the fever, supposing that its nature and virulence varied according to race and that Africans were less susceptible than Europeans. A variant xenophobic fantasy speculated that the French might be less susceptible than Anglos or other Protestant Europeans, and that international commerce with the French Caribbean was responsible for the fever's arrival.[23]

All of these attitudes and debates are dramatized in *Ormond*. The city's free blacks were on the front lines of emergency care, often used as nurses and undertakers on the mistaken assumption that they were immune to contagion. Shortly after the epidemic ended, these black Philadelphians faced ungrateful accusations that they used their positions to steal from stricken whites or extort money for their services. Brown implicitly counters these racially motivated claims in Chapter 5 by highlighting Constantia's interaction with an African woodcarter who is a reliable and entirely trustworthy partner in coping with the death of Constantia's friend Mary Whiston.[24]

Similar prejudices emerge in Chapter 7, in which the old soldier Baxter secretly witnesses a midnight burial in the garden of a neighboring house. Baxter is an elderly, impoverished ex-soldier (retired after service in British imperial wars) who has taken work as a night watchman and guard to survive the financial downturn and layoffs that occur as the fever depopulates the city. As he gazes through keyholes, windows, and over fences in order to spy on a mysterious female struggling to bury an older male, his train of thought is structured by a variety of irrational dislikes. He is "deeply and rancourously prejudiced" against the French (he has even adopted the xenophobic idea that they are immune to yellow fever) and it is this casual Francophobia that makes him disinclined to help his neighbor ("a frog-eating Frenchman") despite evident suffering and need. Although Baxter's ignorance and prejudice initially seem quite distinct from the thinking of the middle-class characters who animate the later chapters, his embodiment of social and ideological fault lines, as well

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[23] Statistics concerning the 1793 epidemic vary significantly in different sources; we use numbers from Estes and Smith, *A Melancholy Scene of Devastation: The Public Response to the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic.* For general accounts of the epidemic, see Powell, *Bring Out Your Dead: The Great Plague of Yellow Fever in Philadelphia in 1793*; and the Web-based resources in Arnebeck, *Destroying Angel: Benjamin Rush, Yellow Fever and the Birth of Modern Medicine* (http://www.geocities.com/bobarnebeck/fever1793.html). For historical discussions of the fever's social and political implications, see the essays in Estes and Smith, *A Melancholy Scene of Devastation*; Kornfield, "Crisis in the Capital: The Cultural Significance of Philadelphia's Great Yellow Fever Epidemic"; and Taylor, *"We Live in the Midst of Death": Yellow Fever, Moral Economy, and Public Health in Philadelphia, 1793–1805.*

[24] For more on the ways that the fever affected the city's free black community and generated debates about the social inclusion of Africans in U.S. civil society, see Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory*; and Estes and Smith, *A Melancholy Scene of Devastation*.

as his example of prejudicial interpreting, will be repeated in ever more significant forms by wealthier and more established characters. The perceived pattern thus indicates a dominant reality of conflict that is obscured by a public rhetoric of sympathetic care. Brown, however, mainly investigates this split indirectly by teasing out the pressures embedded within the middle class's own preferred narrative mode of fiction at that time, a sentimental tale of a young woman in distress.

Constantia and Generic Models of Womanhood

Although Stephen Dudley introduces the problem of the bourgeoisie or commercial middle class in crisis, it falls to his daughter, the conventional focus of sentimental fiction, to bear the burden of reconstructing their lost status as he retreats into self-protective isolation. During the family's experience of laboring class misery, Constantia's role, as her name suggests, is to be constant, faithful, and dutiful. Even in the absence of paternal authority and credibility, it is Constantia who must labor to restore the knowability and reliability of social and commercial value on which bourgeois society rests, by adhering to the traditional role of women as objects of exchange trafficked between men. As Brown and the Woldwinites argue, this is the traditional function of marriage, and this is what makes marriage effectively a form of genteel slavery for women.[25]

  As a commodity for male desire, Constantia and implicitly all women are constantly on display and available for male observation. To use this novel's keywords, they are constantly being witnessed or observed in a quasitheatrical manner. In this optics and the economic relations it literalizes, women are judged mainly for their erotic and status appeal to men and the perceived value of their sexual sympathy is monetarized like other commodities. At its extreme, this principle corresponds to Constantia's disgust at being assumed to be a prostitute or a target for rape when she circulates in the public arena of the city's streets, but it also governs relatively "civil" exchanges such as the courtship of Scottish merchant Balfour (Chapter 9), the banter between Craig and Ormond about Constantia that facilitates Craig's handling of Ormond's money (Chapter 11), and the behavior of male servants and the otherwise virtuous Magistrate Melbourne, who observes Constantia in ways that hint that he is taking stock of her sexual availability (Chapters 10–11). Women, in this world, are available for visual inspection and an unwelcome, penetrating intrusion into their

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[25] For commentary on the novel's feminism and exploration of the conditions of women's lives, see Fleischmann, "Charles Brockden Brown: Feminism in Fiction"; Hinds, *Private Property: Charles Brockden Brown's Gendered Economics of Virtue*; Krause, "Brockden Brown's Feminism in Fact and Fiction"; Layson, "Rape and Revolution: Feminism, Antijacobinism, and the Politics of Injured Innocence in Brockden Brown's *Ormond*"; Stern, "The State of 'Women' in *Ormond*; or, Patricide in the New Nation"; Waterman, *Republic of Intellect*; Wicke, "Sophia, Martinette, et Constantia: Des femmes exemplaires?"; and Zhang, "The Liberation of Women in America and the Three Female Characters in *Ormond*."

private spaces. Because Constantia is not conventionally beautiful, with her relatively large frame and "less … delicate" complexion (as described by the narrator Sophia as she compares Constantia to the striking features of Ursula Monrose in Chapter 8), the novel's emphasis on this repeated surveillance implicitly argues that *all* women are subject to this dynamic, not simply those deemed physically attractive.

Yet something unexpected happens when the Dudleys meet with an opportunity to escape their poverty and regain some aspect of their former status, when Constantia is saved by the respectable merchant Balfour from the possibility of a street rape by working-class toughs. Balfour is attracted to Constantia's reliability and utility as helpmate to his commercial life, and proposes marriage. Constantia's rejection of Balfour, against her father's wishes, like her first rejection of an unworthy suitor before the novel's action began, underlines her larger rejection of the cultural script that is expected to govern her life. Had she accepted Balfour's proposal, the novel would have a conventional outcome and expected forms of structural balance. The damage initiated by Craig's imposture would be restored by the mediocre Balfour, whose very conventionality makes him profoundly uninteresting and at the same time representative of an entire middling lifeworld.[26] But Constantia rejects these formal expectations out of hand. In marked contrast to conventional novelistic and sentimental heroines, Constantia will neither marry nor die. *Ormond* thus moves beyond conventional expectations and generic models for female identity, and, along with Craig's return, Constantia's decision to refuse a suitor marks the conclusion of *Ormond*'s first narrative segment.

With this blow against conventional expectations, Brown both introduces and extends the critique of female disempowerment that was developed in Woldwinite writings, most notably Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 *Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* Wollstonecraft argued that women have been denied equality by a set of infantilizing social customs and institutions, and provided an early analysis of the way that the rhetoric of romantic love turns women into silent objects over which men contend. Her analysis highlights a series of themes that illustrate and document female subordination. The behaviors associated with female beauty constrain women's activity and force them into concerns with fashionable dress that in turn generate juvenile thinking. Traditional practices of female education exclude the male-associated topics of politics, science, and history, limiting women to the less analytical, more affective or emotionalized fields of languages and the arts (painting, music, dance). Additionally, the ideology of heterosexual marriage legitimates a form of contractual servitude likened to that of African slavery (and here the period's Orientalist fascination with the seraglio and harem conflated slavery and sexual submission). In *Alcuin*, his first extended prose publication, Brown conveyed these arguments in

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[26] "Lifeworld" describes the way that the combined force of social and cultural institutions and their associated practices create a shared world of common sense and perceived reality. Roughly speaking, our "lifeworld" is the sum of the assumptions, meanings, and norms that we absorb from our social environment.

dialogic form and suggested their implication within the realm of rights and juridical empowerment.[27]

In *Ormond*, Brown expands Wollstonecraft's arguments in two significant ways. Though his moment lacks the terms and concepts later developed to address these questions, he uses Constantia's trials to develop a wider definition of gender horizons than Woldwinite writings. It is not simply Constantia's clothing and appearance that is disempowering, for example when poverty forces her to adopt a different style of dress in the early chapters, but the wider fact that she is trapped by a "social address" of femininity. Regardless of how she presents herself, she is restrained by normative expectations concerning womanhood, and these conditions define her location in the social field. But secondly, even if this constraining girdle of convention were removed, the absence of these restraints would not in itself be enough to make her free. After all, Constantia has received a "male" education and demands the freedom to think outside the doctrines of organized religious dogma. Here Brown rejects the notions of "equality feminism," or the idea that access to formal legal rights alone is an adequate condition for freedom. Like liberal political economy, this approach to women's lives presents the problem of disempowerment as the laissez-faire need for the removal of blockages or interferences, such as prejudice or legal inequities, and considers that this removal will level the playing field to make all presumably autonomous individuals equal to compete in the marketplace. This is the "possessive individualism" that is economic and political liberalism's answer to disempowerment.

