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Mental Illness in Early American Fiction: Charles Brockden Brown and the Sentimental Novelists

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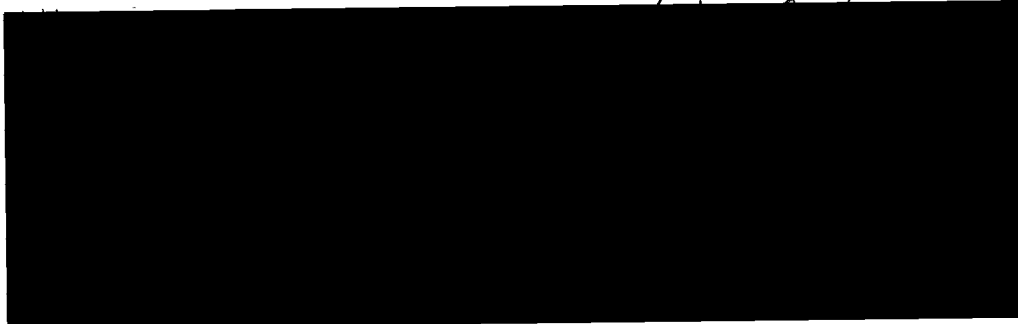
Mental Illness in Early American Fiction: Charles Brockden Brown

and the Sentimental Novelists

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Katie E. Walk

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Abstract

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed the development of

the United States of America as a new nation. This development brought with it new

ideologies and social and political change; included in these changes was the way that

sexual conduct outside of marriage was dealt with. Because the emerging legal system

became less concerned with matters of morality, some people became frightened that

sexual promiscuity would become rampant. The sentimental novel or seduction tale

became a means of attempting to control sexual behavior when the law was not able to

step in.

The way that madness, a term used to describe a variety of mental disorders, was

understood was also changing in the post-Revolutionary era. As historian Roy Porter

points out, mental illness has a complex history in which it is used by society for a variety

of reasons and perceptions of it have changed depending on the needs of a particular

group of people. Early American culture was no different. Mental illness became

something to discuss and write about, and the medical documents presented it in such a

way that it fit the goals of the sentimental novelist well.

Sentimental Novelists typically used mental illness and eventual death as a way to

punish those characters who committed sexual misconduct. Not all novelists bought into

the link between sexual misconduct and mental illness, however. Writers such as Mary

Wollstonecraft and Charles Brockden Brown believed that the relationship between the

two was much more complex. Charles Brockden Brown brings to life many of

Wollstonecraft's philosophies in his fiction and pushes very strongly for women's rights

using his American brand of Gothic fiction. He destabilizes the idea that sexual

misconduct in and of itself could cause mental illness in three of his novels: *Wieland,*

Ormond, and *Arthur Mervyn.* This thesis examines Charles Brockden Brown's novels in

relation to sentimental novels and shows that while he does not dispute the ability of grief

and other emotions to cause mental illness, he also does not attempt to scare readers but

instead uses mentally ill characters in his novels to push for social change and more

rights for women.

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Introduction

Mental illness has been used as a trope in literature for many centuries with the mentally ill character playing different roles. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed the development and popularity of sentimental and Gothic novels in America. Many of these novels employed the use of mentally ill characters for a variety of reasons. Some of the novelists attempted to establish a connection between morality, especially sexual morality, and mental illness. Several American authors used mental illness as a means to attempt to argue for stricter social controls on sexual behavior specifically for women. Many of the associations between mental illness and sexual misconduct are supported by the medical discourse circulating during the period. Not all novelists, however, bought into the notion that sexual misconduct predisposed one to mental illness. Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810) uses mental illness in many of his novels, but he does so in such a way that he calls into question the correlation between mental illness and immorality while also making explicit some of the reasons mental illness seems to follow so quickly on the heels of women's loss of virginity that are implicit in other novels.

In this thesis I will explore what mental illness was defined as and the perceptions of it in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and how it was used in novels of the period. When I discuss mental illness, I will be using the definition put forth by medical doctors of the period rather than modern definitions. I have split my thesis into three chapters and will be looking at several primary texts including medical documents written by Benjamin Rush, three novels by Charles Brockden Brown, two sentimental

novels written by female writers, Susanna Rowson and Caroline Matilda Warren Thayer, and one Gothic novel written by a female writer, Sarah "Sally" Sayward Barrell Keating Wood.

In Chapter 1, I examine some of the medical documents circulating about mental illness during the period that Charles Brockden Brown was writing in. I also examine a couple of comprehensive histories about mental illness and the roles it has played in different societies. I look at what constitutes mental illness and some causes of it according to medical doctors practicing in Brown's lifetime. The most prominent doctor is Benjamin Rush; he is considered the father of American Psychology and wrote prolifically about mental illness. I will also discuss the history and development of attitudes regarding mental illness. Two histories I use are Roy Porter's *Madness: A Brief History* published in 2002 and Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* published in the United States in 1965. Porter's work is a general history of mental illness which provides brief background on how it is depicted and theories of causes and cures. Porter discusses depictions of mental illness all over the world from ancient times through part of the twentieth century. Foucault's work focuses on depictions of mental illness in western culture from the ancient world to the twentieth century and its social construction mainly in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France. Foucault's work provides relevant context for developing attitudes in eighteenth century England and Anglo-America.

In Chapter 2, I examine two sentimental novels and one Gothic novel all written by women and compare similarities between the three in regards to the connection between mental illness and female sexuality. While all three of these women writers had an interest in helping and protecting women, the characters in their novels reinforce strict

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gender roles. They do, however, make an argument for better education for women and condemn the double standard that allows men to regain their honor after committing sexual indiscretions while women are ruined for life (according to them). Chapter 2 also explores the climate in early American history that caused the rise in popularity of the sentimental novel as a means to attempt to control sexual behavior. All three of these novels use mental illness that ends in death or at the very least a miserable life due to mental illness as a way to discourage women from having sexual intercourse outside of marriage.

In Chapter 3, I look at the way that Charles Brockden Brown uses mental illness in relation to the way it is used in sentimental fiction. Brown's novels *Wieland, Ormond,* and *Arthur Mervyn* are rife with mentally ill characters, but Brown uses mental illness to destabilize the link between it and sexuality. He incorporates many of Mary Wollstonecraft's philosophies to create progressive, feminist novels that argue for better education, more experience, the means to support themselves, and more equality for women. He shows through his heroines that women are more than capable of reason and in many cases maintain their rationality while the men and other women around them lose it. He does not deny that grief or external factors cause mental illness, but rather than use the threat of mental illness to scare young women, he uses it argue for improvements in women's situations.

To conclude I sum up what I believe are some of the ways that Brown uses mental illness to help women rather than frighten them. I reiterate some of the points that I feel are most important in understanding the ways that mental illness was used in early American literature by fiction writers.

Chapter 1

Social and Medical Discourses about Mental Illness in Early American History

Perceptions of mental illness have a complex history changing over time to suit a particular culture's needs. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, mental illness played an important role in popular literature and medical documents. Most doctors of the period believed that mental illness could be brought on by a number of external, physical occurrences, and it became a means to control behavior that medical doctors as well as writers utilized. It was written about at length with doctors attributing it to a large number of factors, some of which were sexual in nature. It was not an uncommon viewpoint that many people with mental illness brought it on themselves through lack of moderation in various avenues of their lives, and the medical doctors supported this belief. This chapter will examine some cultural perceptions of mental illness, what medical doctors writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries believed were causes and symptoms of mental illness, and what were some of the motivations doctors might have had when writing and talking about mental illness for the general public. This chapter will provide context for the following chapters in establishing what mental illness looks like, and why it could be used as an effective mean in novels to scare young women as an attempt to control their behavior.

Historically, mental illness has been as much a cultural construction as a physical disease in that it has been perceived and portrayed in many different ways. Roy Porter, a historian, says that mental illness has "donned many disguises and acted out a bewildering multiplicity of parts in early modern times: moral and medical, negative and

positive, religious and secular" (69). He also notes that its use in literature has developed

and propagated stereotypes about mental illness especially in relation to women. He

states, "The autobiographical novels of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) developed the

Gothic image of the mad and/or victimized heroine; the sentimental fiction popularized

the Ophelia figure, the young lady disappointed in love doomed to a hysterical

breakdown followed by early and exquisite death...depressive, hysterical, suicidal, and

self-destructive behavior thus became closely associated, from Victorian times, with

stereotypes of womanhood in the writings of the psychiatric profession, in the public

mind, and amongst women themselves" (88). One belief held about mental illness from

the seventeenth through the nineteenth century was that mental illness is punishment

from God.

George Cheney (1671-1743), a popular doctor and dietician, asserted that mental

illness was punishment for sins of immoderation committed by the patient or the patient's

parents. He believed that all mental illness had the same source of origination, but the

causes of it could vary depending on the patient. In *The English Malady*, he divided

mental illness into two categories: original and acquired. Those with original mental

illness are born with it because of the transgressions of their parents (13). He claims that

those patients are actually fortunate because their affliction causes them to avoid those

actions that cause more severe forms of mental illness in others (14). Those with

acquired mental illness are the people who bring mental illness on themselves by

indulging in immoral behaviors. He described people with a mental illness as being

"gross feeders, or those who deal too plentifully in strong and spirituous liquors, of a

gross and full habit, short and thick necked, voluptuous and lazy; though some thinner

habits may suffer under it but they are those who have formerly been subject to violent head-aches, or are worn out by lechery" (169). Cheney believed that in order to cure mental illness, as well as other types of physical maladies, one should follow a very strict diet and avoid those things that cause eruptions of passion (170).

Cheney is just one example of a doctor who viewed mental illness as a direct result of human behavior. In Europe in the 1700s, people who suffered from mental illness were locked into mental asylums and prisons then put on display as a warning to others that humanity could sink to great depths if people were allowed to indulge in immoral behavior (Porter 70). Michel Foucault claims that the criminalization of the mentally ill person began to degenerate shortly after the disappearance of leprosy. Foucault notes that lepers were not simply regarded as people with a physical disease, but were associated with immorality and shunned or locked into facilities where they were not allowed to be around uninfected individuals. When leprosy began to disappear, the "values and images attached to the figure of the leper as well as the meaning of his exclusion, the social importance of that insistent and fearful figure" remained and began to be transferred to those with mental illness (6). Foucault traces the way that mental illness was used in literature in the Middle Ages and Renaissance to show that while mentally ill characters often represented ironic truth in ignorance or folly, mental illness was also associated with death and crime such as in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* (31).

Foucault notes that as mental illness began to be perceived as something that prevented a person from conforming to social norms, it began to be thought of as a problem that needed to be addressed (64). Mentally ill patients began to be locked away in asylums; France was the strictest in its practices regarding mental illness while other

countries tried different solutions (Porter 94). Porter says that asylums were not designed

to treat those with mental illness; rather they were designed to hold patients, but

treatments were developed as a way to control inmates (100). By the mid-1700s, the

belief was that mentally ill patients were lacking the moral and psychological faculties

that sane people had, and that these faculties had to be revived in order for the patient to

regain rationality (Porter 104-5).

In the early nineteenth century, physicians such as the French doctor Philippe

Pinel realized that locking patients in prison and treating them as if they were criminal

was not in the best interest of the patients, and they began looking for and experimenting

with what they believed to be more humane cures (Porter 107). Pinel's ideas appealed to

people because they aligned with attitudes developing in the revolutionary era (107).

Pinel was one of the most influential doctors in France who was able to bring about

reform while similar changes began happening in other countries due to the actions of

other doctors. In England, laws were developed that required mental asylums to be

certified and forced them to have their licenses renewed every year. Additionally, the

facilities were subject to examinations performed at various intervals and their licenses

would not be renewed if the facility was found lacking (108-9). While most of these new

ideas being generated about mental illness were circulating in Europe, American doctors

were aware of and influenced by them. Benjamin Rush was one American doctor who

was informed of and greatly influenced by the changes in attitude regarding the treatment

of mental illness.

Like Pinel, Benjamin Rush reflected reformist attitudes. Rush was a well-known

American doctor and prolific writer, who practiced in the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries. Often considered the "father of American psychiatry," Rush was

the first American doctor to publish on psychiatry, and he lectured a great deal on both

mental and physical health. Rush is credited with influencing the perceptions of mental

illness in America and bringing about more humane practices in its treatment (Madden

264). Rush thought, like Pinel, that imprisoning patients and publicly humiliating them

was inhumane and did not help the patients. He believed that the practice of imprisoning

and displaying them was to gratify "inhuman curiosity and amusement" (*Inquiries* 31).

In his work *Medical Inquiries and Observations Upon the Diseases of the Mind* (1812),

he outlines what he sees as the causes, symptoms, and cures of mental illness to be.

Mental illness is marked by a variety of symptoms according to Dr. Rush and later Dr.

Edward Cutbush, a doctor practicing in the nineteenth century who wrote his dissertation

on mental illness and titled it *Inaugural Dissertation on Insanity*.

The two main types of mental illness described by these writers are melancholia

or atonic madness and mania or tonic mania. Of the two, mania is the more sensational

and often used to describe those who are afflicted with overwhelming guilt, grief, and

other forms of extreme passion. Melancholia generally describes those who are sad,

forlorn, or seem depressed.

According to Dr. Edward Cutbush, a person with melancholia demonstrated the

following symptoms: "the mind is generally fixed to one subject; many are cogitative,

silent, morose, and fixed like statues; others wander from the habitations in search of

solitary places, they neglect cleanliness, their bodies are generally cold, with a change of

color and dry skin; all the different secretions are much diminished, the pulse slow and

languid" (18). He believed those with mania could "endure hunger, cold, nakedness, and

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want of sleep with astonishing degree of impunity; they are very insensible to the operation of contagion, vomits, purges, &c. During the paroxysm, they obstinately refuse food and medicine; in the decline, they become stupid and mournful, and when they come to be acquainted with their situation, they are much dejected and oftentimes burst into tears" (15-16).

