BEAUTIFUL DECEPTIONS

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European Aesthetics, the Early
American Novel, and Illusionist Art

Philipp Schweighauser

Für Lia

CONTENTS

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Introduction

IN LATE eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America, *art* and *arts* referred to a wide variety of objects, activities, and fields of knowledge. Many of these senses are still operative today, in the twenty-tens, but the distribution has shifted. Browsing the texts collected in *Early American Imprints,* one encounters titles such as *Valuable Secrets in Arts and Trades, &c.* (1809), Richard Turner's *An Abridgement of the Arts and Sciences: Being a Short, but Comprehensive System, of Useful and Polite Learning* (1796), and William Duane's *An Epitome of the Arts and Sciences, Being a Comprehensive System of the Elementary Parts of an Useful and Polite Education* (1805). Already a cursory glance at the table of contents of *Valuable Secrets* reveals that its anonymous author's understanding of *art* differs considerably from the one to which we are most accustomed, with chapter titles reading "Of the Art of Engraving," "Of the Composition of Varnishes, &c.," "Relative to the Art of Gilding," "Essays on Various Arts and Trades," and "On Brewing." In his *Abridgement of the Arts and Sciences,* Turner defines *art* as "the way of doing things surely, readily, and gracefully" and divides the various arts into "those that belong to sciences, as philosophy, rhetoric, grammar, mathematics, astronomy, painting, music, and sculpture" and "all the others," which "are called mechanical" (7). In his *An Epitome of the Arts and Sciences,* which relies heavily on Turner's previous work, William Duane categorizes the "various studies" that are required "in the conduct of human life" into four groups: "Arts and Sciences," "History," "Natural History," and "Natural Philosophy." He adds that "under the first head is comprehended all the means which learning and the ingenuity of man have discovered or devised, for ascertaining and demonstrating other branches of knowledge; such as the mathematics by which computations are made, and without which natural philosophy and astronomy could not have been brought to perfection" (3–4). All three authors use *art* and *arts* in the sense either of "a practical pursuit or trade of a skilled nature, a craft; an activity

that can be achieved or mastered by the application of specialist skills; (also) any one of the useful arts" or of "certain branches of study, esp. at a university, serving as a preparation for more advanced studies or for later life" (*OED*). These two related senses of the terms are still in usage today, for instance in the phrases *arts and crafts* and *liberal arts*, but since the development of the fine arts into an autonomous area of human activity and scholarly concern, they are no longer the dominant senses.

Reading fictions from all three major subgenres of the early American novel (the sentimental, the gothic, and the picaresque), we encounter a third sense of *art* and *arts* that is no longer particularly prominent today. When a friend warns the sentimental heroine of Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797) to "beware of the delusions of fancy" and not let "the magic arts of that worthless Sanford lead [her] like an *ignis fatuus,* from the path of rectitude and virtue" (57); when Welbeck, the villain of Charles Brockden Brown's gothic novel *Arthur Mervyn* (1799–1800), confesses that "there were no arts too sordid for [him] to practice" (86); and when the picaresque narrator of Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive* (1797) calls a mullah who tries to convince him to convert to Islam an "artful priest" (136), they are all using *art* in the sense of "cunning; artfulness; trickery, pretence; conduct or action which seeks to attain its ends by artificial, indirect, or covert means" (*OED*). *Art* in this sense is a near-synonym of *artifice*—another word that we encounter frequently in the nation's first novels. Again, this meaning of *art* is still in usage today, but it is by no means as prominent as it was in the early republic. While *artifice* today still predominantly refers to skills or acts of deception, *art* now most often refers to something else.

This fourth usage of *art,* the one with which we are most familiar today, was clearly not the dominant usage in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In its dictionary definitions, it refers to either "any of various pursuits or occupations in which creative or imaginative skill is applied according to aesthetic principles" or "the expression or application of creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting, drawing, or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power" (ibid.). If used in either of these senses in early American writing, *art* was only partially differentiated from the first three usages outlined above. For instance, in George Gregory's *A Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (1816), there are separate entries on the fine arts and poetry, but they are surrounded by entries on a multiplicity of fields of

knowledge including history, military technology, and the law. As Gregory explains in his preface,

> Those articles which are connected with History and Antiquities, have been furnished by a distinguished scholar, as will be easily perceived; those relative to the Fine Arts, by a gentleman well known in the literary world; Poetry by a lady, who, like Vida, has asserted her title to the character of a critic, by having excelled in the art itself; the Military articles are the production of a literary gentleman who was educated in that profession; and some of the principal Law articles are by a member of one of the inns of court. Besides these, the editor has been favoured with single communications from Dr. Mavor, Mr. M. Smart, and several correspondents who desire their names to be concealed. (n.p.)