In *Ormond*, however, the female protagonist realizes that gaining equal access to rights, or even to rights and knowledge together, is not enough. For Constantia, a "stranger to pusillanimity" or fear, the problem is having the courage and will to enact this knowledge, especially in the public sphere and in relation to men. The difficulty that she faces, because she is a woman, is the need to overcome internalized fear and the long-standing sense of female inferiority that has been instilled in her as the natural ideal of submissive womanhood. To use Wollstonecraftian language, she needs to summon "masculine" courage. This is to say that Brown realizes that a mental revolution must occur for genuine liberation to take place, and that this cultural transformation must precede legal or political affirmation because the former creates the necessary conditions for the latter.

Although Brown's particular focus in *Ormond* is on women, the need for a new cultural consciousness preceding the legal conditions of equality is a precept that Brown emphasizes repeatedly in his writings on all forms of social domination, including ethnic or racial subordination. This is the reason why he often brings these two categories together in particular characters or incidents (such as Constantia's encounter with the woodcarter), or in his analytical arguments. Brown consistently refused the idea that the accident of birth determines one's fate, that biology determines destiny as it delivers a permanent social death or disability. For Brown, if slaves behave lazily

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[27] For more on Wollstonecraft and Brown's development of Woldwinite arguments concerning women, see *Alcuin* and the selections from Wollstonecraft and Godwin in Related Texts.

and seem to lack the will to excel, this diffidence is not the consequence of racial nature, but the imposed condition of slavery, which strips away basic levels of dignity and imposes a multigenerational system of subordination.

Constantia's problem, then, is that even though she is restored to her accustomed middle-class privilege, and even though she distinguishes herself by a "male" education and exceptional courage and fortitude, none of this is enough to take her beyond the conventional horizons of a sentimental heroine. The dilemma she faces is that it is not enough to be free from those who would trick and exploit her. She must also free herself from mental slavery and a hesitation to act.

This process of discovering and forging new ways of womanhood, as one instance of personhood in general, is a fundamental theme of *Ormond*. In many ways the novel's initial chapters may be read as an implicit pastiche and critique of early American sentimental fiction and the ways in which sentimental texts participate in the objectification of women by presenting them primarily as bearers of emotional distress whose crises illustrate but do little to suggest ways of resisting or altering existing states of domination. *Ormond*'s departure from these models is openly advertised in its insistence on qualitative changes in the development and mentalities of its primary female characters, and the qualitative differences between them.

As Constantia encounters the novel's title character Ormond and the women Helena Cleves, Martinette de Beauvais, and narrator Sophia Courtland in the novel's second and third segments, the narrative shifts to a startlingly different tableau of alternative models and potentials for female experience. If the narrative of self-development is categorized as the *Bildungsroman*, the genre that narrates an individual's self-formation, cultivation, and education (the three basic senses of the term *Bildung*), then *Ormond* should be regarded as one of the first revisions of this model. The interior narrative of women's thinking, doubts, and aspirations was already highly developed in the tradition of sentimental or "seduction" novels that developed the models of intensive self-reflection established in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) and its influential successor, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie; or the New Heloise* (1761). *Ormond* refers to these models, but reduces their emphasis on psychological interiority and authenticity, both to question the class assumptions inherent in sentimentalist models, and to connect the question of development into new stages or forms to matters of collective social and political transformation.

Brown's move toward an alternative generic model to explore women's lives takes on additional significance if we consider that it focuses on a character whose "social address" or location is different than that of the genre's customary male protagonists, for such a focus on a nonnormative protagonist implicitly shifts and questions the form's conventional presuppositions. For example, literary historian Franco Moretti argues that that the *Bildungsroman*'s focus on normative European male heroes makes them individually distinctive yet, ultimately, in the form's typical narrative resolutions, representatives or proxies for communal norms of dominant society. The genre's primary function is thus to engineer the end of the narrative so that it provides, as many have observed, an imaginary resolution to real contradictions. Typical or conventional novelistic endings, in other words, resolve crisis into normality. They

answer the formulaic question, how much development is necessary for a tale to be concluded in ways that will not threaten preexisting bourgeois structures and aspirational values for advancement *and* security?[28]

But while these observations are undoubtedly valid for narratives concerning conventional male and European protagonists, they nevertheless leave two other trajectories unexplored. First, Moretti's model does not ask what might happen if, rather than delivering parables of individualism, such narratives of self-development redirected their audiences toward the collective and utopian. Second, and consequently, this alternative community might not have an "end." Its energy might be directed toward further change, and thus become a narrative about ongoing, enlarging, or permanent revolution. These are the questions that *Ormond* begins to raise after Constantia's refusal to marry, and after Brown's refusal to make her a sentimental heroine who embodies comic harmony in marriage or tragic catharsis in death.

The Community of Sorrow and its Vicissitudes

Constantia's first experience of new social potentials draws her toward an emotionally saturated idea or imagination of female community. As her friendships with deferential laboring-class women such as her maid Lucy, Mary Whiston, and Sarah Baxter suggest, these relations often transcend class barriers both upward and downward, so that she is spontaneously comfortable in addressing, quickly befriending, and identifying with women she has not previously encountered. As she learns about the fate of other women, she rushes to consider them similar to herself so that, for example, when imaging the suffering imposed during the yellow fever in Chapter 6, Constantia's imagination constructs the misery around her specifically as a crisis of women in pain, afflicted by the loss of husbands and children. In a certain sense, in fact, Constantia seems to relish the paradoxical freedom opened up by plague conditions, as she becomes more comfortable walking through the city's streets once they have been depopulated and the men who ordinarily dominate these spaces have disappeared. The female community that she initially imagines is based on the sympathetic bond of tears or emotions.

This community of sorrow is most fully developed in her relationship with Helena Cleves, aka Mrs. Eden. In accordance with the logic of sympathetic identification, Helena closely mirrors Constantia's circumstances. Both women come from mercantile-family backgrounds in New York, and both lose this world due to financial turbulence. They both find themselves living under pseudonyms in Philadelphia, where their inability to achieve social inclusion is illustrated in the way they are physically cloistered in small apartments controlled by unfeeling males, and psychologically contained by their own internalized fears of social encounters that would expose them to disapproval and shame. Helena particularly illustrates the condition of women who are imprisoned and damaged by socially conditioned norms of femininity. She

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[28] For the *Bildungsroman* and its cultural politics, see Moretti, *The Way of the World.*

is literally and figuratively imprisoned because her dedication to maintaining the prestige of luxurious dress and living conditions has led her to objectify herself as a "kept" woman, a mistress. Helena's devotion to this emotional ideal appears in her facility with a feminized and aesthetic style associated with modern Italianate forms, in opposition to the figuratively stoic rigor of Constantia's "Roman," classical, and male-associated knowledge.

If Constantia was initially reluctant to contradict or resist male authority, she finds it easier to do so when she is acting on behalf of a sisterly figure in distress. In this situation, Constantia and the novel's readers may begin to consider that psychological and social growth results not from selfishness, the cultivation of individual interests, but from social action, the politics of collective and mutually beneficial organization. If Constantia's encounter with Helena thus provides a test case for this initial turn toward a woman's community of feeling, Helena's suicide quickly literalizes the weakness and fragility of this position and its potential. In an allegorical sense, Helena's inability or refusal to face life's rigors suggests the intrinsically narrow limits and self-imposed limitations of female identity understood as shared trauma. If it teaches Constantia the weakness of this position, it also presents her with an opportunity to overcome her own self-imposed limitations.

In the Helena episode Brown seems to reject strategies or politics based on essentializing sympathy circulated among the victimized. This phase of Constantia's development may additionally be seen as Brown's indication that there are greater structural impediments to (female) empowerment, and an implicit argument about the need to free oneself from past models. For Brown was all too aware of the degree to which even the period's leading feminist writers, female and male alike, found it difficult to extricate themselves from the psychologizing grip of "romance." Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Hays, for example, two authors read and admired by Brown and his associates, were widely discussed as progressive females prone to heartbreak caused by the libertine deceit of men with whom they had fallen in love.