Rush, along with Dr. Cutbush, thought that the most extreme irrational behaviors could be attributed to mental illness. Cutbush's definition of mental illness is behavior that results from a person misjudging a circumstance or scenario and acting in accordance with his or her misjudgment (80). Dr. Benjamin Rush also believed that mental illness could be described as a misjudgment of reality on the part of the patient which spurs actions that seem irrational to others (10). Both argue that most patients have incredibly coherent reasoning abilities, but they are reasoning based on an error. Rush lists a number of examples of people who reason well, but grossly misjudge something. One example Rush gives is that of a person who believes that he or she is made of glass. This person acts in accordance with this belief and rather than try to cure the person of the disease, Rush suggests pulling a chair out from underneath that person causing him or her to fall and at the same time, shatter a large piece of glass nearby to show the person that he or she is still alive despite the shattered glass (108).

Rush claimed that mental illness was a disease of both the mind and the body. He argued that it was brought on by a disruption in the circulation of the blood in the brain or heart, and that this disruption could be caused by something directly impacting the body or something impacting the mind that in turn caused a physical reaction (28). His beliefs were supported by other doctors of the period such as Dr. Robert Ralston who described

the case of a young man who after several days or even weeks of repairing a road,

developed mental illness. Ralston claimed the road reparation was enough to cause

mental illness because of the work's "direct tendency to produce an encreased

determination of the blood towards the head and thereby to excite its vessels to inordinate

action" (144). According to Rush, direct influences could include "lesions to the brain,

bone enlargement, tumors, abscesses, water in the brain, diseases of the brain, certain

odors, gout, consumption, pregnancy, fevers, malnourishment, intemperance, inordinate

sexual desires and gratifications especially in the form of masturbation, celibacy, blood

transfusions, great pain, unusual labor or exercise, extremely hot or cold weather,

narcotic substances, lack of any usual release of fluid from the body which could include

milk, semen, blood from hemorrhoids, and blood from menstruation, worms, irritation

from a foreign matter in the body, and measles" (28-34). Almost any kind of cessation of

normal bodily functions or any discomfiture could cause a change in circulation which in

turn caused mental illness, according to Rush.

He also believed that changes in the emotional state of a person could negatively

affect his or her mental health. Harmful influences in the mind could include "intense

study, frequent and rapid transition of the mind from one subject to another, imagination,

memory by way of trying to remember too many things, loss of liberty, loss of property,

loss of beauty, gambling, inordinate love of praise, domestic tyranny, gratification of

every desire, guilt (real or imagined), excited moral faculties, religion, defamation,

ridicule, absence from native country, and most commonly the impressions made by

passions such as joy, terror, love, fear, grief, distress, and shame" (34-44). Rush also

believed that certain people were more predisposed to mental illness than others.

Those people who have a family history of mental illness are more likely to develop it than those without a family history of it, according to Rush. He argued that this was because of the similarities in their nerves, brains, and blood vessels. He asserted that the disease is likely to get progressively worse from generation to generation, and children born to older parents are more likely to develop it than those born to younger parents. Gender, marital status, social status, intellect, hair color, occupation, and certain climates, political states, and religions also predispose one to mental illness (58). There was some disagreement between doctors on whether men or women were more likely to develop mental illness. Cutbush believed that men were more predisposed than women, but Rush believed that women were more predisposed. Rush does, however, qualify his statement by saying that women are more naturally predisposed to mental illness due to menstruation and pregnancy, but men are more likely to be affected by many of the external causes of mental illness (59).

As shown above, Rush outlines a multitude of reasons for how one could develop mental illness, but sexual misconduct became one of the most popular causes of mental illness in literature of the period. Foucault when commenting on eighteenth-century beliefs regarding mental illness and who was more susceptible to it, notes that a greater number of unmarried women developed mental illness than married women, but that the cause generally had to do with the fact that these women were poverty stricken and forced into prostitution to survive (214). Doctors such as Rush helped to propagate the belief that sexual immorality caused mental illness, however, through their works. For example, Rush argued that sex itself as well as the guilt that ensued from extra-marital sex had a direct impact on patients. He argues in *Inquiries* that God punishes those who

commit moral infractions with disease. He cites the spread of venereal disease as an example of God's punishment. He says that venereal diseases are rampant when there is greater sexual promiscuity (363).

Rush applies the same argument to mental illness although sometimes his arguments are contradictory. He claims that the best cure for an unmarried woman with a mental illness is to get married to end celibacy (60), but he also says that excessive sexual desire and gratification even within the legal bounds of marriage can cause mental illness (345). He states that "celibacy, it has been said, is a pleasant breakfast, a tolerable dinner, but a very bad supper" (60), but later tells a story about a married man who is ailed by mental illness because he enjoys sex with his wife too much. This man wishes to be made impotent in order to be cured (346). Rush claimed that one could avoid excessive sexual desires by avoiding certain actions and engaging in others. Behaviors that can cause sexual desire include excessive eating, intemperance, and idleness. As a cure of this desire, one should listen to certain kinds of music, maintain a diet of vegetables, bread, and water, remain temperate, get married or at least spend plenty of time with "chaste and modest women," stay busy, take a cold bath, and avoid obscenity of any kind (348).

An incredibly prolific writer during his lifetime, Rush wrote many letters, journal articles, and works for publication, as well as gave a multitude of speeches and class lectures (Madden 247-8). Part of what drove Rush was his concern for social order and his desire to make men into law-abiding citizens of the new republic. Jacquelyn C. Miller notes that Rush believed political and moral issues were so connected to one's physical well-being that they justifiably became his concern as a medical doctor (62). In

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many of his essays and letters, he acknowledges that he believes a person should be concerned with maintaining a sense of propriety and morality in order to better society rather than fulfill one's own desires (Terrell 110). Rush firmly maintained that people needed to be educated in such a way that would convince them to be good citizens dedicated to a common goal. He did not think that forcing someone to behave a certain way was possible but hoped through education he could convince people that this was the right way (Clark 63). Colleen Terrell says that "Rush's scheme for republican education attempts to bolster the republic's 'durability' by circumventing its reliance on voluntarism as much as possible, prescribing education to condition the wills of people. The 'wills' of properly educated citizens ideally conform automatically to the interests of the republic" (126). Rush was greatly influenced by his teachers at West Nottingham Academy and the College of New Jersey in that he was taught language had an enormous ability to create moral and social change (Williams 56). Rush had strong opinions about what moral duty looked like which he attempted to authorize with science (Williams 67). His objectivity, however, was to some degree compromised as Rush had developed many of his ideas on education and morality from his personal experiences (Madden 245). Etta Madden notes, for example, that his fascination with mental illness stems from his son's battle with it after killing a man in a duel (249). He also likely became interested in temperance because of his experience with father figures in his life. His step father was a heavy drinker and abusive to him and his mother and siblings while he had an uncle who was very kind to him and who abstained from alcohol (Madden 249-50).

Rush's theories about mental illness and indulgence correlated with his writings about education. Rush had very definite ideas on the role of education for women. He

argued that women should fill a certain role in society that scholars today call Republican motherhood, a concept that was emerging during this period. A good Republican mother was expected to raise her children with virtue and a sense of republican duty (Mulford 366). Thus, women should be educated in such a way that they could teach their children and fulfill their domestic roles. Rush did not think women should be educated in the same way as men nor did he believe that women should have the same rights as men (Clark 70). One thing that Rush did feel was very important in a woman's education was religious teaching. He argued that virtue needed to be taught to young children while their minds were impressionable, and that women should be the ones to take on the role of teaching children virtue (Clark 67). Rush was not the only one who considered the upbringing of virtuous children a woman's responsibility.

Many of the sentimental novels written while Rush was a practicing doctor are written with the similar intention of educating readers, especially women, in ways that are virtuous. Although Rush objected to the use of such novels because he claimed they desensitized readers to suffering and damaged their "moral faculty" (Clark 71), he used such novels or at least the ideas they generated to form some of his own opinions regarding diseases of the period. Madden tells us that the reviews of Rush's works indicate that his works were rather popular and tended to "support the beliefs of the general public" (264). Rush uses many literary characters as case studies for mental illness. In *Inquiries*, he tells readers that his frequent use of literature is justified because the authors "view the human mind in all its operations, whether natural or morbid, with a microscopic eye, and hence many things arrest their attention, which escape the notice of physicians" (158). Given this statement, it is not surprising then that much of the medical

discourse seems to support novelists' assertions that sexual misconduct can trigger mental illness.

While Rush attempted to use science to gain a better understanding of mental illness and to keep the general public informed, in many cases, he may have unintentionally reaffirmed widely held beliefs about it which in turn help to legitimize the claims that sentimental novelists made in their work to frighten young women. While sentimental novels may feel overly melodramatic to today's readers, to the readers of the period, someone dying directly from grief would not have felt far-fetched, and therefore, could be an effective way to influence behavior.

Chapter 2

Mental Illness and the Sentimental Novel

The sentimental novel became a popular platform for writers concerned with the

moral wellbeing of readers, women in particular, from which to preach about the negative

impact sexual misconduct could have on one's life. Many of the writers of these novels

wanted to help women and attempted to guide them. Many of the writers also ostensibly

wanted better educations for women and for women to have the ability to provide

monetary support for their households; however, most of them reinforce strict gender

roles. Mental illness in these novels becomes a convenient and effective way of

encouraging women to maintain their virginity until they are married, and while it can be

argued that many of these texts display feminist aspects, they fall short of truly

encouraging political change to help eliminate the inequality between men and women.

This chapter will compare the use of mental illness as a trope to accomplish certain goals

in three novels, two sentimental and one Gothic, all written by females in the late

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and consider whether or not these texts can be

seen as feminist in nature or conservative by the period's standards.

During the eighteenth century, the sentimental novel or seduction tale became the

most commonly written type of fiction (Hessinger 265). The sentimental novel generally

includes the story of a young woman enticed away from her family or at the very least

seduced by a young man who, after impregnating her, leaves the young woman to endure

social ruin. The young woman then has a mental breakdown, repents of her actions,

warns anyone who will listen to learn from her mistakes, and dies shortly after giving

birth. The rise of this type of novel marks a shift in the way that gender roles were portrayed in literature. Until the mid-eighteenth century, women were often portrayed as being licentious seductresses who left men with little power to resist them (Godbeer 266). After the mid-1700s, novelists began to portray women as innately virtuous while men tended to be depraved. According to these novelists, it is in men's natures to have insatiable sexual desires while it is women's responsibility to resist them and maintain sexual purity and virtue (Hessinger 270). Men still escape culpability for their actions, but now they have to rely on women to keep them virtuous rather than expect women to lead them astray.

The change in the treatment of women in novels corresponds with shifts in the way relationships and sexuality, especially female sexuality, were perceived and treated. After the American Revolutionary War, colonial life underwent changes which left people feeling protective and suspicious. These changes included greater social and geographic mobility for young men, changes in family structure, and perceptions about God and religion. In order to justify their breaking away from England, colonists could not view the monarch as being chosen by God for them to follow blindly. They had to reconceive an ideal government which resulted in changes in the way that family and God were viewed. God began to be seen as a more benevolent being rather than an angry dictator (Fliegelman 210-11). Because God could no longer be seen as a complete dictator who forced people to live under an unfit ruler, parents and husbands' absolute authority could also be questioned if what they were demanding was deemed unvirtuous. Couples began choosing their own mates and viewed marriage as more of a partnership with children enjoying more permissive relationships with their parents (Fliegelman 130).

Young men also began leaving their homes to find their own property due to the inability of parents to split land equally between siblings which lessened the control parents had over their children's behavior (Godbeer 237).

The legal system in early America also underwent changes during this period. Early American historian Richard Godbeer tells us that as financial and commercial issues began rising, courts became less involved in enforcing laws that dealt with moral infractions (228). During the eighteenth century, both literacy and premarital pregnancy rates were on the rise. By late in the century, of the number of women who gave birth, thirty to forty percent of them were pregnant before they were married (Godbeer 249). People became concerned and were searching for a way to control this apparent surge in sexual misconduct. The sentimental novel became a tool to promote morality and to punish those who indulged in vice.

Karen Weyler, the primary literary scholar on mental illness in early American fiction, argues that the loss of legal recourse against those who committed sexual misconduct spurred the rise in the production of the sentimental novel as a means to control sexuality (265). Godbeer points out that most women who became pregnant before marriage either married their partners or received child support from them and married other men. Fiction, however, depicted unmarried mothers as facing social ruin with their reputations and marital prospects destroyed (265). Weyler notes that mental illness is a punishment primarily reserved for seduced women as a way to warn young female readers what will happen when they have sexual intercourse outside the bounds of marriage. She says that "self-scrutiny, potentially leading to madness as self-punishment for moral transgressions, emerges as the ultimate disciplinary tool to regulate female

behavior" (286). Weyler argues that mental illness becomes an effective and popular punishment for the "fallen" woman for a couple of reasons. As outlined above, Weyler notes that medical discourse of the period supports the connection between mental illness and sexual misconduct (287-89). Mental illness is also convenient for authors because it offers a relatively simple way to ensure readers see the connection between the characters' behavior and their mental state. As Weyler states, allowing the "fallen" woman to die during the birth of her illegitimate child is not as effective because death during child birth was a reality that any woman could face regardless of whether she was married or not (293). Instead, with mental illness, the novelist can describe in as much detail as he or she wants the connection between the actions of the character and the state of her mental health. An added bonus with mental illness is the fact that the seduced woman can tell readers whether through a fit of delirium or a suicide note that the cause of her disease is in fact her seduction which she greatly regrets.

While this chapter is closely related to Weyler's essay, I look at only one of the novels she uses in her comparison to and explore a gothic novel to see if mental illness is treated in the same way. Weyler states that mental illness is treated differently in gothic fiction in that it used to simply move the plot along rather than make a moral argument (306). I have found, however, that by comparing novels written during the period, in both the sentimental and Gothic genres, similarities in the way that female sexuality, seduction, and a woman's subsequent development of mental illness begin to emerge. I will explore these themes in this chapter by examining sentimental novels of the period, *Charlotte Temple* by Susanna Rowson (1791), *The Gamesters* by Caroline Matilda Warren Thayer (1805) and a Gothic novel, *Julia and the Illuminated Baron,* by Sarah

"Sally" Sayward Barrell Keating Wood (1800). I will demonstrate that all three novels use mental illness as a means to demonstrate to readers that loss of virginity has irrevocable, dire consequences for young women, and even if they survive the grief and mental illness that follows their sexual misconduct, they no longer be eligible to perform roles in society.