Gregory's preface reveals not only that the gentlemanly tradition of publishing one's writings anonymously was slow to die out in the first decades of the nineteenth century,[1] but also that, similar to *art* and *arts, literature* and *literary* referred to a broader range of objects and activities than they usually do today. In all probability, the "literary gentleman" who wrote "the Military articles" was not an author of literary works but a reader and producer of learned writings, a man who "had" literature in the sense of "knowledge acquired from reading or studying books, esp. the principal classical texts associated with humane learning" (*OED*).[2]

In eighteenth-century Europe, the case was somewhat different. Since the publication of Jean-Baptiste Dubos's *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (*Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting and Music*) in 1719—which is listed in eight booksellers' or library catalogues of the early republic (Schimmelman 69–71)—a number of French and German thinkers have sought to accomplish two related objectives: to identify the common features and functions shared by all fine arts, and to distinguish between the different arts with an eye to developing a system of the fine arts. These attempts laid the ground for later usages of *art* in the singular (Barck, Kliche, and Heininger 320). In stressing the primacy of sentiment over reason in aesthetic judgment, Dubos—a French cleric, diplomat, historian, and early aesthetician also known as l'Abbé Du Bos—paved the way for a critique of rationalist aesthetics that would find an even more powerful source of inspiration in the writings of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, the philosopher who coined the term *Aesthetik* in his 1735 master's thesis *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (*Reflections*

on Poetry).[3] Dubos also anticipated Charles Batteux' more rigorous system-atization of the fine arts in *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe* (The fine arts reduced to a single principle; 1746). Batteux—according to whom all the fine arts aim to imitate beautiful nature and have pleasure as their end—distinguishes between music, poetry, painting, sculpture, panto-mime, and dance (6). In the third part of his treatise, he discusses at length the various forms of poetry—a term that he takes to encompass both lyric and epic poetry as well as tragedy, comedy, the pastoral, and the apo-logue—and more briefly discusses painting, music, and dance. Five years after Batteux' contribution, Jean Le Rond D'Alembert in his *Discours pré-liminaire* (*Preliminary Discourse;* 1751) to the *Encyclopédie* would set forth what David Summers calls "the modern system of the fine arts in its final form" (423). Interestingly, the Enlightenment thinker D'Alembert removes dance from the cleric Dubos's list and adds architecture to come up with the following five types of fine art: music, poetry, painting, sculpture, and architecture.

We can draw two preliminary conclusions from these observations. First, while we can trace in early European aesthetics the beginnings of both an external differentiation of the arts (fine arts, mechanical arts) and an in-ternal differentiation of the fine arts (poetry, painting, sculpture, music, dance/architecture), eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century usages of *art* and *arts* not only referred more often either to specific crafts, branches of study, or acts of deception than to works of art but, when used in the latter sense, were not clearly differentiated from other areas of human activ-ity such as gilding, engraving, or making beer. Around 1800, the modern episteme that would accord the fine arts a distinctive place was not yet fully in place.

The foundational document of the first art academy of the United States, the Columbianum, shows that this lack of differentiation was a transat-lantic phenomenon. On December 29, 1794, the Columbianum's sixteen founding members—among them Charles Willson Peale, one of the era's major portrait painters and an important figure in the fourth chapter of this book—convened to draft the academy's constitution, which declared its members' commitment to "protecting" and "encouraging" an impres-sively wide range of scientific and artistic practices: "Belles Lettres, natu-ral History, Physionomical anatomy and Zoolomy, operative chymistry, Architecture, Sculpture, Historical painting, Landscape Painting, perspec-tive, Engraving, and such other branches of science as may be connected with the theory and practice of painting, Sculpture[,] architecture[,]

etc." (qtd. in Bellion, *Citizen Spectator* 67–68). From Niklas Luhmann's systems-theoretic perspective, which I outline in greater detail in chapter 1, this list bears witness to the process of functional differentiation, that is, the ongoing differentiation of modern societies into self-organizing social sys-tems that include, among others, politics, the economy, and religion, and that perform "special functions to be fulfilled at the level of society itself" such as "the political function of providing for collectively binding deci-sions, the economic function of securing want satisfaction within enlarged time horizons, and the religious function of interpreting the incomprehen-sible" ("Differentiation" 35).[4] In the case of the system of art, Luhmann asks whether its function is not the production of contingency: "Is it not precisely the fictionality of art that, beyond all definite statements, lends— as medium, as it were—to the world a touch of the unreal? And is it not precisely the stringency of the work of art that assigns everything else the character of the 'not really necessary' (without having to talk about alterna-tives at all)?" ("Work of Art" 213). Crucially, according to systems theo-rists, the process of functional differentiation was still underway in the late eighteenth century, which means that, by around 1800, neither politics, the economy, religion, nor art had yet developed into fully functionally dif-ferentiated systems. Thus, systems theory provides one possible answer to a highly pertinent question raised by Catherine O'Donnell in her 2010 review essay on developments in early American studies since the 1990s:

> It is worth noting that the category of literature was, during the early republic, so broad that political essays easily fell within it. And so it is ironic that— influenced by the cultural and disciplinary divisions that exist today—much of the scholarship on literature and politics is uninterested in the specific ways history has produced the division between those categories. The scholarship instead moves immediately to build an analytical bridge between them. But as Robert A. Gross observed in 1989, that separation, "the disjunction between culture and power," had not existed in the colonial period. Was the separation itself being created during the early republic? (291)

It is one of the contentions of this book that the gradual emergence of mod-ern notions of autonomous art, which can be traced at different stages of development in early American artistic production and eighteenth-century European aesthetics, is an integral part of a broader process of functional differentiation that resulted in the division of Western societies into social systems that each perform one unique function for the social whole. The end result of that process is the modern system of social organization in

which areas of human activity such as politics, the economy, religion, and art—areas that were much more deeply intertwined in early America than they are today—have been assigned to specific social systems that are both autonomous and self-organized. Many of the tensions we can detect both in early American art and in early European aesthetics are, I argue, as much the result of that process of functional differentiation as of ideological contradictions.

The second preliminary conclusion that we can draw at this point is that, in its early American usage, *art* was closely linked to deception—as it was in contemporaneous French and German, too (*l'art de la duperie; die Künste des Verführers*). The fact that the word could refer both to the realms of creative activity and to trickery is no mere lexical coincidence. Major public figures ranging from John Adams to Timothy Dwight were adamant about the power of art to deceive its recipients. The antifiction movement—which had been around in England since the 1690s, gained full force there in the 1760s, and reached its American peak in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—illustrates this most clearly, but similar charges were occasionally also laid at the doors of painters and sculptors.[5] Writing to her husband about her first encounter with one of Patience Wright's wax sculptures—works that will make an extended appearance in chapter 4—Abigail Adams confessed that she "was effectually deceived in this figure for ten minutes, and was finally told it was only wax" (*Letters of Mrs. Adams* 178). Adams's reaction to Wright's controversial work betrays some of the cultural anxieties about the deceptiveness of art with which all early American artists had to contend.

My two preliminary conclusions are interrelated: if art is closely linked to other social spheres such as politics, science, religion, and morality, it is likely to be judged by standards external to itself. In the case of religion and morality, this enabled critics to evaluate works of art not on the basis of their artistic merits but according to whether they were decorous, possessed metaphysical truth, inculcated virtue, or contained useful knowledge. On the basis of such expectations, many a politician, clergyman, and educator loudly and prominently denounced early American novels as dangerous lies. Thus, from these vantage points, works of art were artful in two senses of the word. Early American writers were keenly aware of such prejudices against their art, and more often than not resorted not to asserting the novelist's right to invent fictional worlds but to affirming their tales' veracity and educational value. Thus, William Hill Brown wrote this in his preface to *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), the sentimental fiction

that is generally considered the first American novel (P. Young; Davidson, *Revolution* 155):

> In novels which *expose* no particular vice, and which *recommend* no particular virtue, the fair reader, though she may find amusement, must finish them without being impressed with any particular idea: so that if they are harmless, they are not beneficial.
>
> Of the Letters before us, it is necessary to remark that this error on each side has been avoided: the dangerous consequences of seduction are exposed, and the advantages of female education set forth and recommended. (29)

Such didacticism, which pervades the prefaces of early American novels, hardly constitutes a ringing defense of fiction. On the other side of the Atlantic, a number of contemporaneous thinkers were less timid in their vindications of the rights of artists. These thinkers contributed to the emergence of aesthetics as an academic discipline. In its valorization of sensory cognition and of art as a specific form of cognition, eighteenth-century aesthetics crucially participated in the century's more general shift from Cartesian rationalism to empiricism, a shift that was energized by the writings of Bacon, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. A number of developments *within* aesthetics participated in this shift, too. These include the move from an aesthetics of imitation grounded in the divine order of nature, in reason, and in the timeless rules of classical antiquity to an aesthetics of experience that valorized innovation and originality; the move from ontotheologically grounded theories of beauty that revolved around notions such as *consonantia, integritas,* and *harmonia* to more experientially grounded theories of art; and the emergence of corresponding aesthetic concepts such as sensuous cognition, aesthetic feeling, aesthetic idea, taste, the imagination, genius, and the sublime that allowed scholars not only to attribute to art a relative autonomy from the divinely ordered cosmos but also to study the subjective experience of both the creative process and the reception of art.[6]