Wollstonecraft's ill-fated romance with Gilbert Imlay, which resulted in an out-of-wedlock child and suicide attempt, was a well-known recent case in point. Wollstonecraft's husband, William Godwin, described these experiences in a posthumous biography which had the unexpected effect of blasting her reputation for decades. In his biographical *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1797), Godwin also describes how a Helena-like figure, Frances ("Fanny") Blood, represented for Wollstonecraft the ideal of female sympathetic community. Yet despite Wollstonecraft's plans to live with and financially support Blood, the latter chose the conventional path of matrimony and motherhood. Wollstonecraft's affection for Fanny was such that she named her first child (a daughter who later committed suicide) after her.[29] Hays was similarly incapacitated by a romance with an unfeeling man, in much the same way that Helena sacrifices herself to Ormond.

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[29] For more on Wollstonecraft's relationship with Frances Blood and its significance for *Ormond,* see the Godwin selection in Related Texts.

Constantia seems to acknowledge the fragility of sympathy when, after Helena's death, she again behaves in a manner that few readers would expect: she continues her relationship with Ormond, even after it becomes clear that his actions and declaration of erotic interest in her were the catalyst for Helena's suicide. In terms of novelistic or generic conventions, Constantia's refusal to simply condemn Ormond is extremely unusual or even scandalous behavior, as the London *Anti-Jacobin Review* indicated when it rejected *Ormond* categorically, citing its refusal to condemn suicide and related "disgusting and pernicious nonsense" as evidence of its unsuitability for readers.[30] From the perspective of most assumed readers of sentimental or romantic novels in this period, it is remarkable that Constantia behaves as she does, and doubly remarkable that Ormond is neither overwhelmed by guilt nor symbolically punished for his part in Helena's demise.

To a certain degree, the refusal to blame Ormond follows Brown's career-long interest in writing against the principles of revenge and retribution, which he, like the Woldwinites, saw as a set of destructive values that belong to the corrupt machinery of feudal society. Because the rejection of revenge as a self-destructive passion recurs on numerous levels in Brown's novels *Wieland*, *Edgar Huntly*, and *Arthur Mervyn*, it is hardly surprising to find it here. Yet within the context of Constantia's development, her continued affinity for and meetings with Ormond underlines her rejection of woman-centered sentimentality as an affect that is insufficient in the struggle against the old regime and as one that might, in fact, be complicit with its maintenance and reproduction.

Ormond: International Man of Mystery

Constantia's first turn away from sentimental relations comes in her encounter with Ormond's dogmatic refusal of sympathy and its certainties. At all levels, Ormond is brusque, insensitive, and infuriatingly contradictory. A fierce opponent of behavioral hierarchy and the display of politeness that obscures social inequalities, he is nevertheless arrogant, self-aggrandizing, and a firm believer in the superiority of men over women. He professes social transparency, but uses arcane skills as a ventriloquist and master of disguise to secretly examine others and use them with or without their knowledge to influence society, for example when he watches and evaluates Constantia to determine whether she merits receiving (disguised and indirect) financial support. He is antipatriarchal but demands obedience and patronizes those around him. Although Ormond's background and larger ambitions remain mysterious in their detail, not least because the narrator Sophia openly acknowledges that her politicized belligerence toward Ormond colors her descriptions of him, he seems to belong to an international secret society that seeks to distribute enlightenment values through opaque means that are as oppressive as the forces they seek to dismantle. For example, Ormond's group may act as an Inquisition-like secret tribunal that envisions imperialist occupation of non-European lands.

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[30] *The Anti-Jacobin Review* 6.26 (August 1800), 451.

However, what Ormond stands for seems less significant than the effect of his manner of conveying it to Constantia. His relationship with her proceeds through a series of action and reaction spirals, in which his initial offensiveness inevitably acts to pull her closer. This pedagogy is unorthodox and transforms Constantia's attitudes through abrupt, often insulting psychic shocks, rather than nurturing encouragement. With this antisentimental schooling through adversity, Ormond raises the question for Constantia of whether one can learn from and in a hostile environment. Can one draw knowledge from established authorities, take what is useful from the past, and then use it to extricate oneself from their rule? As mentioned, this third, interstitial position, caught between the extremes of total subordination to authority and totally spontaneous revolt also suggests the need for a tactics of subterfuge or a guerilla-like existence within a larger social fabric.

Furthermore, Ormond's indeterminacy, the continual difficulty of determining with certainty what he actually believes, who he is, or where he has been, provides a model of what it might mean to exist in a time of rapid transition, in a moment in which it becomes difficult, if not actually a liability, to believe in a firm or permanent sense of the (individual) self. Can one live with the challenge of being comfortable with indeterminacy, without dependence on ideas of authenticity in settled forms of (gendered, regional, ethnic, denominational) identity, while still negotiating a critical engagement with the world? Does having an embodied identity help one live and learn from the play of history, even if this history is traumatic, degrading, and disreputable? Or more simply put: Can there be a progressive cultural politics that radically frees itself from the need for an identifying social location, from the particularities of body, race, and nationality?

The possibility of this divide comes with the challenge that Ormond's shape-shifting, in his masquerades as an African American chimney sweep or possibly as the charlatan Martynne, presents to the physiognomic assumption and sentimental idea that the body's surface is the register on which interior personality can be found and reliably interpreted. While the novel's characters frequently gaze on each other as a means of ascertaining the relative risks of interaction, Ormond refuses to be read so simply. Ormond's inscrutability comes on the heels of Craig's, but unlike Craig, whose imposture was perceived in wholly negative terms, Ormond's is simultaneously abrasive and seductive for Constantia. For despite his complicity in Helena's suicide and the fracturing of female community, Constantia is magnetized by Ormond as he presents an initially disconcerting, but also compelling possibility of breaking away from the social conventions and identities which may imprison us even as they provide the security of the known.

Female Antisentimentality: Martinette and the Politics of Enlightenment

Although Ormond's name gives the novel its title, Martinette de Beauvais may be its most remarkable figure and is certainly the character who provides Constantia the

greatest tutelage in alternative modes of being (female) in the modern world. Because she appears in disguise as the mysterious Ursula Monrose (the figure secretly witnessed by the old soldier Baxter in Chapter 7, and subsequently glimpsed and described in Chapter 9) before being revealed as Martinette, this French-speaking émigré functions as a sort of hidden vortex around which Constantia swirls until she has developed to the point where meeting Martinette will have maximum impact.

When Sarah Baxter first tells Constantia the story of an apparently impoverished immigrant woman who disappears after old Baxter witnessed her burying an elderly man presumed to be her father, the American woman's first response typifies the codes of sentimental emotion. She yearns to meet this woman who, in her habitual imagination of female community, doubles and amplifies the conditions of her own suffering. Similarly, when Constantia encounters the foreigner in a shop in Chapter 8, she feels a powerfully magnetic, yet still inarticulate attraction to the stranger. When Constantia finally does encounter and speak with Martinette outside her initial disguise, however, this long-standing code of sympathetic attraction is abandoned for an elective affinity, an intentional and purposive bond, that is riddled with ambiguity and tension because it is based on the rational evaluation of possibilities and challenges that individuals encounter in the modern world's political and social turbulence. Above all, Martinette represents the enactment of a dynamic response to the liberating opportunities presented by revolutionary social change.

Like Ormond, Martinette is emphatically cosmopolitan; she speaks many languages, and has traveled and lived throughout the Mediterranean, European, and Atlantic worlds. She is comfortable existing within and accommodating herself to the kinds of complex conditions that characterize a historical period in rapid and violent fluctuation, and this facility is signaled by the multiple names and social conditions her character bears in successive stages of her life. Intellectually and politically, she is a fierce advocate of the progressive and radical Enlightenment. Like Ormond, she is almost twice Constantia's age and assumes a commanding role whenever she meets the younger woman. Martinette's abrupt appearances and disappearances mean that she dictates the tempo of their relationship, and her wide knowledge and personal, bodily engagement in contemporary international politics as lived experience means that Constantia looks to her for concrete education about the disruptions of the modern world, in contrast to her previous, more abstract study of classical history and culture. Yet in comparison with the contradictory mixture of opportunities and obstacles Constantia encounters in Ormond, Martinette provides a more influential and accessible model. Martinette's concrete embodiment of liberatory possibilities provides the information and example that will be necessary to cross the barrier of gender constraints that has blocked Constantia's horizons to this point.

Unlike Constantia, Martinette seems to be beautiful in the conventional terms determined by male evaluations of female appearance. As Sophia's detailed verbal "portrait" in Chapter 8 suggests, Martinette is small, delicate, graceful, and smoothly complexioned. But unlike Helena, the novel's other conventionally beautiful and delicate woman, Martinette refuses to allow the accident of her appearance or exterior

biological apparatus—her female sex—to predetermine or define her social potential and actions. Martinette's rejection of the imprisonment of gender is most clearly explained when Constantia quizzically wonders how this exotic foreigner could have experienced so much in contrast to her own relatively localized and banal past. Martinette replies with unapologetic vigor: "You grew and flourished, like a frail Mimosa, in the spot where destiny had planted you. Thank my stars, I am somewhat better than a vegetable. Necessity, it is true, and not choice, set me in motion, but I am not sorry for the consequences." This reply affirms the value of cosmopolitan circulation over nativist isolation, as Martinette refuses to be fixed or defined by the accident of being born into a particular region, language, class, or body.