Charlotte Temple is the story of a young woman, Charlotte Temple, who is seduced by a young officer, Montraville. Charlotte attends an all-girls boarding school in Chichester away from the immediate protection of her parents' household when Montraville first sees her. With the aid of Mademoiselle La Rue, one of Charlotte's teachers, Montraville sends her a letter and procures an interview with her. He and La Rue convince her to elope with him from England to America where they will be married. La Rue elopes with Montraville's friend, Belcour. Charlotte decides to back out of the elopement, but when she tries to leave Montraville she faints and he carries her away. On the ship La Rue tires of Belcour and meets and marries Colonel Crayton. Once they reach America, Montraville does not marry Charlotte but rents her a house in the country where he visits her. Belcour decides he would like to seduce Charlotte and Montraville meets Julia Franklin whom he decides he loves. Belcour uses this to his advantage and tells Montraville he should abandon Charlotte for Julia. Montraville resists because Charlotte is pregnant until Belcour convinces him that Charlotte has been unfaithful to him. Belcour is supposed to protect Charlotte and give her money from Montraville, but he loses interest when Charlotte falls ill. She is left destitute with no means of making money and she cannot pay the rent when it is due so she is kicked out in the middle of winter. Charlotte manages to walk to the few miles from the house in the

country that Montraville rented for her to New York and appeals to La Rue to take her in, but she refuses so one of La Rue's servants takes her home with him. Charlotte gives birth to a baby girl then becomes depressed and delirious. She does not recognize the baby as her own most of the time and slips in and out of lucidity. Her father arrives from England just before she dies and offers her his forgiveness and takes the child home with him. *Charlotte Temple* contains only one instance of mental illness, but it is an effective portrayal. The novel affected so many people, men and women alike, that a tombstone was erected for Charlotte Temple where young men and women could weep over it (Davidson 142).

Another popular novel of the period, *The Gamesters* (1805),[1] It contains several characters that develop mental illness throughout the novel and highlights the sensational aspects of its development as does *Charlotte Temple*. It is a novel about a man named Leander Anderson who is a good, but passionate, man and is suspicious of no one. He meets Edward Somerton at a boarding school and befriends him. Somerton is essentially malicious and wants to ruin Leander because he does not like his goodness and would like to steal his wealth. Shortly after Leander marries Amelia Stanhope, Somerton and another man, Evander, convince Leander to gamble. They hustle him, and being a gentleman, Leander feels obligated to stay even though he is losing because he does not wish to seem like a poor loser. Over a period of a couple of years, Leander becomes addicted to gambling and loses his fortune. He eventually becomes manic and commits suicide after learning of his cousin Eliza's seduction by Somerton and his distress over losing his own virtue by his addiction to gambling. Leander and Amelia are the main

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[1] *The Gamesters* was reprinted many times between 1805 and 1823 (Mulford 368).

focus of the novel, but there are a couple of other plotlines that run throughout the novel that involve women who are seduced, exhibit signs of mental illness and eventually die either by suicide or as a direct result of their illness.

The first woman who is seduced in *The Gamesters* is Celestia Williamson. Her story is told to Leander by her father. She is seduced by Evander who is representing himself as Theodore. After seducing and impregnating her, he leaves her telling her "had your virtue been inflexible, I might possibly have loved you; but you aught to have remembered, that when a lady ceases to respect herself, she may vainly look for admiration or respect in our sex" (31). Celestia becomes manic at this point, and after she gives birth to a daughter she writes two suicide notes, one to her parents in which she explains that her suicide is due to her seduction and one to Theodore in which she upbraids him for abandoning her despite her devotion to him. These letters become a convenient tool lest the reader miss the fact that she is committing suicide because she has been seduced. Somerton seduces a second woman, Eliza Anderson, Leander's cousin. Somerton seduces and impregnates her after he is already married. When she tries to tell him that she is pregnant, she becomes so distraught that she faints and prematurely gives birth. After awaking from her swoon, she lives a few days in a state of "interesting insanity" before she dies (298).

Julia and the Illuminated Baron is a little different from the other two novels because it is considered a Gothic novel rather than sentimental one, but it contains many of the same aspects of a sentimental novel when it comes to the melodramatic conduct and ensuing mental illness of some of its characters. It is the story of a young woman, Julia, who is brought up by a woman whom she believes to be her mother and an older

man whom she believes to be her grandfather. The majority of the story is set in France; however, there are interludes in America and England. Her mother makes mysterious annual trips in which she leaves Julia behind. She disappears on one of these trips and a few years later Julia's grandfather dies. Being orphaned and having no way to support herself because she has always been told that she is of too noble birth to work, Julia sets out on her own and happens to come under the care of the benevolent Countess De Luana. Julia charms the Countess as well as her brother, the Marquis Alvada and his son, Baron De Launa, who is a depraved man but who disguises himself as a reformed rake. Julia meets a young man, Frances Colwort, and falls in love, but he goes to America and through a series of events she is kidnapped and held in Baron De Launa's castle. The baron gives Julia the option of marrying him, but he insists that if she does not comply then he will simply rape her. Julia resists him and at the crucial moment when he is about to attack her, her lover barges in, kills him and rescues Julia. This is not the end of Julia's struggles, however. Shortly after escape, Colwort is arrested for the murder of the baron and Julia is forced into hiding. Eventually Julia is reunited with the Countess and Marquis as well as her lover and it is discovered that Julia is actually the daughter of the Marquis and Colwort the son of the countess. Julia and Colwort are married and the foursome set off for England where Colwort was raised to escape the French Revolution. Throughout the novel, readers are reminded of Julia's goodness as well as her noble bearing despite the fact that she appears to be a penniless orphan. Julia comes into contact with a few "fallen" women many of whom have varying degrees of mental illness and who advise her to remain pure and envy her virtue.

One of the most common themes throughout all three novels is that men are not to be trusted, no matter how innocent they may seem. Countess De Luana sums it up well in *Julia and the Illuminated Baron* by saying that "a modern man of honor is a more dangerous character, than a more downright knave, who is known to be a villain, and scorns not to be called so; for the former acts in disguise, and in deceiving others, often deceives himself" (74). The characters in these novels have difficulty recognizing rakes. Oftentimes rakes disguise themselves so well that not only are the seduced women deceived, but their parents and other family members as well. Somerton and Evander are both welcomed into the Williamson, Anderson, and Stanhope families based on faulty recommendations from other fooled characters as well as other unrecognized rakes. The seducer in *Julia and the Illuminated Baron* appears to have been reformed, but he is still malevolent in reality. Montraville ends up a seducer in *Charlotte Temple*, but the narrator tells us that he is not fundamentally wicked, he is simply impulsive. The downfall of each of the women who suffer mental illness begins early in their relationship with these men. Rush and Cutbush both claimed that mental illness was in large part faulty perceptions, and these women definitely suffer from faulty perception. It is interesting though that most of these women are not alone in their beliefs about the rakes in the novels; many of their families also suffer from the same perceptions, but in general the whole family does not develop mental illness. Through these depictions of men, the novelists emphasize the necessity for women to resist all overtures by a man and maintain their purity if they wish to escape mental illness and marry.

All three novels establish as fact that once a woman is seduced she is no longer eligible for marriage and begins to develop variant forms of mental illness shortly after

her initial seduction regardless of whether or not she has been abandoned yet. This serves to show readers that sex acts and the ensuing guilt cause the mental illness, not the abandonment. Most of the women, however, do not succumb to mania until after they are abandoned. After abandonment, Charlotte, Eliza, and Celestia only have short periods of lucidity and die fairly quickly. The seduced women in *Julia and the Illuminated Baron* are allowed to live for years after their seduction, but they are not allowed to coexist happily with others. For example, one of the Baron's victims, Leonora, suffers, from depression and mania for seventeen years in the baron's home before she dies. Another, Madame Gyron, suffers alone for a few years until she inherits money after which she devotes her efforts towards seeking revenge on her lover (125). Lest the reader think that Madame Gyron escapes unscathed by mental illness, the narrator tells us that she spent twenty years trying to find a cure for a "diseased mind" brought on by "that deadly passion of indignant reputation and lost honour" (138). Donna Olivia is the only woman who commits sexual indiscretions and does not suffer mental illness. She, however, has to live out the rest of her life away from society in "prayer and penitence" (244). Celestia makes it clear in *The Gamesters* that the only two options women have after being seduced are madness and death or living a miserable life of repentance. She states, "At first the struggle was almost insupportable; a sense of guilt, and a dreadful presentiment of retaliating wrath, made me half resolve to live and dedicate my days to repentance; but the struggle is over; I am resolved on death." These women are not the only ones to suffer because of their transgressions; their families are hurt by their actions as well.

Weyler points out that it is common for whole families of a seduced woman to be destroyed in seduction novels (285). This ploy in the plotlines of the novels is, according to Jay Fliegelman, a new kind of parental tyranny. He claims that in earlier periods parents were expected to have complete control over their children, especially their daughters. In this time of liberty for children, these novelists attempt to give parents back the control by equating the daughter's honor with the whole family's honor (203). In other words, if a daughter is seduced and "ruins" herself, the whole family is ruined. The daughter is blamed for destroying the family despite the whole family being deceived along with the daughter. Hannah Webster Foster notes in a couple of places in *The Boarding School,* which is considered in part a conduct novel, that a daughter can be responsible for the destruction of her family if she is not careful. According to the novel, seduction and elopement are enough to break a parent's heart and cause both a father and a mother to die prematurely (188, 200). In the three above-mentioned novels, all of the parents suffer from grief and the children born out of illicit affairs grow up without mothers. Eliza's father dies almost immediately after she does, and Celestia's father suffers mental illness which spurs one of his creditors to demand payment on his loan. Because he cannot repay the loan, her parents lose all of their property and her father is put in prison. The narrator tells us that her father's creditor was waiting to call the loan until something disastrous happened to her father. He is also the one who introduced "Theodore," Celestia's seducer, to the family knowing his true intentions (91).

Another reason that whole families suffer is that there was a great deal of paranoia about contagion during this period. Both mental illness and seduction were commonly seen as contagious. Dr. Rush tells of a woman who gave birth in a mental asylum. She

regained lucidity shortly after giving birth, but the child was taken from her for fear the mother's disease would be passed from her to the child (230). This idea that mental illness is contagious could stem from Rush's assertion that mental illness is a disease of both the mind and the body (28). In their respective studies, Shirley Samuels and Angela Monsam tell us that the novel became a place that this fear of contagion and even outsiders was commonly expressed (183, 73). The "contagion" is spread by the seducers in the novels (79). This fear is evident in all three novels even if the whole family is not destroyed. In *Charlotte Temple*, Charlotte's mother's family is destroyed because a friend of the family wants to make her mother, Lucy, his mistress. When she will not consent and her father disallows him in the house, he demands payment on a loan that he knows her father cannot pay back. Her father is put into debtor's prison, her brother challenges his friend to a duel and is killed, and her mother dies having suffered from severe grief (11). Also, Madame La Rue, the narrator tells readers, lived a profligate life before teaching at Charlotte's boarding school (19). It is evident that through her influence Charlotte is seduced more easily than she would have been otherwise.

Belcour, Evander, Somerton, and the baron are all examples of male seducers who spread sexual misconduct. Belcour has sexual relations with La Rue, hopes to have them with Charlotte, and when Charlotte becomes ill he seduces a farmer's daughter and then "rioted in all the intemperance of luxury and lawless pleasure" (81). Charlotte Temple's family stays intact, but the site of her infidelity is clear across the ocean. Evander seduces Celestia and destroys her family. He then tries to kidnap and rape Amelia, splitting her family apart temporarily. Somerton marries a woman for her money, cheats on her with Eliza, and eventually ends up with what sounds like a sexually

transmitted disease. The baron tries to seduce his step-mother and kills her when he does not succeed, seduces at least two other women after that, and kidnaps and tries to rape Julia. In all of these situations, the sexual deviant is infecting other women and damaging families. Samuels argues that sexual misconduct was believed to be dangerous not only because it hurt the family but by destroying families it hurt the nation (187).

Looking at the cultural context of these novels, one can see that one of the reasons why it was so important that women maintain their virginity until marriage was due to the emergence of the ideal of the Republican mother. A woman's most important role in the republic became that of an educator of virtuous children who would in turn become virtuous citizens. According to this ideal, a woman who has had sexual intercourse outside of marriage cannot claim virtue and must, therefore, be disqualified from performing her natural duty. It is no wonder then that the "fallen" woman is repeatedly described as ruined. By losing her virginity, she has lost not only her bargaining chip to negotiate a profitable marriage but also her right to raise virtuous children. The authors of *Charlotte Temple*, *The Gamesters*, and *Julia and the Illuminated Baron* take issue with the double standard that is applied to men and women when it comes to matters of sexual misconduct, but they seem unable to put forward any solutions. In *Julia and the Illuminated Baron*, Madame Gyron is able to keep the son she bears after her seduction and raises him although she tells him he is her nephew. The son is said to be a good and virtuous man, which could imply that despite her mistakes, Madame Gyron is capable of teaching virtue. The narrator, however, does not dwell on this and instead goes on to tell us how her mistakes caused her mental turmoil. Celestia in *The Gamesters* is quite upset by the double standard in her letter to "Theodore." She

despairs that women cannot regain their lost virtue but that a man is able to "tarnish his

name, and brighten it again" (90). She is especially angry because she lost her virtue in

innocence and naivety while he took advantage of her inexperience and manipulated her.

The narrator reminds readers repeatedly in the novel that this double standard is not fair,

but rather than propose a change she tells women that it is in their power to resist loss of

virtue.

Charlotte Temple and *The Gamesters* both have an intrusive narrator who

interjects at times for a variety of reasons. In these interruptions, the narrators in both

novels appeal to their readers' emotions, remind readers that their tales are founded in

fact, give advice, foreshadow, and encourage women to protect their sexual purity. The

narrator in *Charlotte Temple* advises young women to turn to their parents for support

and to remember all of the things their parents have done for them before eloping because

it will grieve their parents, especially their mothers. Both narrators remind readers that

women who are seduced are left in deplorable situations and have no recourse because

they are mistresses and cannot even be comforted by the fact that they are virtuous

despite their lovers' actions. They also ask for pity for seduced women (Rowson 83,

Thayer 281). They remind readers that these women are ruined regardless of how

repentant they may be or any actions they may take in the future. The narrator in *The

Gamesters* states, "No penitence, however exemplary and sincere, can meet acceptance at

the world's tribunal; the wounds of female reputation admit no lenitives, resist all healing

applications" (282). The narrator in *Charlotte Temple* interrupts at the climax of

sentimentality to ask readers' forgiveness for the melodrama and reminds readers that the

story is true and must be recorded accurately (83). *The Gamesters'* narrator does

something similar by implying that the story would not be accurate if all of the characters' suffering was not recorded (246). Although these narrators seem very conservative and their attempts at controlling female behavior demeaning to women, Paul Barton makes a convincing argument that this narrative voice can actually be conceived as a strong feminist voice.

Barton argues that by including such a strong narrative voice Rowson prevents Charlotte's own voice from being misrepresented and manages to play a role that was off-limits for women, that of a minister (27). Barton states, "By adopting a narrative approach, Rowson could introduce herself as a functional character capable of elucidating the story she was relating and thereby gain a greater degree of authority and control over her work" (28). Rowson is able to accomplish her goals of creating pity for Charlotte as well as make sure the advice she wished to impart to young women is clearly understood. The same is true for the narrator in *The Gamesters*. Both narrators are evidently disgusted with men who act like Belcour and Somerton, and present their feelings with rather strong language. The narrator in *The Gamesters* says, "The compassionate reader will pity Eliza's fall; the tear of the writer has blotted the pages which record it. Who will not detest the perfidious Somerton! Who will not pronounce him, in the language of the tragedian, 'a monster, from whose baleful presence Nature starts back'" (264). The narrator of *Charlotte Temple* tells readers about Belcour, "he forgot the solemn charge given him by Montraville; he even forgot the money entrusted to his care; and, the burning blush of indignation and shame tinges my cheek while I write it, this disgrace to humanity and manhood at length forgot even the injured Charlotte..." (81). Both of

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these narrators see the women as victims of injustice that they have suffered at the hands of men.

Both women have feminist messages in their novels even if they may be sometimes difficult to distinguish from arguments for conservative gender roles. Many scholars have argued over whether *Charlotte Temple* can be seen as a feminist text or not (Desiderio xvii). Placed alongside other texts like *The Camesters* and *Julia and the Illuminated Baron,* Rowson's novel can be seen as feminist even if it does not seem to call for large amount of social change.

The feminism these authors embrace is a conservative feminism. It has been argued that Rowson could not or would not embrace a more radical feminism in which she would call for greater social change for women (Baker 207). Rowson envisions women's happiness not lying in social change that would create greater equality for women, but in women's own self-control and avoidance of rakish men (215). All three of the writers seem to embrace this mindset. The women who survive in these novels create their own happiness by choosing their marriage partners wisely and avoiding men who would be bad matches for them. Characters are even allowed to disobey parental advice as long as the advice may harm their virtue. In *Charlotte Temple*, for example, Charlotte's father defies his father by marrying Lucy Elderidge because he loved her and knew she would make a good marriage partner. The narrator tells readers that "he saw his elder brother made completely wretched by marrying a disagreeable woman, whose fortune helped to prop the sinking dignity of the house; and he beheld his sisters legally prostituted to old, decrepit men, whose titles gave them consequence in the world..." (3). Mr. Temple decided that he did not want that life and when his father picked a wealthy

woman out for him, he declined to marry her (13). Amelia Stanhope's father tries to

force her to marry Evander against her will so she attempts to run away. When

Evander's true intentions come to light, Amelia is praised for her defiance rather than

punished (175). Harriet Anderson picks her spouse and is happy as does Julia in *Julia*

and the Illuminated Baron. The preceptress in *The Boarding School* also encourages

women to pick their own spouses as a way to obtain happiness, but she reminds her

pupils to only marry a man who is approved by their parents.

Gwendolyn Audrey Foster argues that *The Boarding School* is also a feminist text

despite its conservative undertones. She notes that the novel encourages a strong female

community kept alive by letter writing and visits when possible (64) as well as ridicules

the "ornamental female" and the "male-defined system of education" for women (62).

Like the other novelists, however, Hannah Webster Foster does not push for a political

change for females. She advises women to find power within the bounds of their duties.

For example, the preceptress urges her pupils to keep track of household accounts so that

when they are married they will be a helpmate to their husbands and have something to

occupy their time (195). She suggests women to closely examine themselves and their

behavior in order to increase their happiness and amend any part of their personality that

is unbecoming (202, 205).

The female writers of these novels attempted to subtly allow women more rights,

but they knew that they faced many challenges and ended up using mental illness to scare

young women. They were forced to use rhetoric and common themes to convince

readers that women needed better educations and the ability to provide for themselves,

but they were not able to push for a great deal of social or political change. They knew

that if they tried for too much change they would be ridiculed and their texts not read. Mary Wollstonecraft is an example of a female writer who overtly strove for social change for women and while she enjoyed some success, her reputation was eventually hurt, and she was mocked for her beliefs.

She uses mental illness in her unfinished novel *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* to argue for more rights for women. Her main character, Maria, marries a man who she later finds out married her to gain her uncle's wealth. He turns out to be a despicable husband; he impregnates another woman and abandons the child. He then tries to prostitute Maria to one of his friends when she refuses to request more money from her uncle. She decides that she can no longer live with him and escapes her home with her newborn child to live with her uncle. Unfortunately, her uncle is unwell and out of the country so she is forced to hide from her husband until she can make it to her uncle. In the meantime, her uncle dies and leaves his wealth to Maria's daughter because he knows that according to the law Maria would be required to relinquish her money to her husband. When Maria attempts to leave the country, her husband catches her and institutionalizes her in a mental asylum. He refuses to free her until she agrees to give him her uncle's money. She meets another man, Darnford, in the asylum who has also been admitted by a relative wanting to gain his wealth and she begins a relationship with him. They both befriend a caregiver, Jemima, who they encourage to share with them how she came to work in a mental asylum.

Unlike Maria, Jemima has been forced to live a life in poverty and eventually prostitutes herself. She is the daughter of two servants within a wealthy household. Her mother is punished severely and is expected to stay hidden until after Jemima is born.

Although her father's identity is known, he escapes without punishment. He abandons her mother and she dies shortly after giving birth to Jemima. She is initially taken care of by nurses and later taken into her father's household after he marries. She is treated like a servant within the household and is apprenticed to another family after the step-mother tires of her. The husband and father within that household repeatedly rapes her until he is caught be his wife. The wife blames Jemima and kicks her out. She is forced into prostitution to survive until she is able to find work as a servant in another household. While working for a older gentleman she began to receive an education and learned to read. Once he died, however, she was again forced out into the streets with little money. She struggled to find work (and she makes it clear that if she were a man she would have had her pick of numerous careers) until she becomes a washerwoman. She only continues this for a short time before injuring herself and losing her job. She was forced to enter a workhouse whose owner took notice of her and gave her the position of caregiver at his mental asylum.

After quite a bit of time in the asylum, Maria is informed that her daughter has died and Darnford will soon be leaving the asylum. She is able to break out with the help of Jemima and lives with her new lover. She pays her husband off and he leaves her alone for a brief time, but decides to have her lover charged with adultery and seduction. She defends herself and presents a very logical argument outlining the many ways that her husband has mistreated her and shows that they are not compatible because her husband is selfish and leads a very immoral lifestyle, but she is met with resistance from the judge simply because she is a woman. The narrator tells us,

The judge, in summing up the evidence, alluded to 'the fallacy of letting women plead their feelings, as an excuse for the violation of the marriage-vow. For his part, he had always determined to oppose all innovation, and the newfangled notions which incroached on the good old rules of conduct. We did not want French principles in public or private life—and, if women were allowed to plead their feelings, as an excuse or palliation of infidelity, it was opening a flood-gate for immorality. What virtuous woman thought of her feelings?—It was her duty to love and obey the man chosen by her parents and relations, who were qualified by their experience to judge better for her, than she could for herself. (107)

The differences between Wollstonecraft's novel and the other three novels explored in this chapter are poignant. Instead of showing a ruined woman, Wollstonecraft's main character, Maria, maintains virtue throughout the novel. Although her affair may seem scandalous, she insists it is not because she is faithful to her husband until he tries to prostitute her. She has no legal recourse or way to divorce him, but she realizes that it is unfair that she should live with someone of his moral character and in her mind is divorced from him. She believes that her affair with Darnford is a marriage to him even though it has not been legalized.

Both Maria and Jemima interact with mentally ill patients but are lucid throughout the whole novel even though they have sexual intercourse outside of marriage. The only truly mentally ill woman in the novel is a beautiful patient in the asylum who is forced to marry a much older man against her will. Unlike the sentimental novelists, Wollstonecraft is not afraid to show that mental illness or the allusion of mental illness is used as a tool to try to control and manipulate women. She makes it clear throughout

Maria and also *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that women need to be allowed

more opportunities to support themselves and better educations to help maintain their

mental health. While her works declined in popularity as her reputation was damaged

she did have a lingering influence and Charles Brockden Brown was one writer who took

her arguments to heart and infused his fiction with her ideology.

Chapter 3

Charles Brockden Brown: Reconceiving the Role of Mental Illness in Fiction

Charles Brockden Brown's novels *Arthur Mervyn, Ormond,* and *Wieland* were all published between 1798 and 1800. All three novels attempt to undermine the connection between mental illness and sexual misconduct that is prominent in most sentimental novels and even some medical discourse of the period. He is strongly influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft and many of her ideas are brought to life in Brown's fiction. Brown attacks traditional gender roles and education, strict patriarchy, and attitudes regarding female purity and sexuality while pumping his novels full of characters with mental illness for a variety of reasons.

Some reasons for mental illness in Brown's characters are hereditary, some seemingly the result from sexual behaviors, some from the loss of wealth, and others from varying passions. The characters that develop mental illness range from young to old and include both males and females. To determine whether to classify a character as mentally ill or not in Brown's novels, I examined the characters' behaviors and descriptions of them, and then compared their behaviors to the symptoms described by Benjamin Rush to conclude that the character truly exhibited signs of depression or mania. Most of the mentally ill characters in Brown's novels tend to have symptoms of mania, but in a couple of cases it is not always clear.

Most often Brown's narrators also noted which characters were mentally ill, and these characters' actions were in accordance with Rush's descriptions of mental illness. In *Wieland,* three characters develop mental illness; two females and one male. One

female has a family history of mental illness and is only temporarily ill after suffering a tremendous amount of loss and grief. The other female has an emotional affair with a man who is not her husband and dies. The male has a family history of mental illness and becomes manic after hearing mysterious voices and being told his sister has been seduced. In *Arthur Mervyn*, nine characters have mental illness five of whom are females and four are males. Four of the mentally ill females die and one lives while all four males die. Two of the females are seduced, one loses her wealth, and one suffers a great deal of grief. One male is a schemer and seducer who loses all of his wealth; two of the males are related and lose their wife/daughter, and there is no known cause for the fourth male's mental illness. In *Ormond*, there are four mentally ill characters: two female and two male. One of the females is seduced and commits suicide while the other is a prostitute who becomes a religious fanatic and eventually regains rationality but dies of a pulmonary disorder. Both men are killed; one is murdered and the other killed by a woman defending herself against him.

Charles Brockden Brown was greatly influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft's writing regardless of the backlash against her, and used his fiction to propagate her philosophies in regards to female education and place in society. He used mental illness and even seduction in *Wieland, Arthur Mervyn,* and *Ormond* to align himself with Wollstonecraft's radical feminism. Mary Wollstonecraft published a feminist manifesto entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in which she takes to task both male and female writers of the time in their propagation of staunch patriarchy which greatly hurt women and society. She says that some novelists know "little of human nature" and "work up stale tales, and describe meretricious scenes, all retailed in sentimental jargon,

which equally tend to corrupt the taste, and draw the heart aside from its daily duties"
(272). She is not subtle about her social and political agenda and rather than hiding
behind a screen of "appropriate" female writing she writes in a stereotypically male
genre. Following are some of the arguments Wollstonecraft makes in *A Vindication of
the Rights of Woman* that evidently influenced Brown because they come up several time
in his novels.

Wollstonecraft sees social inequality between men and women as something that
hurts both sexes because power imbalance creates people who are vain and self-absorbed.
She states, "But one power should not be thrown down to exalt another—for all power
inebriates weak man; and its abuse proves that the more equality there is established
among men, the more virtue and happiness will reign in society" (45). Wollstonecraft
claims that societal expectations of women keep them childish and are contradictory. She
notes that men complain about women's weak behavior, but believes that it is a direct
consequence of the way that women are raised and educated (49-50). She believes that
men and women could be equals if society would let them. She questions what
differences we would see in the behavior and intelligence of the sexes if both were given
the same opportunities (55). She argues that there are people, "tyrants and sensualists,"
that are very invested in keeping women uneducated because they want "blind
obedience" to create slaves and playthings (56).

Wollstonecraft argues very strongly for better education for women because she
believes that women need to be taught how to reason. She believes that women never
reach their full potential when they are kept ignorant. She states, "But in the education of
women, the cultivation of understanding is always subordinate to the acquirement of

some corporeal accomplishment; even while enervated by confinement and false notions of modesty, the body is prevented from attaining that grace and beauty which relaxed half-formed limbs never exhibit" (54). She believes that not educating women hurts marriages and relationships between men and women because once a woman loses her beauty or her husband is no longer awed by it then she has nothing more to offer and he will become distracted by someone else (60). She reasons that women's education makes them desirable for a short amount of time but precludes them from long term happiness (145).

Wollstonecraft also notes that it is a woman's reputation rather than her actual chastity that is important. She discusses the fact that innocent single women are taken advantage of by men and are ruined but married women are able to practice various arts to seduce men and are not destroyed because no damage is done to their reputation (200). According to Wollstonecraft and other women writers, this is unfortunate because a woman can never get her reputation back like a man can and there is little way to prove true virtue once a woman's reputation has been tainted (202).