   In contrast to Constantia, Martinette is unwilling to be constant or true to dominant ideals of femininity. In what is a prescient, point-by-point refutation of the values cultural historians would later define as the nineteenth-century "Cult of True Womanhood,"[31] Martinette rejects domesticity, religious piety, sexual purity, and submissiveness to male dictates and expectations. Significantly, and almost shockingly for the period's fictions, Martinette is a woman who is comfortable with the enactment of female sexuality and who is never punished or humiliated for it.[32] Free from debilitating shame, she unhesitatingly recounts a past rich in erotic experiences with multiple partners outside the policing oversight of theocratic authorities. She has little or no interest in maternity and certainly does not consider her widowhood as her final identity or an event worthy of morbid preoccupation.

   Martinette's backstory, recounted in Chapters 19–21, primarily emphasizes her ability to elude the prescriptive force of conventional scripts for women's lives and, crucially, to elude them precisely because she abandons sentimentality. When she buries the man assumed to be her father, the old soldier Baxter is as shocked by her lack of tears as he is by the moonlit burial itself. Martinette's freedom from rule by feminizing emotion means that she can be schooled by adversity rather than constructing herself as its victim. She has antagonistic relations with her elderly female governess Madame Roselli and, even more so, with the priestly tutor Father Bartoli (Chapter 20). Yet despite the priest's attempt to seduce (or rape) and dominate her, Martinette manages to invert the scenario and empower herself instead, by focusing on useful aspects of the situation, notably the tutor's ability to transmit to her the male-associated disciplines of science and history.

   Martinette's tactical refusal of sentimentality and embrace of an assertive perspective on her life's challenges is articulated most clearly in the passage in Chapter 21 in which she unapologetically recounts her earlier plan to assassinate a Royalist general hostile to the French Revolution. Constantia is initially shocked by her friend's enthusiastic endorsement of violence toward revolutionary goals, but Martinette makes it clear that she believes social emancipation can only occur in the moment of crisis.

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[31] For this formation, see Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1850."

[32] See Lewis, "Attaining Masculinity: Charles Brockden Brown and Woman Warriors of the 1790s."

For Martinette, these are the times that try women's souls. As Constantia marvels at the idea of acting in "a scene of so much danger," Martinette replies:

> Danger my girl? It is my element. I am an adorer of liberty, and liberty without peril can never exist … . Have women, I beseech thee, no capacity to reason and infer? Are they less open than men to the influence of habit? My hand never faultered when liberty demanded the victim.

By rejecting ideals of pacific, evolutionary reform and celebrating the arena of emergency because it provides the best opportunities for previously disempowered groups to throw off their shackles, Martinette exemplifies trust in revolutionary dynamics.

Martinette's commitment to a politics and pedagogy of decisive ruptures is typified by her serial acts of transvestism in the service of the American and French Revolutions. Martinette's cross-dressing, a feature of the novel that was drawn from a popular period subgenre of military female-transvestism narratives, is much more than a simple proclivity to masquerade.[33] It offers a new mode for combining antiaristocratic and antipatriarchal politics, since transvestism is an attack on the standing order of the body as the most fundamental "social address" of status. Furthermore, Martinette relates the story as the mechanism of her own liberation from normative internalized fear. While fighting in military drag for American independence, she discovers that "the timidity that commonly attends women gradually vanished," and relates that she gradually became "embued by a soul that was a stranger to the sexual distinction." Emancipation from internalized fear is, of course, what Constantia herself has been consistently struggling to achieve.

Numerous commentators have noted Constantia's initial recoil from Martinette's ferocity, and often insist that this momentary aversion should be understood as Constantia's (and Brown's) final word on the question of revolution.[34] But this interpretation seems to ignore both Constantia's ensuing desire to learn more from Martinette, and Martinette's larger claim that change occurs through antisentimental shocks, whether these be Ormond's scandalous statements or Martinette's willingness to thrust herself into scenarios of risk and danger. Martinette's list of the reasons why some women cross-dressed to participate in revolutionary wars shows Brown's

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[33] For more on the revolutionary-era genre of female transvestism tales, see the selections concerning Louise Françoise de Houssay and Deborah Sampson in Related Texts, and the commentary in Dekker and Van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe*; Dugaw, "Female Sailors Bold: Transvestite Heroines and the Markers of Gender and Class"; Friedli, "'Passing Women': A Study of Gender Boundaries in the Eighteenth Century"; Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*; Gustafson, "The Genders of Nationalism: Patriotic Violence, Patriot Sentiment in the Performances of Deborah Sampson Gannett"; Wheelwright, *Amazons and Military Maids: Women who Dressed as Men in Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness*; and Young, *Masquerade: The Life and Times of Deborah Sampson, Continental Soldier.*

[34] See for example Marchand, "Introduction"; Levine, *Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville*; Comment, "Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond* and Lesbian Possibility in the Early Republic."

awareness of the period's rumors and accounts of female transvestism, but Martinette's final rationale—the "contagion of example"—indicates her awareness that the communication of possibilities may catalyze their imitation and further enactment.

Readers may assume that Martinette's account of her past is inauthentic or carefully manipulated in part or in whole, given her self-admitted experience in imposture and masqueraded identities. As Constantia realizes in Chapter 19, "an impenetrable veil was drawn over her [Martinette's] own condition." But to discount the importance of her example for Constantia on this grounds would be to mistake the greater lesson that this experienced and knowledgeable foreigner—"a woman thus fearless and sagacious"—extends to the young American. For Martinette provides a master class in how to refuse body-based government of all kinds, whether the rules in question are those of aristocratic lineage, male authority, or racial prejudice.

Martinette's rejection of the old regime of feudalism and priestly fraud is most obvious with her active engagement in the French and American revolutions. Her antipatriarchal gestures are inherent in her easy appropriation of male authority, which goes beyond her practice of transvestism to include her staging of moments that reverse the normative sexual economy in which women are trafficked between men. For example, when the still-disguised and as yet unknown Martinette stands next to Constantia before a shopkeeper handling the trade of a lute, she pretends not to speak English, forcing the male merchant to shuttle between the two women. In early modern iconography, the lute is a familiar attribute of female sexuality. In singing to this instrument's accompaniment, the female voice circulates among male listeners in much the same way that Helena Cleve's musicality marks her as female and available. But in this scene, as Martinette implicitly arranges it, a male voice becomes an object circulated between women, and male desire (since the lute is Stephen Dudley's tool of pleasure) is subordinated to a discretely signaled affinity between two females. Similarly, no matter what conditions led to the death of Roselli, the man that Martinette buried in Chapter 7, the unceremonious and tear-free burial enacts the "death" of the patriarch, especially insofar as it frees Martinette from a woman's linkage to the home so that she can move at will, in striking contrast to Constantia's domestic cloistration during these same chapters as a "good daughter" enacting filial piety toward her moody, emotionally abusive father.

Additionally, Brown hints at one more possible register of freedom with this character by suggesting potential connections to the condition of slavery and the situation of racially mixed women. The suggestion of possible racial mixture in Martinette appears with Chapter 8's description of her skin color ("the shade was remarkably deep," comments the narrator Sophia) and delicate frame, both qualities that may gesture toward period stereotypes in which mixed-race women were held to be more feminine, dainty, and elegant than either blacks or whites of "pure" or less mixed ancestry. Although Martinette relates an elaborate backstory concerning her Eastern Mediterranean origins, there is no independent confirmation of this tale and claims of southern European identity were in fact one of the alibis used for racial passing (a later example is the fugitive slave George in Stowe's 1851 *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, who passes with a "Spanish complexion"). Considering that Martinette's last

port of call before arriving in Philadelphia was the Caribbean slave colony Haiti, and that her companion Roselli oversees colonial possessions in another slave colony, Cayenne, French Guiana, it may well be that she has a more than passing connection to the world of slavery, a possibility additionally suggested by her name's resemblance to Martinique, an important French sugar colony.

In the racial hierarchies of Haiti, mixed-race subjects had a different social status than individuals with full African parentage. Many of these "free people of color" became wealthy plantation and even slave owners in their own right. Mixed race or "mulatta" women from his planter class then frequently exchanged wealth for status by marrying poorer white Creoles, much as English aristocrats married the daughters of American robber barons in the later nineteenth century. Consequently, if the relation between Roselli and Martinette was that of a former master and slave, or of a European Creole and a free woman of color, then Martinette's tearless burial may connect with a number of other scenarios, from the murder of an extortionate master to a fortuitous opportunity for freedom brought about by the chaos of the fever epidemic. Martinette's burial of the father may thereby hint at a kind of racial uprising or a violent refusal of the kind of "kept" status that Helena experienced in a more self-destructive fashion.