Wollstonecraft was suspicious of a society in which people are educated to behave nicely rather than to reason and gain experience. She says that it is regrettable that both men and women are taught "manners before morals, and a knowledge of life before they have, from reflection, any acquaintance with the grand ideal outline of human nature" (56). She claims that women cannot be truly virtuous because they only do what is expected of them rather than choosing by their own reasoning to remain chaste (52). She credits women's "deplorable state" to their being forced to live in ignorance in order to insure that they maintained their chastity. Her claim in regards to this is that women

are overly concerned with their bodies and attractiveness because they are not taught to consider anything else nor are they allowed other pursuits that would distract them (83). She says that women are believed to be only a toy for man when he wishes to be amused, but she claims that this kind of relationship can only end badly because a husband will never be able to take his wife seriously or respect her. She states, "But when forbearance confounds right and wrong, it ceases to be a virtue; and, however convenient it may be found in a companion—that companion will ever be considered as an inferior, and only inspire a vapid tenderness, which easily degenerates into contempt" (69). She believed that the way women were educated did not gain them respect from men and that eventually a husband's love of his wife's beauty would diminish and her frailty would eventually make him despise her.

Wollstonecraft also desires that women be allowed to learn to support themselves with a trade. She says that many women are unhappily married and spend their lives wishing for a better husband. She asserts that a woman can live a "single life with dignity" if she has an occupation to support herself and that she is better off single than unhappily married (67). Wollstonecraft maintains that women were legally prostituted through marriage because for women the only means of rising in society and financial security is through marriage (104). She alleges that through a lack of education and means to support themselves women are more liable to turn to prostitution. She states,

> It does not frequently even deserve the name of error; for many innocent girls become the dupes of a sincere, affectionate heart, and still are more as it may emphatically be termed, *ruined* before they know the difference between virtue and vice:—and thus prepared by their education for infamy, they become

infamous…A woman who has lost her honour, imagines that she cannot fall lower, and as for recovering her former station, it is impossible; no exertion can wash this stain away. Losing thus every spur, and having no other means of support, prostitution becomes her only refuge, and the character is quickly depraved by circumstances over which the poor wretch has little power, unless she possesses an uncommon portion of sense and loftiness of spirit. Necessity never makes prostitution the business of men's lives… (120).

Wollstonecraft argues that no woman would become a prostitute if it were not for men's depravity and women's lack of sympathy for those fallen women. She asserts that shunning a ruined woman helps lead to her demise into prostitution (208). In order to prevent sexual misconduct, Wollstonecraft argues that men should be forced to be financially responsible to any women they seduce and that the physical and moral consequences of promiscuity for men should be discussed rather than just the ones for women (210). She also lists a number of occupational possibilities for women to perform which include doctors, nurses, politics, and business (221-22). Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* was initially well received by the general public because her arguments regarding women's education aligned with the political standpoint of the Republican mother. However, after her husband, William Godwin, published a biography about her that revealed she had children outside of marriage and attempted suicide, people turned against her, claiming her arguments were "morally corrupt" (Layson 169-70).

Regardless of claims that Wollstonecraft's assertions were "morally corrupt," Brown still implemented many of them in his novels. *Wieland, Arthur Mervyn,* and *Ormond* are rife with instances of the narrator arguing for more rights and better

education for women. Brown even pushes further than Wollstonecraft was willing to go and his use of mental illness plays a large role. In all three novels, mental illness is often used a means of creating Gothic-like novels. Barbara Judson argues that Brown uses Gothic fiction as the genre in which he chooses to write in order to "highlight the alienation –even terror–experienced by a consciousness newly released from the confines of custom and tradition" and that the uncanny can "hold revolutionary possibilities" (25). In all three novels, Brown uses mental illness and Gothic elements as a way to destabilize traditional philosophy and gender roles.

Wieland is an especially sensational novel based on a true story which Brown hints at in the preface as a way to substantiate what he sees as truth in the novels. In the preface, he states,

> In support of its possibility the writer must appeal to physicians and to men conversant with the latent springs and occasional perversions of the human mind. It will not be objected that the delusions are rare, because it is the business of moral painters to exhibit their subject in the most instructive and memorable forms. If history furnishes one parallel fact, it is sufficient vindications of the Writer; but most readers will probably recollect an authentic case, remarkable similar to that of Wieland. (4)

The "authentic case" Brown refers to is that of James Yates. Yates violently murdered his whole family in 1781 when he believed that God told him to sacrifice them (Hughes 44). Shortly thereafter, in 1782, another man, William Beadle killed his family and committed suicide because he had lost his fortune (Hughes 45). After the Beadle

murders, there was a great deal of speculation as to the cause of the murders, and at least

one writer cited infidelity as the cause. The murders along with Beadle's writings

outlining his reasoning were used in political debates as examples to further a particular

political or moral agenda (Williams 646, 651). The Yates murders did not receive as

much public attention with only a few editors putting a brief mention of it in their

papers, stating minimal facts until 1796 (Williams 647) when an anonymous writer,

claiming to know intimate details of the tragedy, wrote a story called "The Republican

Stepmother" in *The New York Weekly Magazine* which was known for its overt

moralizing rather than objectivity or accuracy (Hughes 51). The writer admits to

combining both fact and fiction to create "The Republican Stepmother" (52). The article

focuses quite a bit of attention on the female members of the family and seems to

suggest that "masculine aggression can be restrained and contained by female agency"

because the sister of Yates is able to help him back to rationality and his oldest daughter

almost convinces him to stop his murderous deeds (Hughes 56-7). Brown goes even

further in *Wieland* than the writer of "The Republican Mother" in that he tells the whole

novel through the perspective of Wieland's sister, Clara, the sole survivor of the

calamity Wieland inflicts upon his family.

Clara is writing the novel at the request of some friends and due to her belief that

she has a moral obligation to share information so that it may help others (5). She

begins the novel by giving a lengthy background of the Wieland family which includes

the story of her father and his mysterious death. Her father was a religious fanatic who

despised social worship so he created his own temple on his property where he would go

twice a day, once at noon and once at midnight. He begins to have premonitions about

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his death and believes he is going to be punished for failing to fulfill a duty to God (14). His fears culminate in his apparent spontaneous combustion. The Wieland children's mother dies shortly after their father, and they are raised by a maiden aunt (22). While this aunt makes sure that the children, Clara and Theodore, are educated, she does not provide them with much structure or social interaction outside of their home in the form of religion or school. Clara tells readers that her aunt saved them "from the corruption and tyranny of colleges and boarding schools" (22). The Wielands begin to withdraw from the small community they are initially in with their friend, Catharine Pleyel, whom Theodore Wieland eventually marries. Henry Pleyel, Catharine's brother, arrives at the Wieland home and the family seems to be happy and the setting idyllic when a man, Carwin, arrives and the family starts to hear mysterious voices. Readers realize early in Clara's story that though the family may feel safe and at peace, something is amiss in their little community.

These voices create a great deal of mischief and eventually tragedy caused by delusions including Clara believing someone is plotting to murder her, Pleyel believing a lover is dead, and Pleyel believing Clara is having a sexual relationship with Carwin. The voices either directly or indirectly cause Wieland to murder his wife and children and attempt to murder Clara and Pleyel. Wieland believes the voices are supernatural and that they tell him he must sacrifice his family to God. Clara eventually discovers that Carwin is the source of the voices and blames him for her family's destruction, but there are indications throughout the novel that Carwin's actions may have simply sped up the process for Wieland's impending mental illness as Clara seems to be the only person in the novel who is surprised by Wieland's behavior and violence (Harris 206).

Indeed, upon reflection, Clara notes that her brother's personality tended toward a gloomy disposition and that he resembled her father, who seems to be mentally unbalanced, in many aspects. She tells us that growing up

> His [Wieland] deportment was grave, considerate, and thoughtful...the images that visited us were blithesome and gay, but those with which he was most familiar were of an opposite hue. They did not generate affliction or fear, but they diffused over his behavior a certain air of forethought and sobriety. The principle effect of this temper was visible in his features and tones. These, in general, bespoke a sort of thrilling melancholy. (25)

Clara also indicates that she was subconsciously aware of the type of violence Wieland was capable of when she describes a nightmare she has in which Wieland is trying to tempt her to her death (71) as well as when she realizes there is an intruder in her closet and automatically assumes it must be Wieland who wishes to harm her in some way (101).

After Wieland commits the murders, Clara sinks into depression temporarily, but the scope of her disease does not compare to that of Wieland's. In fact, she recovers enough despite the tragedy she has endured to agree to flee to Europe for her own protection from Wieland proving that, though she is a woman, she has more strength of mind than her brother and is able to survive a great deal of grief. However, before she leaves, she returns to her house where she has a confrontation with both Wieland and Carwin. Wieland eventually commits suicide, Carwin flees, and Clara again succumbs to depression. She recovers enough to write the text and relive the horror after which she

believes she will die, but she survives and concludes the novel by telling readers that she

has recuperated and married Pleyel. Brown's use of mental illness in this novel helps to

add to the Gothic elements of the novel, but it also serves to undercut many of the claims

sentimental fiction attempts to make in regards to female sexuality, female capability,

reputation, and mental illness.

Like *Wieland, Arthur Mervyn* contains numerous mentally ill characters, but they

add less to the Gothic element of the novel and serve to really highlight some of what

Brown seems to believe are true causes of mental illness. These include the education,

social and financial status of the character, and other circumstances the character may

find him or herself in. The novel is narrated by two men, Dr. Stevens and Arthur

Mervyn. The first part is narrated by Dr. Stevens who has taken Arthur Mervyn in after

finding him very ill on the street one night. He offers to take Mervyn on as an apprentice,

but finds out Mervyn has had some shady dealings in the not so distant past. As a way to

discover the truth and defend Mervyn, Dr. Stevens begins the text and later has Mervyn

take it over for his own defense. The novel has a coming of age feeling to it and

describes Mervyn's journey from naïve farm boy to an experienced man of the city.

Mervyn leaves home after his father, a farmer, marries the family's milkmaid. Upon

reaching the city, Mervyn is completely out of money, has no place to stay, and knows

only one man whom he cannot locate. After spending a frightful night in the closet of

strangers, a victim of an apparent prank, Mervyn sets out hoping to return to the country

to find work on a farm. On his way out of town, however, he happens across a seemingly

wealthy man, Welbeck, who hires Mervyn as a clerk. Arthur soon discovers that

Welbeck has come by his money dishonestly and has seduced and impregnated the

rightful owner of his wealth, Clemenza Lodi. Readers later learn Welbeck has been speculating with his money and is about to lose everything. Later a man, who is the brother of another of Welbeck's conquests, arrives to duel, and Welbeck kills him in the duel. Welbeck and Mervyn flee Welbeck's house together and Welbeck disappears, faking suicide, while Mervyn finds work on a farm outside of Philadelphia.

Arthur becomes friends with the family he is working for, the Hadwins, and decides he is in love for the second time in the novel, this time with the youngest Hadwin daughter, Eliza. In order to impress the family, he returns to Philadelphia in the middle of the yellow fever outbreak to find the oldest daughter's fiancé and bring him home. Mervyn falls ill at which point he meets Dr. Stevens. In the second section, Mervyn attempts to find solutions for some of the problems that Welbeck has set into motion. He finds a wealthy female guardian for Clemenza Lodi impregnated, removing her from the alleged brothel Welbeck put her in. He protects Eliza from a tyrannical uncle who gains possession of her home and is named her guardian. He also returns money that was on the body of the man Welbeck killed to the rightful owners. During this process, Mervyn meets Achsa Fielding, a woman who is several years older than he is, who has been married before, and who has a child, and marries her at the end of the novel. The novel is wrought with instances of seduction and mental illness with Mervyn and Dr. Stevens recording each of them.

Ormond is the novel that seems to be the most influenced by Wollstonecraft. As in the other two novels, mental illness is present in many characters, but Brown is more overt in his assertions that the circumstances each character is in have caused it. The novel is narrated by Sophia Courtland, a friend of the main character in the novel,

Constantia Dudley. She is writing a letter to someone named I.E. Rosenburg who is presumed to be a suitor of Constance, but the text never confirms this. The novel follows Constance through her many difficulties which include poverty, illness, an ailing father, and sexual violence.

Ormond is highly ambiguous on what exactly makes a virtuous character. It becomes obvious that that Ormond is depraved despite his incredible rationality and willingness to do good deeds for those less fortunate. Martinette has strong political beliefs that propel her into serving in the military during the French Revolution, but Sophia seems to think that she is grotesque because her propensity towards violence is unbecoming in a woman, and Constance who is arguably the most virtuous character, is forced to take Ormond's life in defense of her virginity and possibly her life. Readers cannot even be sure that Constance has killed Ormond in self-defense or has maintained her virginity because there are no witnesses. Brown uses the generic form of the seduction novel, but infuses it with radicalism turning it into a critique rather than an endorsement of the genre (Hamelman 317). One of the differences between *Ormond* and other seduction novels is that Ormond has no particular interest in ruining any of the women he seduces. In fact, he tells Constance that putting so much importance on a woman's virginity is ridiculous. Ormond also does not refuse to marry anyone because of her social standing like many other seduction novels' rakes (Lukasik 493). Ormond is interested in gratifying his sexual desire without the binds of marriage or the impersonality of prostitution. Both women he chooses are women he is attracted to who come from good families but are reduced to poverty through no power of their own. He

feels that the arrangement is good for both parties because he gets his desire fulfilled while the woman is financially taken care of.

Ormond discusses women's education and ability to work and think rationally more than the other two novels. It also contains the most sexual violence of the three novels with at least seven rape and sexual seduction attempts (Layson 160). Constance herself is the victim of three of these attempts. Critic Hana Layson argues that the result of so much focus on sexual violence is that the novel becomes critical of republican masculinity and rationality as well as parts of Wollstonecraft's Vindication (163). While Brown attempts to demonstrate Wollstonecraft's desire to show that women are capable of rational thinking and many other qualities and talents that are typically thought of as masculine, he takes issue with Wollstonecraft's inability to question the idea that evidence of virtue is tied in with rationality (Layson 164-5). The most depraved character in Ormond is also the most "rational," but he takes his rationality to the extreme, not allowing any feelings of love or compassion to alter his malevolent passions or to persuade him away from his arbitrary beliefs so in this case rationality does not equal virtue.

Sophia opens the novel with the Dudley family history and their subsequent fall into poverty the family faces after being swindled by Stephen Dudley's business partner, Craig. The family leaves their home and goes to Philadelphia to avoid the embarrassment of their reduced state. Dudley's wife does not survive long after they lose their fortune, and Dudley, who is unaccustomed to and does not like to work for a living, falls into depression and begins to drink heavily until he loses his sight rendering him

unable to work. Against her father's wishes, Constance begins to provide for her father and a servant by doing needlework.

The time frame that the Dudleys are in Philadelphia also happens to fall during the onslaught of the yellow fever. Constance falls ill after taking care of a woman whose brother abandons her in the throes of sickness. The yellow fever descriptions serve the purpose of establishing the strength and goodness of Constance's character (Hedges 296). Constance initially comes into contact with Ormond after having followed Craig to Ormond's home to request money and she piques Ormond's curiosity. She later comes into contact with him when she befriends his mistress, Helena, and tries to convince him to marry Helena. Ormond refuses and offers Constance some of the same arguments she has just had with her father who tried to convince her to marry someone unsuitable for her but who could provide financial stability. He then decides that he would like to pursue Constance so he tells Helena that he wishes to discontinue their relationship but that he will provide for her and tell everyone that they are siblings. This causes Helena to commit suicide. His callous treatment of Helena is the first cue for readers to the fact that Ormond is depraved. The extent of his depravity, however, does not become clear until the end of the novel when he has Stephen Dudley murdered by Craig because he believes that Dudley is in the way of Constance becoming his mistress. At the close of the novel, he follows Constance into an abandoned house and, at first, attempts to seduce her but she will not consent so he then threatens to rape her. She threatens to commit suicide to prevent her rape which he says will not stop his sexual violation of her so she kills him in self-defense. We also learn that he was in a barbarous army and has murdered and raped

previously. The novel closes with Sophia and Constance leaving for Europe to join Sophia's husband.

Some critics see Brown's novels as progressive but not all have been kind to him. Critics tend to be split on how they perceive his writing depending on what aspects they are looking at. If looking at how he deals with feminist issues, critics generally tend to find him radical for his day (Layson 160), but historically, Brown is often left out of the feminist literary canon despite his work for a women's movement to make room for novels such as *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* both written by females. According to one critic this is unfortunate because, he claims, "...the central irony of the case for Brown is striking: only an overly eager analysis of what is seen as implicit feminism in the fictions of early American women novelists could attempt to minimize the most startling feature of Brown's career: that, among the first novelists working in the United States, he was the most committed to probing and dramatizing the conflict between patriarchal practices and the challenges to them raised by early feminist critiques" (Lewis 168). One reason for Brown's exclusion could be that his writing is at times difficult to understand and ambiguous. Readers are not sure what to think about the characters at the end of the novels because they and the situations they find themselves in are complicated.

It is difficult to compare Brown's novels with others of the period because the characters are different in many ways. Brown's female characters have been compared to and even said to resemble the heroines in sentimental novels, but his characters are able to withstand challenges and affronts to their mental and physical well-being that sentimental characters would not have been able to handle. Sydney Krause states that "Brown's women are by and large more self-possessed in crises than the sentimental

heroine, and though circumstances may render them less than tranquil, they are subject to grief without being destroyed by it. Though not unscathed, they are survivors" (352). Brown's forward thinking in regard to women's rights likely stems from his background as a Quaker as well as his education and social community.

Brown was well-versed in philosophy, law, and medical discourse. He attended law school for a short time and befriended a group of doctors and intellectuals in Philadelphia. They formed what became known as the "Friendly Club" in which they discussed and debated literature, medical documents, moral and political topics (Kafer 546). Through his association with these men, Brown became concerned with the power of knowledge and the means in which it is disseminated accurately. One friend who influenced Brown was Dr. Elihu Smith who believed that a nation could be destroyed through lack of knowledge. He believed that ancient nations were as badly damaged by rumors of disease and superstitions that claimed disease was punishment from God or gods as they were by disease itself (Waterman 22). Eradicating ignorance became one of Brown's goals through his writing. He believed that creating an educated public would prevent recurring epidemics and help prevent fear from causing faction and creating threats (Waterman 22). It was an accepted belief that writing could sway popular opinion, teach rational thinking, and expound upon the avoidance of vices (Ellis 4, McAuley 313, 321, 324). With that in mind, Brown decided to write for a living.

Brown took his responsibility as a writer very seriously. He posited himself as a moral observer (Waterman 224), and believed that he had a "moral responsibility to the public" to write (Ellis 6). Brown was concerned that information be presented as accurately as possible and that readers understand the difference between truth and

imagination. He stated in his essay, "The Difference Between History and Romance" that "curiosity is not content with noting history and recording the *actions* of men. It likewise seeks to know the *motives* by which the agent is impelled to the performance of these actions, but motives are modifications of thoughts which cannot be subjected to the senses. They cannot be certainly known" ("The Difference Between History and Romance" 10). Brown also noted that curiosity is "eager to infer from the present state of things, their former or future condition" (6). Brown's preoccupation with curiosity and the rhetoric of writing carries into his novels.

Brown used memoirs and letters to create his novels rather than an omniscient narrator. The purpose of this ostensibly is to create a more reliable document, but in fact, Brown manages to question the authenticity of the text (Bell 159). While this may seem counterproductive, Brown creates novels in which readers are forced to think about characters' actions, whether the narrator can be trusted, and infer consequences and motives of characters rather than tell them what the characters are feeling or thinking at all times. In *Arthur Mervyn*, Mervyn says that people judge others' actions according to their own characters. They make inferences based on what their own motives and actions would be and by not knowing someone it is easy to judge without compassion and without truly knowing the circumstances of the other person (249-54). Brown set the novels up in such a way that readers have a difficult time judging the characters' actions. Brown does not allow himself to write in a formulaic way. Although readers may think that there will be a particular outcome to one of his novels or stories within the novels, more often than not, Brown sets his readers up to expect one conclusion but then he gives a different one. He always keeps his readers off-balance. Brown was also concerned

with how rumor and embellishment could affect listeners and readers. For instance, in *Wieland*, Clara Wieland is writing the novel in memoir style, and like Brown, she claims to be writing for the good of the public. She says that she hopes that others will learn from her family's mistakes and that she believes the public has a right to information (5). Clara tells readers her whole family history and does not dwell on or moralize on her brother's actions. She spends most of the novel allowing readers to view her own thoughts and feelings as well as see all of the things that were taking place in her very small community and relates the details of her brother's murders quickly and without much embellishment unlike other writings claiming to tell with accuracy the James Yates murder story.

Story-telling and rumor very negatively impact characters' physical and mental well-being in all three of Brown's novels. Many of the rumors are about the yellow plague, but Brown sets up the scenarios so that one can see the connection between the problems of rumor causing physical disease to that of rumors of mental illness causing mental diseases. In *Arthur Mervyn* we are told:

> As often as the tale was embellished with new incidents, or inforced by new testimony, the hearer grew pale, his breath was stifled with inquietudes, his blood was chilled and his stomach was bereaved of its usual energies. A temporary indisposition was produced in many. Some were haunted by a melancholy bordering on madness, and some, in consequence of sleepless panics, for which no cause could be found, were attacked by lingering or mortal diseases. (101)

Fear subverts understanding and causes characters to act in unpredictable ways (*Arthur Mervyn* 122). One example of this fear causing physical disease is that of Mr. Baxter in *Ormond*. Baxter witnessed Martinette burying her old guardian late at night when he (Baxter) was in a fragile state of mind. He believed that the man had died of the yellow fever (which he had not), and Baxter fell ill almost immediately. In *Arthur Mervyn*, Susan's fear for her fiancé combined with her grief over her father's death cause her to become manic and die.

Like rumors of physical illness, when a seduction story is told, the teller generally focuses on the sensational aspects of the story such as the seduction, mental illness, and death of the young woman and the teller tends to embellish the story. This focus on these aspects can cause the backstory of the young woman to get lost and makes the story more scandalous and frightening to young woman than it should be. Brown makes it clear that those with over-active imaginations can cause more harm than good. For example, in *Wieland*, readers are told early on that Pleyel is very imaginative and likes to make stories up according to his own understanding and rejects anything that does not conform to his reason (27). We are also given evidence that he is a jealous lover and is hasty to jump to the conclusion that his current love interest must be involved with someone else (45). When he receives word that his lover in Prussia is dead, he becomes interested in Clara Wieland and almost immediately becomes jealous of Carwin, believing Clara is in love with him. This makes him hasty to accuse Clara of having a sexual relationship with Carwin based on snippets of things he has seen or heard despite having known Clara and her unwavering virtue most of his life.

Pleyel's invention creates a chain reaction that has tragic consequences for the Wieland family. It causes Clara to become desperate to clear her name which causes her to return home late which in turn causes Wieland to go to her house to find her. On the trip to her house, he has an intense spiritual experience that culminates in the murder of his family (188). It can also be argued that Pleyel's accusations help to spur Wieland to mental illness. Pleyel going to Wieland to tattle on his sister reminds Wieland that it is his role to protect the family's honor and motivates him to act. Although Wieland seems to believe Clara, he expects her to return to his home after trying to reason with Pleyel and she is apparently out late. He can only imagine where she might be and when he finds her house empty, he believes he hears God's voice telling him to kill his wife.

Catherine may seem like an unusual choice for his first victim because she has no voice in the novel. She seems to be a faithful spouse and good mother, but given the beliefs about contagion and sexual conduct it is reasonable to assume that Wieland was afraid Catherine may be contaminated by Clara's actions. If Catharine has in fact been contaminated then Wieland has a lot at stake in regards to his children. Catharine is "sacrificed" because she cannot perform her duty as mother and raise her children with impeccable morals. Wieland seems pleased with the fact that he will be the one to raise his children when he is "commanded" to kill them as well. He says, "A voice spake like that which I had before heard—'Thou hast done well; but all is not done—the sacrifice is incomplete—thy children must be offered—they must perish with their mother!—'" (197). The damage to the children has already been done. The children have already been influenced by their mother and if her chastity has been negatively influenced then she would have passed this on to the children who would imitate their mother's actions

because she has the primary responsibility for shaping them into moral, independent individuals.

Another way that readers can see that Wieland's insanity is linked to Clara's sexuality is by looking at his emotional responses to Pleyel's accusations and Clara's defense of herself. When Pleyel goes to Wieland and accuses Clara of having an affair with Carwin, Wieland exhibits signs of emotional upheaval. Catharine tells Clara, "He took your brother to walk with him. Some topic must have deeply engaged them for Wieland did not return till after the breakfast hour was passed and returned alone. His disturbance was excessive, but he would not listen to my importunities, or tell me what had happened" (121-22). At this point Wieland demonstrates some emotion, but will not tell Catharine what is going on. He simply reassures her that Clara is safe (122). However, when Wieland meets Clara, he shows no signs of being upset. He, in fact, appears to be perfectly calm. According to Benjamin Rush, a person can quell a passion for a short period of time before it erupts, but it will eventually erupt in a big way. He states,

> But there are instances, in which the sympathy of the heart with the whole system is so completely dissevered by grief, that the subject of it discovers not one mark of it in his countenance or behavior. On the contrary, he sometimes exhibits signs of unbecoming levity in his intercourse with the world. This state of mind soon passes away, and is generally followed by all the obvious and natural sign of the most poignant and durable grief. (318-19)

The response that Rush describes is how Wieland reacts to Pleyel's accusations of Clara. What is telling about the extent to which he goes to subvert his emotions is the fact he is pretty apathetic to the reality that his sister had a man in her home who threatened to rape and murder her. In his confession, he writes that the events the previous evening, "suggested the existence of some danger; but this danger was without a distinct form in our imaginations, and scarcely ruffled our tranquility" (188). It's more than a little improbable that a murder and rape threat which scared Clara enough to cause her to decide to move in with Wieland and his family "scarcely ruffled" their peace especially considering Wieland and Catharine were concerned enough to wait up for Clara. Wieland is only able to control his emotions for a short period of time before they take control and transform him into a madman.

A couple of other things that are suggestive of the link between Wieland's madness and Clara's sexuality are that Wieland tries to kill Clara and Pleyel, but does not pursue Carwin. Wieland also kills Catharine in Clara's bedroom and places her body on the bed. Not only does Wieland murder Catharine in Clara's bedroom, but he attempts to murder Clara there twice. Clara's bedroom is her personal space where she keeps her journals and allows herself to create her own identity which includes her sexuality. Not only that, but her bed is the place that would be the presumed place that most of the sexual activity she is accused of would have taken place so it does not seem unusual for Wieland to choose that site as the place to perform his "sacrifices" to show his religious virtue.

It is interesting that Wieland has no desire to kill Carwin when he is the only who is accused of having the affair with Clara and then threatens her with rape. Not only

does he not pursue Carwin, but he even tells him to leave when he attempts to kill Clara the second time (251). One explanation for this is that Carwin is not actually the threat to Clara's sexuality, but that Pleyel is. If we assume that Carwin did not direct Wieland to kill his family and that he really had no intention to rape Clara, then Carwin's actions actually do little more than expose the problems within the Wieland family. Wieland is a religious fanatic before Carwin enters the picture and Carwin's ventriloquism just exposes the extent of Wieland's fanaticism. Clara tells us early in the novel that Wieland was always finding things to reconfirm his beliefs about God. She states, "Moral necessity and calvinistic inspiration, were the props on which my brother thought proper to repose" (28). Carwin even goes so far as to tell all of the characters at one point what he has done to create the voices; he just does not take responsibility for the voice that Wieland heard command his sacrifices (86). Wieland still clings to the idea that the voice must be supernatural and there is no human agent involved.

There is sexual tension between Clara and Pleyel before Carwin appears. Clara admits to us that she has feelings for Pleyel and is upset that he thinks it is funny to tease her about being in love with Carwin. She tells us that it upsets her that he finds mirth by the fact that she may have feelings for Carwin and that it "produced in my friend none but ludicrous sensations" (80). It does not take long for Pleyel to realize, however, that he has feelings for Clara as well. Carwin is able to recognize that Pleyel has feelings for Clara which is one of the reasons why he decides to trick him into believing Clara has had an affair. He tells Clara, "It was plain that Pleyel was a devoted lover, but he was, at the same time, a man of cold resolves and exquisite sagacity" (239). Carwin simply brings out jealousy in Pleyel. Shirley Samuels states, "Published while the fear of

contagion by the alien was at its height, the novel both blames Carwin for introducing sexuality, disorder, and violence into the Wieland family, and explains that introduction as nothing more than an enhancement of sexual and familial tensions already present" (*Romance* 49). One possibility for Clara's intense hatred of Carwin even after he saves her life from Wieland could be because she is aware that he is the one that exposed the family's failings, and she blames him for the shame that Wieland has brought on their family.