In a French Position: Culture and Political Contagion

As it presents Martinette's activities in Philadelphia and develops the implications of her impact on Constantia, *Ormond* also registers and provides commentary on the more diffuse cultural wave of transformation that occurred when large numbers of Francophone refugees from the ongoing revolutions in Paris and Haiti arrived in the city. Throughout the 1790s, and above all during the 1793–1794 period of extreme political and social crisis that corresponds to the dates of the novel's action, French exiles arrived in U.S. port cities and had an immediate impact on American culture far out of proportion to their relatively small size as an emigrant group. Like Martinette, who plans to leave Philadelphia to rejoin the revolutionary struggle after learning of Robespierre's death in Chapter 21, many of these refugees considered themselves temporary exiles, waiting out the revolutionary storm that was underway in metropolitan France or colonial Haiti.[35]

Unlike the mainly agricultural and laboring-class background of earlier and larger northern-European emigrant groups such as the Germans and Scots-Irish, these Francophone exiles of the 1790s belonged largely to the middle class and planter

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[35] For commentary on the period's Francophone wave, see Branson and Patrick, "Etrangers Dans Un Pays Etrange: Saint-Domingan Refugees of Color in Philadelphia"; Meadows, "Engineering Exile: Social Networks and the French Atlantic Community, 1789–1809"; Nash, "Reverberations of Haiti in North America: Black Saint Dominguans in Philadelphia"; Potofsky, "The 'Non-Aligned Status' of French Emigrés and Refugees in Philadelphia, 1793–1798"; and Wiener, *The French Exiles, 1789–1815.*

elites, and consequently tended to be more literate, financially comfortable, and less familiar with manual labor than earlier immigrant communities. With little experience in crafts, the refugees scrambled to survive by helping establish a market for consumer pleasures—often involving the commercialization of physical appearance and behavior—as hairdressers, dressmakers, cooks, dance instructors, book sellers, and music and theater performers. As they brought a new code of manners and personal dress styles to the plainer, predominantly Protestant cultures of American cities, the French strangers were arguably important catalysts or accelerators in this period's shift from self-sufficient, agrarian, household economies toward more modern patterns in which individuals fashion their identity not by adherence to family or village origins, but through consumer choices in clothes, books, and other cultural commodities. Not only did these French emigrants make new kinds of consumer objects and behaviors available to Americans, they also embodied and modeled for locals a radically new mentality involving comfort with lifeways based on a consumer economy, an orientation that is dramatically different than Puritan ideals of asceticism or Quaker moderation.

While these refugees often arrived with little money, they did come with considerable cultural capital, as highly literate individuals often accustomed to managing others as merchants, lawyers, or property owners. Perhaps not since the New England Puritans had North America experienced the arrival of so bourgeois and educated a group as these Francophone émigrés. They introduced fashionable consumer and dress styles including relatively relaxed codes concerning the display of sexual desire and behavior, such as the open presence of mixed-race mistresses in the street. As they introduced a new repertoire of cultural outlooks to the early U.S., they positioned themselves as "educators" who could guide the American public in their experience of these new styles. In this manner, the period's French-speaking émigrés also began to create something that had not previously occurred in the U.S., a bridge between classes based on a new set of cultural and political outlooks.[36]

While there was already a long-standing dynamic of prestigious French contributions to early U.S. culture, previous exchanges tended to focus on relations between elites, for example the Marquis de Lafayette's friendship with Washington, or Franklin and Jefferson's exchanges with French scientists and intellectuals during their diplomatic assignments in Paris. The French refugees of the 1790s, by contrast, encountered a wide spectrum of Americans, and their new conditions of unexpected social decline meant that high-status Francophone exiles found it necessary to live and work among middling and laboring-class Americans. Brown accurately captures this mixture when he presents Martinette, during her period of disguise as Ursula Monrose, living among the Philadelphia working class, and later has her explain her travels to Constantia by citing the geographical writings of C. F. Volney, another of the refugees who took up residence in Philadelphia during this period and became

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[36] In Related Texts, see Brown's "Portrait of an Emigrant" and the selections by Moreau de Saint-Méry, Watson, and C. F. Volney.

well known to Brown's circle.[37] It was the French immigrants' potential for introducing a new set of "irregular" cultural ideals, as well as their ability to circulate these practices through the lower strata of the city outside the control of the standing political and social order, that made them so threatening to conservative forces and the sitting Federalist government during these years.

Conservative anxieties concerning the period's multifaceted wave of French cultural influences are critically dramatized throughout *Ormond* in more and less obvious ways, from the plebian Francophobia of the old soldier Baxter to narrator Sophia Courtland's more sophisticated but no less pronounced antipathy to all things French. What Brown is inscribing in the novel with this motif, in general terms, is the way that the period's vitriolic revolution debates corresponded to partisan divisions in the U.S. political climate at the time the novel was written. The Federalist Party in power in the U.S. during the 1790s supported England rather than France and feared the effects of European revolutions, but the greater and more lasting threat that the period's conservatives associated with French immigrants to the United States perhaps lay in this immigrant community's tendency to hasten a new "democratic" consensus and fusion between the political elites of the opposition Democratic-Republican Party (Virginia and New York property holders such as Madison, Jefferson, and George Clinton, Vice President to Jefferson and Madison) and a large stratum of artisans, mechanics, and itinerant laborers then seeking organizational opportunities. When the Federalist administration of then-President John Adams enacted the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798, the year that Brown's novelistic phase began, their target was not simply to repress explicit political radicalism (allegorically, such as Ormond's), but also to contain what they perceived as the threat of alternative cultural outlooks that might link together otherwise isolated non-Federalist groups (allegorically, such as Martinette's alliance with Constantia). In this light, it is not Ormond alone who elicits a reactionary response in the narrative's framing of events, but Martinette as well. The relatively greater anxiety provoked by Martinette's influence may be inferred, perhaps, by the fact that it is only after she establishes her connection with Constantia, and not after Ormond's entrance, that the novel's narrative flow is unexpectedly interrupted.

Reactionary Regulation: Sophia and Counterrevolutionary Sentiment

All of Brown's novels present sudden and initially disorienting breaks in their plotting and narrative development. These breaks tend to divide the narratives into seemingly irreconcilable parts (often halves, or binaries), to suggest contending or contradictory energies, to heighten the reader's awareness of the limitations of the narrator's point of view, and to shock the reader generally, reshaping the sense of the

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[37] For more on Volney and his relation to 1790s Philadelphia, see Related Texts.

novel's action that readers have presumably built up or assumed before the break occurs. As a result of such breaks, *Wieland* shifts from a tale about a lower-class wanderer and mysterious voices at a wealthy estate, to a terrifying account of insanity and patriarchal family murder. *Edgar Huntly* begins as a story about an enlightened Quaker's rural benevolence, but ends with uncontrollable sleepwalking, barbaric cycles of settler-Indian revenge violence, and profound insecurity. *Arthur Mervyn* opens with a panorama of overwhelming institutional corruption literalized in the 1793 yellow fever epidemic, but ends with an unexpectedly hopeful tale of romance between figures from different classes and ethnicities. In all of these novels, the abrupt juxtaposition of superficially different elements has a logical purpose for Brown as he uses one dimension of the narrative to reveal tensions that underpin and inform another. Thus, we might say, the narrative segments are not ruptures or breaks so much as efforts to turn the narrative upside down so that readers will see a social underbelly or infrastructure that is otherwise missed or too easily ignored. *Ormond* not only follows this pattern of emplotment through the introduction of new perspectives and story lines, but its overall narrative frame is arguably Brown's most insistent and complicated use of this technique.

  The effects of this frame are evident throughout the novel, although the manner in which its influence is gradually intensified and revealed means that readers are not obligated to notice it until Sophia Courtland, the narrator of the entire performance, steps out from the behind the authorial curtain in Chapter 23 and exchanges her relatively understated shaping of the narrative's meanings up to that point for an overt, explicit intervention in its drama of contending revolutionary and reactionary energies. Sophia, as "S.C.," establishes and acknowledges her control over the narrative on the novel's first page, when she addresses it to a "German" reader identified as I. E. Rosenberg, admits that her portraits of Constantia and Ormond will be neither objective nor complete, and intimates that the narrative's fictional purpose is to account for Constantia's "defects" and "errors" in such a way as to make her a suitable partner for an elite marriage. Even in the novel's early chapters, Sophia intervenes to address the reader and editorialize, usually in ways that implicitly claim she is more intimate with the protagonist Constantia, and a more authoritative source of knowledge about her, than any of the other characters with whom Constantia interacts, above all Ormond and Martinette. In Chapter 2, for example, Sophia establishes her emotional authority as a member of Constantia's community of suffering and claims special proximity to the protagonist with her assertion that "my eyes almost wept themselves dry over this part of her tale."