Carwin admits to Clara that he studied the family before he appeared on the scene and he used the information he found out about them to manipulate them with the voices. He also admits that he even went so far to use her diary to be able to mimic her ideas well (235). Because he has access to her private thoughts he is able to expose and use them against Clara. Pleyel is the one who first introduces Wieland to Clara's sexuality by accosting him with accusations of her alleged sexual activity. He is also the one who seems the most likely to ruin her reputation by spreading the rumor that she is unchaste which would bring shame to Wieland and his whole family. Pleyel actually looks more like a typical seducer by the end of the novel than Carwin does.

One reason Clara is so exposed is because she is naïve. She has not been educated traditionally which helps her to maintain her sanity, but she has no experience of the world. Brown makes it clear in his novels that education and experience are both important for survival for women. Education plays a major role in a woman's ability to withstand seducers and keep her mental health. Constance believes that one of the reasons that women are subjected to sexual harassment is through their own ignorance and cowardice. They do not realize they are allowed to stand up for themselves when

men make off-color remarks to them (71). The women who are able to defend themselves are well-educated in non-traditional ways and are willing to work or learn skills that allow them to survive on their own. Those educated according to traditional standards in Brown's novels are more susceptible to seduction and mental illness. According to Sophia, most women are educated in such a way to make them "sensual" and "ornamental" (*Ormond* 25).

The heroines of these novels are not educated according to the period's standards, but are given a more "masculine" education enabling them to reason and defend themselves. In *Ormond,* Sophia's mother is seduced at a young age and eventually becomes a prostitute. Sophia believes that her mother's actions are a direct result of the education she received. In *Ormond,* we are shown that this type of education causes women to be easily manipulated as is the case of Helena. Ormond argues that becoming his mistress would be no different than being his wife. Helena is unable to formulate an argument against Ormond's reasoning and has so little knowledge of the world that she does not realize that he is using her current situation as a means to get his way. Ormond also does not consider marrying Helena because she is very much his inferior in intellect. In fact, he believes all women are inherently less intelligent than men because he has never met one that is his equal until he meets Constance. Sophia makes it clear that Helena is not naturally unintelligent; she simply has not been taught how to think in such a way as to be attractive to someone like Ormond (95-96). Unlike Helena, Constance has been taught how to debate and reason and Ormond is fascinated by her. He says that although he believes some of her ideas are wrong, she always reasons well (118). Constance's ability to reason and think quickly are what end up saving her from Ormond.

Martinette is another character who has been educated in science, math, history, politics, and language. She is able to use her education to procure a position to travel with a wealthy woman and marry a man of her own choice. She develops very strong political beliefs and participates in war with great valor even going so far as to be willing to go on a suicide mission to kill an enemy. She is able to live by herself and support herself, and while Sophia does not approve of her love of war, Constance is enraptured by her and takes to heart some of her teachings. Sophia is educated by Constance's father along with Constance as a child, and she is able to travel from Europe to America without her husband. Because her mother passes away, she has also learned how to handle matters of property exchange and estate planning so she is able to assist Constance in selling her properties after her father dies.

In *Wieland*, Clara is educated according to her own understanding rather than in a strict structure. Clara decides to live by herself rather than with her brother and of all of the characters of the novel she is the most open to various opinions and options when it comes to the mysterious voices everyone keeps hearing. She contemplates the voices and does not rule anything out in regards to them unlike her brother who automatically jumps to the conclusion that they must be supernatural (85). One of the reasons that Carwin is so interested in Clara is because he is told by his lover (Clara's servant) that she is unlike other women. She does not frighten easily and has great reasoning abilities. Clara does not completely forgo all feminine education. For example, she learns to draw, but she does not do it to show off her talent instead she uses it as a tool to help her reflect.

In *Arthur Mervyn*, there are several women that Arthur Mervyn is romantically interested in with varying degrees of education. We are led to believe that Clemenza is

more traditionally educated in that she is rich, seems very sensual and given to feeling, and appears to have the attainments of a woman educated to be pleasing. She also has a language barrier so she is seduced by Welbeck and eventually is taken care of by several characters in the novel because she has no other way to support herself. Eliza Hadwin is a farmer's daughter so she has not received a useless education designed to help her find a husband, but she is highly naïve. She has been raised on a farm and should be able to support herself by hiring herself out as a laborer. She has a desire to learn and wants to live in Philadelphia, but Mervyn knows that she lacks the education and skills to support herself there. She is eventually taken in by Achsa Fielding and Mervyn. Achsa Fielding, on the other hand, has been educated in Europe and is Jewish so she has a richer cultural background than most of the other women in the novel. Not much is mentioned about her formal education, but Fielding has lived through a failed marriage, motherhood, the loss of wealth, and the death of her parents. Achsa is independently wealthy and is able to support herself along with several others.

Of the women in Brown's novels who are educated traditionally, Helena is seduced, depressed, and commits suicide, Clemenza is seduced and for a time frantic with grief, and Sophia's mother suffers from mental illness after she converts to Christianity and until she develops a pulmonary disease while Constance, Martinette, Achsa, and Sophia never suffer any form of mental illness although they face difficult challenges both mentally and physically. Even Clara who has bouts of mental illness following her family's murders and her brother's attempt on her life, maintains sanity and reasoning abilities in critical moments. The women who are educated non-traditionally resist patriarchy in its most extreme forms and refuse to give in to societal pressures which tell

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them that patiently suffering in timidity and weakness is the best way to prove themselves as virtuous, good women.

It becomes evident in Brown's novels that patriarchy and the embracement of frailty in women are causes of mental illness. Brown plays with gender roles in all three novels and sets up a pattern in which the "masculine" women and "effeminate" men, for the most part, escape mental illness while the most extreme representations of tradition gender roles tend to suffer the most violent forms of mental illness or cause it. Ormond, Pleyel, Welbeck, and Theodore Wieland are examples of the men most associated with patriarchy while Arthur Mervyn, Carwin, and Dr. Stevens reject stereotypical gender roles. Mr. Dudley is caught in the middle of the two. At times, he is feminized and rejects traditional roles such as in his daughter's education, but at other times, when he is mortified by his financial decisions, he embraces traditional gender roles by discouraging Constance from working and encouraging an inappropriate marriage in order to elevate their financial standing. Those characters who do not conform to traditional gender roles can become problematic for those who do. Clara claims that meeting Carwin for the first time is the first broken link in a chain (61). Carwin is charming and different from Wieland and Pleyel which becomes obvious to Clara almost immediately. He has the ability to expose the danger of the patriarchy that Wieland and Pleyel hold onto, and cause Clara to question some of the ideology she has always taken for granted (Leeuwen 9). In Carwin's presence, Pleyel turns into a "patriarchal tyrant" and Carwin "reveals that behind Theodore's mask of enlightened rationalism hides a staunch patriarch whose authority is founded on and supported by an age-old androcentric perspective on the nature of familial society and the power of structures that oppose it" (Leeuwen 1).

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Carwin's mere presence causes Pleyel to become the victim of "real terror" which, according to David Hogsette, is "the tragic loss of rational thought and the subjugation of ones will to the power of an external voice and social code" (3). Carwin is intrigued by Clara as a rational person and is interested in seeing examples of her courage and fortitude rather than seeing her as an object to be possessed and idolized.

Ormond is a resolute patriarch who believes no woman is worthy of marriage to him until he meets Constance. He treats women as if they are objects rather than equals. In the end of the novel, he is killed by Constance who is not willing to be treated as a prize. In *Arthur Mervyn*, Welbeck is the patriarch who suffers the most as he develops mental illness and dies in jail while Arthur Mervyn is feminized by his rejection of male gender roles. Welbeck believes that Clemenza, as a young woman, has no ability to handle her money or take care of herself so he takes it upon himself to become her guardian and take possession of her wealth. Ironically, it is Welbeck who cannot be trusted with money as he squanders it by carrying on a lifestyle he cannot support and he takes advantage of his role of guardian to seduce Clemenza and impregnate her. Welbeck makes attempts to take advantage of both men and women and when given opportunities to redeem himself, he refuses and thinks only of what can benefit him. Mervyn is seduced, so to speak, by Welbeck as well early on in the novel, but as a man he is able to overcome the seduction and thrive based on the lessons he has learned from Welbeck. He rejects most "masculine" pursuits and adopts feminized roles such as mending socks. His femininity does not sit well with those who are accustomed to strict patriarchy. His father, for example, thinks he is lazy while a young woman from his neighborhood is distrustful of him.

Arthur spends most of his time protecting various women from what he believes

are dangerous situations such as living with prostitutes, financial instability, and

tyrannical family members. Most of these women are potential love interests for Mervyn

and "embody a different aspect of American femininity under assault by libertine

masculinities" (Traister 3). He is rewarded for his protection of these women by

eventually gaining a position as apprentice to Dr. Stevens and marrying a wealthy

woman. Although Mervyn protects women, he does not take it on himself to be their

providers. He sets Eliza up in a situation so that she is safe, but he forces her to be

responsible for her finances after the money she currently has is gone. He returns money

to the Maurices, but has respect for Fanny Maurice because she is making a living for

herself by teaching music. He convinces Achsa and Mrs. Wentworth to take on the

financial burden of Clemenza who cannot speak English. In many ways, he expects the

women he helps to discard their vulnerability and become like Clara, Constance, and

Achsa.

Brown was likely influenced by Wollstonecraft in his desire that women reject

weakness as a means to gain power over men, and instead learn to support themselves.

Wollstonecraft wanted women to be more like Clara Wieland and Constantia Dudley.

She disliked the fact that men encouraged women to feign frailty as a way to attract them,

and that women fell for the ploy, embracing weakness as if it were an asset rather than an

encumbrance (77). Wollstonecraft believed that as long as women were kept weak, they

were limited in opportunities to support themselves and were believed to be less

intelligent than men (63). Wollstonecraft states, "Weakness may excite tenderness, and

gratify the arrogant pride of man; but the lordly caresses of a protector will not gratify a

noble mind that pants for, and deserves to be respected" (62). Like Wollstonecraft,

Brown wants women to have more opportunities and finds strong women more desirable

than weak women. Wollstonecraft and Brown had opposition in this belief as other

writers of the time believed that to allow a woman to perform masculine roles was to

make "whores" out of them (Layson 172). Brown combats this notion by showing frailty

in women as an unattractive trait that leads to mental illness and death. Dr. Stevens

believes that his wife is frail and sickly, but she does not shrink away from difficult tasks.

When he finds Mervyn on the street, she does not hesitate to comply with her husband's

wishes that they bring him in even though she knows she will be doing the majority of

the care for him. Stevens also notes that she was unaccustomed to some of the tasks in

regard to the care of her child and household that she was performing at the time. The

fact that she does not wallow in her frailty and weak "constitution" seems to endear her

even more to Dr. Stevens (7). Dr. Stevens is also impressed later in the novel when he

realizes that a friend's sister is doing bookwork for his friend's business. He is surprised

when she proves herself to be more capable than her brother and she seems to enjoy the

work. He says that he assumed "intellectual weakness" because she has "external frailty"

(199-200).

Brown pushes this notion of female strength even further than Wollstonecraft was

willing to go. She compares the heroism that is believed to be present in men to justify

war to the heroism that could be present in women if they were able to reason, but she

quickly states that she is not trying to develop female soldiers (219). Brown, on the other

hand, uses a female soldier in *Ormond*. Martinette goes to war because she believes the

cause is just and fights as fiercely as the male soldiers. She is willing to sacrifice herself

for her cause if she needs to, but never has to cross that bridge. While Sophia does not approve of her actions, Brown does not present her in a negative way. She is an example of a completely independent woman who fits into society if she wishes, but she can hold her own counsel as well. Constance is initially enamored with her and eventually mirrors Martinette's actions to a certain extent when Ormond threatens her.

Women who are not willing to work or prove their strength do not fare well in Brown's novels. They tend to succumb to mental illness or die. Helena, Catherine, Mrs. Maurice, Arthur Mervyn's sister, and Susan are all weak women in one way or another. They all rely solely on males for security. When circumstances arise that render them defenseless or poor, their reactions are to not to fight their battles, but to curl up and die. Helena and Mervyn's sister commit suicide, Mrs. Maurice becomes bedridden, Susan becomes mentally ill and dies and Catherine does not try to fight Wieland and ends up murdered. Brown's novels indicate that he believed women would have to fight extreme forms of patriarchy and needed to be up for the challenge. The novels show that women will have to be the ones to force their subjugation out of existence and self-violence is not the answer. Martinette tells readers that she loves her liberty, but that liberty involves peril and requires endurance. Succumbing to mental illness and death do society no good. The seduced woman's illness and death have no impact on the seducer's future behavior. Welbeck continues to seduce despite the fact that the first woman he seduced and, apparently, loved dies, her husband commits suicide, her father dies from grief, and Welbeck eventually murders her brother, his best friend, in a duel. Arthur Mervyn's sister's seducer goes on to live in whatever way he pleases and the assumption is he goes on to seduce other women. Susan Hadwin grieves to the point of mania and death over

her fiancé who cares so little about her well-being he refuses to come home when she is sick with fear for his safety and disappears near a prostitute's home the assumption being he survives and lives in debauchary. Helena's suicide does not stop Ormond from attempting to seduce and later rape Constance. In fact, most of these men show little or no remorse at the end of the novels unlike those in sentimental novels.

Brown was dissatisfied with a societal structure that valued women for their virginity. As Mary Wollstonecraft notes, it is a dangerous thing to make women's value depend on her ability to obtain a good marriage which she can only do if she is believed to be chaste. When this happens, according to Wollstonecraft, women are taught how to be desirable to men and that this is ultimately their goal in order to attract a husband. At the same time, they are instructed not to act on the desires they stir up in men because if they do they will be ostracized, develop mental illness, and die. Teaching a woman only to be desirable also precludes her from being able to keep a husband's interest because she cannot communicate in important ways with him. Brown adopts this belief in his novels. Constance notices the first time she sees Martinette that there is something different about her. She says,

> It was not the chief tendency of her appearance to seduce or to melt. Her's were
> the polished cheek and the mutability of muscle, which belong to women, but the
> genius conspicuous in her aspect, was heroic and contemplative. The female was
> absorbed so to speak, in the rational creature, and the emotions most apt to be
> exhibited in the gazer, partook less of love than of reverence. (60)

Ormond is willing to provide for Helena as a mistress because she is pleasing for small amounts of time, but she cannot debate or rationalize like a man so she bores Ormond. Arthur Mervyn even notes that Eliza Hadwin has everything that makes a woman desirable, but she is not wife material because of her lack of education and experience in the world. He even notes that she is fortunate he is helping her because she would be easy to take advantage of (226). Like Wollstonecraft, Arthur Mervyn believes that true virtue can only by the result of experiencing different places and cultures and having the ability to reason and face adversity and conquer it (223-28). What makes Achsa Fielding interesting to Mervyn even though she does not have all of the desirable qualities that Eliza has is that she has lived in different cultures, traveled, and she is not a financial burden. She uses her experiences to develop a self-awareness that is present in all of Brown's heroines.

Rather than succumb to mental illness the heroines of Brown's novels rise above the difficult circumstances in their lives. Elizabeth Dill says about Clara, "Left as the surviving witness to the home ravaged by revolutionary troubles, the sentimental figure becomes not just a defective interpreter of chaotic circumstance but also an unstable agent of political change. Through her fickle sensibility, she is transformed from a victim of revolution which the nation might safely invest its powerful rejection of patriarchal authority, into an agent of it" (274). Hearing Carwin's voice and living through the destruction of her family cause Clara to examine herself and her own autonomy in ways she did not have access to before (Judson 27), and through this, she is able to discover how truly independent she is (Leeuwan 12). Clara does suffer a mental breakdown at the deaths of her sister-in-law and nieces and nephews then again after Wieland commits

suicide in front of her, but unlike Wieland, any of the sentimental heroines, and even

Helena and a few more women in Brown's novels, Clara survives. Not only that, but she

has the strength of mind to write down the horror of all she has survived, in essence,

examine and live through it again without suffering another mental breakdown. Barbara

Judson argues that Clara only consciously examines herself in interesting ways before she

has the mental breakdown (30), but she fails to take into account that Clara is writing the

whole document after everything has happened and she has recovered so she is actually

examining everyone's and her own thoughts and actions in retrospect. Constance rejects

marriage partners because she feels that personality and educational differences would

make for an unhappy marriage, she works when reduced to poverty, and she handles an

attempt to destroy her reputation and therefore her livelihood without becoming

hysterical.

One of the biggest causes of mental illness in Brown's novels is the loss of wealth

without access to the means to regain it. Mrs. Maurice, Welbeck, and Mr. Dudley all lose

great sums of money and have no hope of regaining it and all three end up mentally ill, at

least temporarily, from it. Women are educated to believe that their only means to wealth

is through a good marriage and in order to obtain a good marriage, a woman must be

absolutely chaste. Like Wollstonecraft, Brown sees the equation of virginity to

marriageability as a dangerous thing for women because women become objects

available for purchase rather than human beings. Brown demonstrates in all three novels

that the rise from poverty to affluence is a very tempting thing for anyone and men are

more than willing to purchase sexual favors. In *Arthur Mervyn*, one of the Mervyns'

servants, Betty Lawrence, marries Mervyn's father despite their age difference in order to

gain control over his farm and money. Mervyn is also able to "trade his way up from poverty to affluence" (Ostrowski 7-8), but he has more mobility and is able to change his mind about his marriage partners without loss of reputation because he is a man. He is able to gain experience and seek out knowledge which shapes his understanding of morality (Hedges 307). While Mervyn is naïve and sheltered (like most women) he does not have much of a moral code, but as he gains knowledge he is better able to determine right from wrong on his own. He is initially seduced by Welbeck into an immoral lifestyle because he is so innocent, but he learns from his mistakes, corrects them, and goes on to live a happy life. Women, on the other hand, are not allowed to do this in most novels.

Women are expected to be inherently virtuous and decipher moral problems without sufficient knowledge or experience. This puts them at great risk to be seduced and, consequently, ruined. They do not get a second or third chance like Mervyn does. If we believe most sentimental novels, a seduced woman's options are mental illness and death, a celibate life in a convent, or life as a prostitute. It becomes increasingly evident in Brown's novels that he is dissatisfied with the system that declares a woman's worth is decided by her sexuality.

According to critic Christopher Lukasik, "Brown's modifications of the didactic seduction novel's structure in *Ormond* disaligns the threat of dissimulation and it exposes how the post-Revolutionary seduction novel sustains the latter by regulating the former" (498). *Ormond* and *Arthur Mervyn* are used as a way to expose a connection between the sentimental novel and commercial interests (Hamelman 309, Drexler 358). In *Arthur Mervyn*, the only women who are independently wealthy without inheriting money are

prostitutes. While Mervyn and Dr. Stephens do not condone prostitution, they understand that it is the only way for these women to gain and maintain wealth (169). Other women in the novel have to rely on men for their money; they are not allowed to handle it themselves unless they have been widowed. Welbeck believes that because Clemenza is young and a woman that she cannot possibly handle money so he takes control over her and her money. He goes so far as to claim he has a legal right to control Clemenza (153). Eliza should have inherited her father's farm and money, but because she is again young and a woman, her property is taken from her by a tyrannical uncle. The Maurice women are wealthy, but have to rely on men to handle their property exchanges and when one of the men helping them is killed, they are in a conundrum because he has a large sum of their money at the time of his death.

Ormond presents even darker scenarios of men acting as if women are mere objects. Constance begins by comparing unhappily married women to property. Constance is the victim of a rape attempt shortly after this speech which makes Hana Layson believe that Brown is making a parallel between marriage and sexual violence as she claims this speech foreshadows the first rape attempt Constance experiences (166). Brown questions the connection between sexuality and subjectivity that exists in sentimental novels like *Charlotte Temple, The Gamesters,* and *Julia and the Illuminated Baron* (Layson 167). Constance is subjected to another rape attempt by Ormond and rather than be passive or take her own life, Constance is aggressive and defeats Ormond. It is evident that Ormond also sees women as property; he "identifies both Helena and Constance as worth of his affection, but he does so by deeming them objects of exchange...Ormond essentially buys her [Helena]–along with her reputation and, most

likely, her virginity—rather than submit to marriage" (Ellis 13). He also tries to buy

Constance's love and virginity in the same way he did Helena's (14). He does not

respond well to Constance's rejection of his overtures and eventually tries to rape her.

He tells her,

> My avowals of love were sincere; my passion was vehement and undisguised. It
>
> gave dignity and value to a gift in thy power, as a woman to bestow. This has
>
> been denied. That gift has lost none of its value in my eyes. What thou refusedst
>
> to bestow, it is in my power to extort. I came of that end. When this end is
>
> accomplished, I will restore thee to liberty. (215)

Brown realizes that it is not always in a woman's control to maintain her virginity. Both

Constance and Clara demonstrate that rape is a very real possibility for any woman

despite any actions that have been taken on their part. Both are threatened with rape and

are frightened because they believed that being of a "sound mind" and having the ability

to reason should protect them from such violence (*Wieland* 104). It is also clear that it

does not seem to matter if the woman gives consent or not, any loss of virginity is still

shameful and damaging to the woman's reputations.

After Ormond attempts to rape Constance, Sophia is concerned that Constance

has been raped, but she frames her question to Constance in an accusatory tone. She

states, "I hope…that nothing has happened to load you with guilt or shame" (220).

Hana Layson notes that the period's perception of rape is that it is damaging to a

woman's honor and reputation rather than her physical and mental well-being (188).

Suicide following rape or as a means to prevent rape are not uncommon in didactic

literature of the period and both Constance and Clara contemplate it when put in a situation where rape is a real possibility. Clara says that she has historically believed suicide to be an act of cowardice, but reconsiders when there is a possibility that she may be raped. Constance also threatens to commit suicide to prevent Ormond from raping her, but to no avail. His response is

> So! Thou preferrest thy imaginary honor to life! To escaped this injury without a name or substance: Without connection with the past or future; without contamination of thy purity or thralldom of thy will; thou wilt kill thyself; Put an end to thy activity in virtue's cause: Rob thy friend of her solace: The world of thy beneficence: Thyself of being and pleasure? I shall be grieved for the fatal issue of my experiment: I shall mourn over thy martyrdom to the most opprobrious and contemptible of all errors… (216).

While a couple of Brown's "villains," namely Ormond and Carwin, admit that a woman does not lose her honor through rape, their perceptions are not the same as other characters' within the novel. If any inkling of the clandestine meeting that Ormond orchestrates with Constance despite her unwillingness to be a part of it becomes public knowledge, Constance's reputation could be destroyed.

Brown's novels show that a large segment of society is always willing to believe the worst of women when it comes to sexuality. Ormond initially believes that Constance has had an affair with Craig's imaginary brother despite indications to the contrary from her. Clara Wieland has led an exemplary life and yet she is accused of a sexual affair and there is little she can do to prove her innocence. Both women know

that they will be shunned from their communities if their reputation is in question. Clara states that "the gulf that separates man from insects is not wider than that which severs the polluted from the chaste among women" (129). Arthur Mervyn, who later helps protect Clemenza, says that she is a scene of "ruin and blast" and that her charms are "tarnished" and "withered" once he realizes she is pregnant, but has an immediate change of heart about her when he allows himself to imagine that she has been widowed (59-60). Constance is almost ruined by claims against her reputation when she rejects a potential husband. His sister, angry with Constance for rejecting her brother, spreads rumors claiming she is unchaste and Constance's customers readily believe the rumors and quit using her services. Constance is as powerless as Clara is when Pleyel accuses her to defend herself against these rumors that they did nothing to bring upon themselves. The heroines in Brown's novels are fortunate that they have communities on which they rely to support them, but not all seduced females are so fortunate. Brown also indicates that the more diverse a character's community is, the better.

The Wielands, for example, are more susceptible to mental illness and are not as quick to recognize it because of their seclusion. They are apart from society and dwindle their community down so that they have very few connections outside of their own family (Harris 202). In essence, they are not connected to any type of reality outside of themselves. This is dangerous for them because their reality is the terror that is inside Theodore Wieland (Cleman 217). No one in their community recognizes they danger are in as they do not know Wieland's stability is questionable because they do not have access to other people. We see Clara start to subconsciously and possibly, to a certain extent, consciously recognize the danger she is in at the hands of Wieland

through her descriptions of her dreams and belief that he is the one hiding in her closet. She does not begin to see this, however, until Carwin is introduced to the family.

The Hadwin family is set up similarly in *Arthur Mervyn*. The members of the Hadwin family believe that they each have the same concerns and emotional reactions to circumstances which destroys their limited community (Roberts 316). When the Hadwins act as a unit, they are stable, but when Susan's concern for her fiancé grows and eventually drives her father out to find her fiancé, they are destroyed. The Wielands and the Hadwins are easily influenced by rumor and rhetoric because they are distant from society.

In terms of seduction, those women who do not have a community on which to rely after seduction are the ones who develop mental illness and die. For example, Clemenza does not suffer mental illness despite the fact that she is orphaned, impoverished, seduced, sent to live with prostitutes, her lover dies, and her baby dies. Her actions do not cause her to suffer a loss of society or community in the same way Helena or Arthur Meryvn's sister do. Before she gives birth, Clemenza is taken in by prostitutes who apparently treat her well and she is later sent to live with Dr. Stevens and his wife through Mervyn's machinations. Helena, on the other hand, was accustomed to leading an active social life when her father was alive. She becomes depressed from her lack of interaction with others. She is shunned by women who used to know and admire her and her only source of social interaction comes from Ormond and Constance. Sophia points out that Helena was happy when Ormond or Constance were around her, but once they left her depression would come back. Helena only commits suicide when Ormond tells her he is going to send her away from him.

Mervyn's sister is seduced and eventually commits suicide, but it is only after she has been impregnated and abandoned by her lover, ridiculed by her family, and kicked out of her home with nowhere to go and no way to find work. With her reputation destroyed, she has no means to support herself and, based on the way her family treats her, no hope for help from anyone else so she responds to her desperate situation in a desperate way. In the novel, readers are fed small amounts of information regarding her in such a way that it sets readers up to look at her story in an atypical fashion. When readers are originally told her story, it sounds like a seduction tale in which the woman is seduced, develops mental illness, and commits suicide, but eventually the truth comes out. The way it is told helps to emphasize why she responds to her seduction the way she does. Mervyn believes that she was treated unfairly and somewhat understands her actions. The point that is stressed is that her mental illness was caused by the circumstances she was in rather than the seduction itself.

In his novels, Brown is able to bring to life and to show what a woman who is educated and allowed to work in a way that Wollstonecraft pushed for could fare in society if she is given the chance. He is able to strongly argue for more rights for women without hiding behind a screen of self-deprecation like so many of the female writers are forced to do, and he creates novels that do not attempt to scare young women, but instead encourage women to help themselves and each other. He indicates that while men can be champions for women, like Arthur Mervyn, it is ultimately up to women to develop their own strength and determination to gain the rights they want for better education and more opportunities to support themselves.

Conclusion

In his novels, Brown destroys the notion that mental illness is punishment for sin because mental illness can happen to anyone. It can happen to the religious family man, the doting father, the devoted, chaste fiancée, the seduced woman, and the villain alike. The novels show us that one's susceptibility to mental illness is derived more from family history, community, educational background, and changes in socio-economic status than from sin. In doing so, Brown relies on contemporary medical texts to depict mental illness in ways that resemble those found in sentimental novels. Unlike other novelists who use mental illness as a means to both monitor women's behavior and foreground unequal conditions, Brown's depictions of mental illness present the need for women's increased freedom. He uses some of Wollstonecraft's ideology and incorporates his own reformist ideas to use medical discourse for a more feminist end. Unlike the sentimental novelists who wanted other women to feel pity for "fallen" women and to learn from their mistakes, Brown wanted readers to realize that each could do his or her role in protecting women against mental illness by providing them with sufficient education, job opportunities, and community support.

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