  A striking example of this style of intervention occurs in Chapter 8, a sort of tour de force of narrative insinuation in which Sophia rhetorically balances Constantia's loss of a visual portrait of Sophia herself (claiming that this loss constitutes a deep psychological and sympathetic wound for Constantia) against her own production of a verbal portrait of Martinette, her future rival in Constantia's affections, who at this point is still in disguise as Ursula Monrose. Even before she uses her narratorial powers to reveal to the reader that Monrose is in fact Martinette, Sophia is already attempting to limit and qualify Constantia's interest in Martinette by insinuating that

Constantia's real dilemma (presented as a crisis of interior psychological authenticity of the kind that occurs in sentimental novels) concerns herself, Sophia, rather than the fascinating woman Constantia is encountering and becoming attracted to. A picture is worth a thousand words, as the saying goes, and thus Chapter 8's performance of what we might call "narrative narcissism" need not be noticed by the reader, even though it prefigures the more blatant instances of prejudicial interpretation that will emerge in the novel's later narrative segments. The old soldier Baxter and the predatory Ormond, more attentive readers may realize, are not the novel's only deeply prejudiced and antagonistic secret witnesses.

  By the point that Constantia forms her friendship with Martinette, the novel has implicitly charted her increasing awareness of the possibility of emancipating herself from the gender constraints of conventional femininity and womanhood. In this regard, Martinette's presence and example is more influential than that of Ormond. The emergence of this crucial influence, therefore, may explain why Sophia waits until after Martinette's full-blown arrival, rather than her own melodramatic and alarmist introduction of Ormond, to unmask herself as Sophia Westwyn Courtland and step onto the stage of the tale's events.

  Sophia is perhaps best understood as a sort of mirror opposite to Martinette. Both characters share similar transnational and tumultuous life conditions, but they embody diametrically opposed ideological interpretations of the contemporary moment. Martinette is cosmopolitan, a freethinker, willing to engage with social change, socially and politically radical. Sophia is nativist, territorial and provincial, dedicated to religious dogma, hostile to change, socially conservative, and politically reactionary. Like Martinette, Sophia is taken abroad by a damaging maternal figure she does not like, but whereas Martinette used travel as a means of learning, Sophia spends her time complaining and avoiding her new surroundings. While Martinette transforms herself through social intercourse in different cultures, including marrying men of different nationalities, Sophia is a petulant American abroad who spends her time grousing that Europe is not like home and is never happier than when she finds compatriots to reminisce with.

  On returning to the U.S., Sophia writes in Chapter 24, she found that "the difference between Europe and America, lay chiefly in this; that, in the former, all things tended to extremes, whereas, in the latter, all things tended to the same level. Genius and virtue, and happiness, on these shores, were distinguished by a sort of mediocrity. Conditions were less unequal, and men were strangers to the heights of enjoyment and the depths of misery, to which the inhabitants of Europe are accustomed." With this insistence on social conformity, Sophia's superficially patriotic affirmation celebrates America as the land of internalized discipline. Deeply provincial, she employs the language of patriotism as a means of reinforcing existing forms of social relations while repressing social differences and the possibilities of Enlightenment liberation that Ormond and Martinette illuminate for Constantia. Further, she channels a contemporary conservative argument about the difference between America and Europe that was then associated with the ruling Francophobic Federalist Party. Ventriloquizing future U.S. President John Quincy Adams, who wrote from

Berlin in 1800 to assert that the difference between the American and French Revolutions was simply "the difference between *right* and *wrong*," Sophia asserts a qualitative distinction between the two revolutions in order to draw Constantia's imagination back to the limited horizons and perspectives that defined it before she met Ormond and Martinette.[38]

Up until Sophia steps onto the stage in Chapter 23, her narrative perspective and political views have been more implicit than explicit. Once she reveals her identity and recounts her backstory by way of establishing herself as a childhood friend and protector of Constantia, however, her narrative provides an increasingly tendentious and argumentative denunciation of the past and present activities of both Ormond and Martinette, presenting them as the destructive careers of pathologically imbalanced minds and the consequences of progressive and radical political principles.

Sophia's narrative authority and interventionist role in the novel's conclusions pose basic questions of interpretation. Some readers have agreed with critics like William Hedges, who argues that Sophia's "actual presence [is] the sure sign that the novel will tolerate no deviance from accepted views," or with Robert S. Levine's suggestion that Brown introduces Sophia to affirm that "the preservation of liberty may require a 'reactionary' power."[39] There is no question that Sophia represents a counterrevolutionary outlook, but it is much less certain that Brown intends readers to hear Sophia's rants as his own, rather than as illustrations of the ways that conservative and reactionary claims are commonly presented as neutral, commonsensical, or unquestionable affirmations of "natural" order.

What seems clear, by the time Sophia begins to intervene actively in the novel's action, is that she uses her role as narrator to present herself as an objective and omniscient commentator when she is anything but. Simultaneously claiming that she has constructed her narrative solely from Constantia's letters and that she has secret sources of information that she cannot clarify, Sophia never mentions that almost all of its events, from Dudley's bankruptcy to her own return shortly after the father's death to assume his monitory role, occur during Constantia's Philadelphia exile when there was no communication between the two women. At best the narrative is a retrospective reconstruction of events that occurs after Ormond and Martinette are no longer present to counterbalance Sophia's admittedly prejudicial representations. She asserts special knowledge about Ormond in her prefatory note to Rosenberg and in Chapter 12, but withholds any information that might confirm her claims, rationalizing this narrative strategy with the assertion that it is not "prudent to unfold *all* the means by which I gained a knowledge of his actions; but these means, though

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[38] John Quincy Adams, "Preface" (p. 4) to his translation of Friedrich von Gentz's counterrevolutionary tract comparing the "origins and principles" of the American and French Revolutions (1800). For Brown's explicitly argued rejection of this position and its associations in the U.S., see his review of this pamphlet in Related Texts.

[39] William Hedges, "Charles Brockden Brown and the Culture of Contradictions," 118; Levine, *Conspiracy and Romance*, 49.

singularly fortunate and accurate, could not be unerring and compleat." Even as she delivers her sensationalized denunciations, in other words, Sophia confesses to the reader that she cannot or will not provide evidence beyond her own words to justify her portrait of the novel's title character. In contemporary parlance, we might say that Sophia practices "stonewalling": she delays, misdirects, and ultimately refuses to answer implied questions about the validity of extraordinary claims.

Critic William Scheick, for example, notes how Sophia's "revelations frequently clarify little for the reader; rather they generate other questions…. Often, she brings the reader to the verge of understanding, only to distract his attention by the urgency of a new present moment, leaving his comprehension of events incomplete."[40] This narrative practice of misdirection and willful obfuscation is intentional, for it allows Sophia a relatively subtle means of amplifying a sense of need in the reader that legitimates her own claims to be a superintending figure whose authority is natural and unquestionably authentic. Thus it is crucial to recognize Sophia's dedication to controlling the flow of information throughout the tale, especially because so much of our perception of Ormond, for example Chapters 21, 26, and 27's anecdotes concerning his barbarity during the Russo-Turkish wars, comes only from Sophia, who has never met Ormond in person, but who targets him for vilification because of his political ideals.

The accelerating tempo of events in the novel's final segment, from Dudley's death in Chapter 22 to Ormond's in Chapter 29, in which the narrative's rhythms pulse ever more rapidly and produce more inscrutability than even the events of the yellow fever epidemic, occurs only after Sophia's emergence into the novel's action. Neither of the violent deaths that punctuate this final act are witnessed, and the interpretation of both is literally and figuratively managed by the narrator. Sophia seems to use this shift in dramatic pacing and velocity to distance Constantia from Martinette and to portray Ormond as an immediate danger, even though Ormond and Constantia have already established placid relations despite strong intellectual differences. For it is only after Sophia's physical arrival in Philadelphia that Ormond will be presented as a violent, maniacal rapist intent on possessing Constantia dead or alive. At the same time, however, in an unexpected and additional narrative turn, this staging of Ormond's libertine sexual violence as both the consequence and literalization of his radical politics allows Sophia to present her own attraction to Constantia as an alternative sexuality.

Female-Female Sexuality: The Desire that Shall Remain Nameless

As early as the 1940s, scholars were already commenting, albeit briefly, on the thematization of female same-sex desire in *Ormond*. For the next several decades, this

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[40] Scheick, "The Problem of Origination in Brown's *Ormond*," 133.

feature of the novel was often skirted and frequently dismissed with the assumption that the novel's outlook is unquestionably heterosexual.[41] Beginning with Lillian Faderman in the early 1980s and the ensuing rise of literary, cultural, and historical studies on same-sex sexual expression and communities, however, *Ormond*'s treatment of female relations and erotic contexts has become foregrounded as readers have increasingly noted the erotic charge that binds the novel's women, and debated the ways in which the novel seems to reflect on (proto)-lesbian desire.[42]

For example, Constantia's search for an alternative script for female personhood presents implicit reflections on marriage as a form of slavery and on the mind-numbing commodification of women as objects to be trafficked between men. These aspects of the novel already harbor an implicitly critical perspective on compulsory heterosexuality, since they imply that normative codes and categories of womanhood are not "natural" states but rather an imposed regime of subordination. The example of Constantia's briefly glimpsed mother, who in Chapter 2 "died a victim to discontent," exemplifies the ways that normative wifedom can expose women to physical and psychological forms of domestic violence and everyday practices of depersonalization. Constantia's insistence on displaying sympathy directed mainly to women, and her experiences of annoyance and endangerment as a result of male supervision and intrusion into her private sphere, are also parts of this pattern of reflection. These everyday forms of cultural background noise, the "normal" conditions of existence in Constantia's world, are continually amplified by Sophia's heart-rending shrieks of deep romantic friendship for the subject of her narrative. Sophia never ceases to advertise her emotionalized bonds with Constantia, insists that the two should spend their lives together, and immediately after getting married abandons her husband in Europe to travel perilously across the Atlantic and search for her long-lost friend, even when there is no certainty that Constantia is even alive.

Sophia's emotionally saturated claims made her relationship with Constantia the realm of most critical focus until the 1990s, when scholars who had become more

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[41] Warfel, in *Charles Brockden Brown* (1949), writes that in Sophia and Constantia "Brown recognized … an abnormal relationship" (132). Of Constantia, he suggests, "Emotions of normal love are alien to her nature, and there seems to be a homosexual tendency in her conduct. She rejects all suitors, and in the end no husband awaits her" (130). The 1952 Clark biography replied by arguing that there is no evidence "that Constantia was the victim of homosexuality" (173).

[42] The argument here draws from Shapiro, "In a French Position: Radical Pornography and Homoerotic Society in Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond or the Secret Witness*." In *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women From the Renaissance to the Present* (1981), Faderman opened a new phase in discussions of the novel when she argued that "In *Ormond* the female-female love [i.e., the bond between Sophia and Constantia], despite the title of the work, is the central and most powerful relationship in the book, and it provides the happy ending" (155,n433). For recent scholarship and commentary, see Comment, "Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond* and Lesbian Possibility in the Early Republic"; Layson, "Rape and Revolution"; Lewis, "Attaining Masculinity"; Smyth, "'Imperfect Disclosures': Cross-Dressing and Containment in Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond*"; and Roulston, "Having it Both Ways? The Eighteenth-Century Menage-à-Trois."

attuned to the cultural politics of transvestism as a medium for communicating same-sex sexual desire began to examine the links between Martinette and Constantia. It is Sophia herself who first reveals the affinity between the two in Chapter 8's previously mentioned artful contrast between her own claims on Constantia and the magnetism of a still-disguised Martinette, during the exchange of a lute and its erotic connotations. Sophia's description of the two women exchanging the lute bypasses the level of explicit, linguistically coded assertions to concentrate on "interpreting the language of features and looks." In this context, the reader may well find Sophia's insistence on the resemblance of the two women initially confusing, given the superficial difference she notes between their ages, physiques, and public comportment. But her suggestion of an unstated yet nevertheless visible attraction conveyed in forms that go unnoticed to bystanders will be repeated and made plainer in subsequent chapters. When Martinette explains why large numbers of women are serving covertly in the Revolutionary army, for example, she says that, among other reasons, some of these disguised fighters are simply following other women into a setting which may, despite its potential dangers, offer greater possibilities for female-female intimacy. Similarly, when Martinette explains the ease with which she was able to take refuge in Philadelphia's émigré community at a time of emergency, her evocation of a secret city with little-known subcultures hints at the presence of wider erotic possibilities as well.

The presence of same-sex practices and subcultures was well known to Brown and, historically, it is well documented in the Philadelphia of the 1790s. Indeed, Brown was the first U.S. writer to inscribe male same-sex relations in fiction. The protagonist of his serially published *Memoirs of Stephen Calvert* (1799–1800) is a man who suddenly and inexplicably loses interest in his fiancée and falls in love with an exotic, cloistered immigrant. When he proposes, the woman tells him that she is already married and explains that, soon after her marriage, she discovered her husband having sex with another man.[43] Brown's later magazine article on the Persian poet Hafiz

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[43] *Memoirs of Stephen Calvert* (*Monthly Magazine* 2.4, April 1800, 265–66) sets out the crucial passage concerning the husband's behavior in these terms:

"At length, various circumstances set the depravity of my husband in a new light. For a long time I was blind to the obvious inferences which a person, much acquainted with the world, could not fail to have drawn from appearances. My husband's negligence of me I naturally ascribed to his attachment to some other woman. I could not readily believe what yet appeared to be true, that his associates were wholly of his own sex; and I gave him credit for a rectitude of conduct, in one respect, which was little in unison with other parts of his deportment.

This illusion came, at length, to an end. Belgrave's contempt and hatred of me exceeded even his own regard for his own reputation, and to his own safety, from the animadversions of the law. So open, so shameless was his conduct, that, at length, my own eyes were allowed to witness—.

I cannot utter it—I was frozen with horror. I doubted whether hideous phantoms, produced by my own imagination, had not deceived me; till my memory, putting past incidents together, convinced me that they were real."

Brown echoes the pre-twentieth-century code phrase *peccatum illud horribile, inter Christianos non nominandum* (that horrible sin not to be named among Christians). Nineteenth-century editions of Brown that included *Stephen Calvert* excised this passage.

openly acknowledges the male poet's desires for young men.[44] Besides the complexity of its own action, *Ormond* refers to other contemporary codings of female-female sexuality, for example in its footnoted allusion in Chapter 14 to a fictional account of the life of Orientalist adventurer Edward Wortley Montagu. That narrative begins with an allegorical scene in which Montagu's mother, the Bluestocking intellectual Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, enters a Turkish harem and witnesses explicitly sexual, all-female "oriental" dancing, before being forcibly impregnated by the Sultan, as if to compensate for her indulgence in non-normative erotics. In this period, the historical Lady Montagu was famously the object of slanderous attacks by Augustan poet Alexander Pope and others that associated her with same-sex sexual practices.[45] French émigré bookseller Moreau de Saint-Méry, in passages included in Related Texts here, also noted and reflected on female-female sexuality in 1790s Philadelphia.[46]

  Because critics and historians are still learning how to read the period's discourse of same-sex affections and how to understand its description of a spectrum of possibilities extending from homosocial friendship to explicit homosexuality, readers must still decide for themselves whether they see *Ormond* as a text of sexual longing and alternative or oppositional reflections on female-female sexual companionship. If we choose to read the novel in ways that include historically-attuned awareness of female-female eroticism and its representations, then the important question, perhaps, is less whether Constantia is more attracted to Sophia or to Martinette, than whether these two relationships may encode different styles of same-sex attraction that together chart out conditions and possibilities for future relationships. If the purpose of Sophia's narrative is indeed to prepare a marriage to the never-explained figure I. E. Rosenberg, then her longing for proximity to Constantia will implicitly be restrained, privatizing, and protected by the coverture[47] of marriage. Martinette's style of behavior, on the other hand, unapologetically transgresses conventional codes for female behavior and is frankly radical in its political outlook. Contemporary readers

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[44] See "On Persian poetry and Hafiz" in Brown's *Literary Magazine* 3.21 (June 1805), 419–23.

[45] For more on Montagu and the fictional account of his life, see Notes to Chapter 14 and the discussion in Related Texts of female transvestism in the revolutionary era.

[46] For a fuller discussion of the cultural politics of sex-gender in 1790s Philadelphia, see Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender & Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730–1830.*

[47] Laws of coverture are the body of early modern English common law regulating women's legal status and personhood in this period. Under Anglo-American common law, women had no legal personhood or formal, statutory independence. A woman's legal identity (and consequently her right to own property, sign contracts, and so on) was absorbed into or "covered" by that of her father, husband, or other male guardian. In the Anglo-Norman legal terminology of this system an unmarried woman was a *feme sole* (a woman alone), a married woman a *feme covert* (a covered woman). Although it abolished titles and primogeniture, the American Revolution did not change these laws concerning women's subordination. For discussions of coverture and its relation to the period's U.S. reading culture, see Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*; and Davidson, *Revolution and the Word.*

might find the latter more appealing and, depending on how we read the final scenes, it may well be that Brown shared this perspective.

Conventional Endings and Uncommon Sense

Brown's encoding of nondominant forms of gender and sexuality helps us consider the implications of the novel's violent and puzzling final act. Throughout *Ormond* Brown has staged tensions between two aesthetic and political worldviews. One seeks to reaffirm traditional social order and gender roles, and lends itself to expression through the codes of classicism, with their concern for maintaining balance, simplicity, and symmetry. The other, which embraces political transformation and the forging of new behavioral roles, is linked to an expressionistic and mobilizing aesthetics that favors irregularity and embodied performance. As the tale is drawn toward its conclusions, these two tendencies may usefully guide different ways of reading its final pages.

  On its surface, the plot seems clear. A vertiginously imbalanced Ormond uses the surrogate fraudster Thomas Craig as an intermediary to accomplish the murder of Stephen Dudley, then seeks physical control over Constantia through rape. Acting in self-defense, Constantia kills Ormond in her paternal mansion before Sophia can arrive to protect her. The classic sentimental confrontation between a virtuous woman and a predatory rake is not actually witnessed, but generically resolved by Sophia's uncanny ability to submerge all status differences and social tensions into the "ultimate restoration to tranquillity" that is invoked on the novel's final page. Sophia's aggressive management of Constantia's affairs will implicitly prevent any further encounters with radicals, advocates of social change, or other forces of imbalance, for she transports her friend to London, the geopolitical fulcrum of Anglo-American counterrevolutionary order, where her new life is such that she "has experienced little variation."

  Sophia ensures that Martinette and her Francophone influence remain distant by reporting, once again on the novel's final page, that her own husband, the suggestively named Courtland, has communicated startling new revelations after meeting with Martinette in revolutionary Paris and simultaneously denying Martinette new information about Constantia, because he "thought proper to with-hold from her the knowledge he possessed." Sophia's brief assertion, seemingly an afterthought, that Martinette was secretly the sister of Ormond, effectively ends the text by fusing and demonizing both of the novel's radical figures, erasing any significant distinctions between them. As the curtain falls, then, Sophia has returned Constantia to where she began the story, cloistered within domestic tedium. The tale's protagonist seems destined for marriage with the mysterious I. E. Rosenberg, an event that may transpire as soon as her virtue is legitimated (her "errors" and "defects" erased) by Sophia's embedded narrative, which is *Ormond* itself. With generic assumptions of conventional melodrama and compulsory heterosexuality assured, all's well that ends well and the novel seems to provide the reader with a "proper" ending, the finale and imaginary

resolution that the drama "ought" to have, and might more easily have had, if Constantia had never strayed from conventional expectations and scripts.

Yet the puzzling rough edges that Sophia's narrative does not succeed in smoothing away seem to leave the reader with many suggestive possibilities and a persistent sense that the narrative's highly conventional conclusion does not, in the end, satisfactorily account for the novel's wider suggestions and willful irregularities. Coming as they do at the end of a tale that repeatedly illustrates how its characters indulge in charades of transparency while enacting stratagems of hidden surveillance and imposture, *Ormond*'s final pages hint that they too engage in dramatic misdirection, and suggest that a more careful reading may qualify the conclusions that Sophia has presented to her reader.

For example, in the novel's world of dizzying inversions, where the rich, white Ormond passes as a poor, black chimney sweep, or the physically delicate female Martinette successfully masquerades as a male soldier, readers have ample reason to wonder about the authenticity of the novel's strangely veiled and melodramatic death scene, as well as the identity of the mysterious I. E. Rosenberg, whose name, as Wil Verhoeven notes, is a German inversion of the French meaning of Martinette's earlier pseudonym. That is, both Rosenberg (in German) and Monrose (in French) mean the same thing: red—or pink, rose-colored—mountain.[48] If Sophia writes to Rosenberg in order to hand Constantia over to this figure, then could she be wittingly or unwittingly writing to someone, such as Martinette, who is arranging for Constantia's final movement toward a French position?

To consider only the theatricality of Ormond's death, it is notable that Sophia does not witness the scene and never presents it dramatically to the reader, but only glimpses the aftermath through a keyhole, a bit like the old soldier Baxter spying on Martinette in Chapter 7, and draws a rapid conclusion as to its import. The scene that she discovers, with two male figures draped over one another, seems knowingly posed or staged, a hyperbolic possibility suggested by Ormond's own quotation of Hamlet dragging the body of Polonius, as he brings out Craig's corpse. Ormond's strange death mask also intimates a hidden joke as a "smile of disdain still sat upon his features. The wound, by which he fell, was secret, and was scarcely betrayed by the effusion of a drop of blood." What could an imperceptibly wounded Ormond be laughing about?

In short, since every other compilation of letters in the novel is composed of frauds and forgeries (Craig's letters, accounting, and bank notes; Martinette's unseen autobiography; and Martynne's reference letters), the novel's overall logic suggests that Sophia's narrative must likewise fall under suspicion of duplicity. Whether we distinguish terminologically between the "novel" and the "narrative," between the text's surface and depth, or between literal and figural levels of reference or figuration, it seems clear that Brown has designed *Ormond* in such a manner as to bring out a

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[48] See Verhoeven, "Displacing the Discontinuous; or, The Labyrinths of Reason: Fictional Design and Eighteenth-Century Thought in Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond*."

readerly awareness of the difference between Sophia's scripted narrative and the wider potentials it attempts to contain. Allegorically, it may well be that Constantia's murder of Ormond completes her initiation into the worldview that Martinette had previously championed. Given the novel's logic of theatricality, it is plausible to speculate that, like Martinette, Constantia has learned through adversity, under the tutelage of a predatory male, and figuratively buries his corpse in the paternal garden, right under the nose and spying eye of a prejudicially inclined agent of public order.

Brown's novels often suggest struggles to clarify meaning in the midst of such duality as his characters search through disorienting architectural or other spaces in which important texts and other secrets are hidden.[49] Novelistic devices of inscrutable or hidden manuscripts were already commonplace elsewhere in the period's gothic fiction and were used to great purpose, for example, by William Godwin in his *Caleb Williams*, which Brown's contemporaries commonly understood as a model for *Ormond*.[50] The period's conventional use of this motif, however, referred to secrets about the past, so that novelistic discovery tended to reveal feudal crimes and subterranean horrors of the old regime. Brown's writing seems to take a different approach, one mainly suggested by the period's libertine and pornographic fictions, in which the known-but-unacknowledged secrets refer to alternative societies *in the present moment*.[51] In *Ormond*, such allusive references to alternative social arrangements includes Martinette's comment about a Francophone Philadelphia that remains hidden in plain sight to Anglo eyes, or Ormond's revelation that Constantia's father's closet opens into rooms beyond her apartment's apparent limits. Brown's combination of texts, spaces, and utopian possibilities that are obscure to mainstream eyes but visible to those who can perceive them suggests that he has articulated *Ormond*'s entire narrative in this fashion.

Ormond, then, may be read as two narratives, one familiar and conventionally digestible, and another more subtly radical in its subterranean codes. Given the interpenetration of aesthetics and politics that characterizes it so thoroughly, Brown's use and abuse of generic forms in this novel is best understood from our perspective at the outset of the twenty-first century as a political allegory in which Brown indicates that, by the end of the 1790s, the forces of reaction, the Sophia-like embodiments of common sense and conventional wisdom (*sophia*, in Greek), have become strong enough to exert control over the mechanisms of public expression, the narrative form

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[49] See McNutt, *Urban Revelations: Images of Ruin in the American City, 1790–1860.*

[50] See Verhoeven, "Opening the Text: The Locked-Trunk Motif in Late Eighteenth-Century British and American Gothic Fiction." Contemporaries understood the connection with Godwin to such a degree that the 1802 German translation of *Ormond* could be intentionally or unintentionally attributed to Godwin himself, and Brown's earliest biographer Paul Allen could remark, "Constantia appears to be little more than Godwin's hero in a female dress." See Allen, *The Life of Charles Brockden Brown*, 389–91.

[51] See the image from Restif de la Bretonne's *The Perverted Peasant* (1776) in Related Texts, and the commentary in Shapiro, "In a French Position: Radical Pornography and Homoerotic Society in Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond or the Secret Witness.*"

itself. In a situation of weakness, he seems to suggest, radicals are well advised to wait for the arrival of a more progressive phase, and in the meantime to inscribe their meanings in encoded forms that may be transmitted to distant or future actors.

This strategy of nonsubmissive submergence, or artful insubordination, would be true for the surviving Woldwinites, like Godwin, who quietly waited until the next generation, when figures such as his daughter Mary and Percy Shelley would relay a radical spirit and attempt to resurrect an older progressivism that had been left for dead by the period's counterrevolutionaries. Shelley's friend Thomas Love Peacock reported that Shelley avidly read Brown's novels and considered that Constantia Dudley was his finest achievement.[52] Mary Shelley, the daughter of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, and Shelley's wife and partner before his death, likewise read Brown's novels and famously spun a tale, in her novel *Frankenstein* (1818), about the arrival of the undead in the form of a creature created from graveyard limbs, in a manner that suggests the challenges of representing a resurrected progressivism. Brown, of course, would not live to see the next phase, due to his untimely death from tuberculosis in 1810. *Ormond*, however, can be read as a document of his developing political and narrative tactics, a tale about the strategic need to wait until better days. Accordingly, as readers of *Ormond*, we are the secret witnesses of progressivism long delayed, but not destroyed.

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[52] Peacock, "Memoir of Percy Bysshe Shelley," 409.