In late eighteenth-century Europe, it was the German dramatist, poet, and philosopher Friedrich Schiller who most stridently defended the right of art to bring forth imaginary worlds. In the course of 1793, Schiller sent a series of letters to his Danish patron Prince Friedrich Christian, Duke of Schleswig-Holstein-Augustenburg.[7] In these letters, Schiller engaged with one of the most pressing questions of his time: after the devolution of the French Revolution into *terreur,* how could the project of the Enlightenment still be salvaged? Being a writer, Schiller focused on the role art could play in that project, arguing that art permits human beings to enter a realm

of semblance and play in which the competing exigencies of feeling and reason are reconciled to allow for the fullest experience of human autonomy and freedom. Schiller concluded that it is only aesthetic experience that prepares human beings for the *liberté, égalité,* and *fraternité* that the French Revolution promised but ultimately withheld as it descended into terror: "If man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic" (9). In making his exceptionally strong case for the emancipatory potential of aesthetic experience, Schiller was as aware as were early American novelists that the enemies of art attacked it precisely because of the world of semblance it creates. Yet Schiller's response to his critics, which we will revisit in chapter 3, was a very different one. Preempting charges that fictions lie, he distinguished between two types of semblance (*Schein*): "aesthetic semblance," which is "honest" and "autonomous," and "logical semblance," which is "dishonest and dependent," a "mere deception" (193, 197). In making this categorical distinction, Schiller sought to carve out an autonomous space for art precisely because he believed in the socially and politically transformative nature of aesthetic experience. In *On the Aesthetic Education of Man,* we can detect an argument that anticipates not only Romantic assertions of the autonomy of art but also Theodor W. Adorno's much later contention that the political force of art is grounded precisely in its autonomy. This line of thinking on aesthetics crucially informs this book.

While Schiller's defense of art is much less diffident than that of his American contemporaries, its tone is not nearly as assertive as that of, say, Percy Bysshe Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry" (1821)—even though the claims Schiller makes for the importance of art are ultimately more radical. Schiller could not take for granted that his contemporaneous readers would readily accept his distinction between two types of semblance. The very sharpness with which he condemns any confusions between the two testifies to considerable anxieties: "Only impotence and perversity will have recourse to dishonest and dependent semblance; and single individuals, as well as whole peoples, who either 'eke out reality with semblance or (aesthetic) semblance with reality'—the two often go together—give evidence alike of their moral worthlessness and of their aesthetic incapacity" (199). Schiller's assertion that the imaginary worlds of art are neither lies nor deceptions was not unheard of in his time, but it was no self-evident truth either. Despite its bold claims for the social functions of works of art (as opposed to their didactic utility), *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* on every page betrays its author's awareness that, in 1790s Europe, art was not

yet a fully functionally differentiated system. Art's right to semblance still had not come into its own. Still, Schiller was keenly aware that processes of functional differentiation were well underway as he was writing his letters. This becomes clear when he contextualizes his reflections on aesthetic education in a socioeconomic context broader than that of the French Revolution. For him, it was not only the violent upheavals of the recent past that were tearing the world apart; he knew that a more subtle but no less major shift in social and political organization was eroding the foundations of the world into which he was born. Deeply dismayed by what he saw, Schiller compared his age to

> an ingenious clock-work in which out of the piecing together of innumerable but lifeless parts, a mechanical kind of collective life ensued. State and Church, laws and customs, were now torn asunder; enjoyment was divorced from labour, the means from the end, the effort from the reward. Everlastingly chained to a single little fragment of the Whole, man himself develops into nothing but a fragment; everlastingly in his ear the monotonous sound of the wheel that he turns, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of putting the stamp of humanity upon his own nature, he becomes nothing more than the imprint of his occupation or of his specialized knowledge. (35)

Anticipating Karl Marx's analysis of alienation by half a century, Schiller describes a world in which psychological fragmentation is a direct result of social fragmentation. Both thinkers grapple with the effects on human beings of that "maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish" (Berman 1) we call modernization. Unlike Marx, however, Schiller does not trace psychological estrangement back to one sphere of human activity (the economy) but to the very dissociation of spheres of human activity from one another.

With Luhmann, we can locate the process described by Schiller at the heart of modernization and define it as the differentiation of Western societies into autonomous function systems such as politics, religion, morality, the economy, and art. Schiller acknowledges the necessity of functional differentiation for the advancement of reason but urges his contemporaries also to consider its socially and psychologically disruptive force: "However much the world as a whole may benefit through this fragmentary specialization of human powers, it cannot be denied that the individuals affected by it suffer under the curse of this cosmic purpose" (43). What Schiller may have been less aware of is that, by defending the rights of art and of "autonomous semblance," he contributes to the breaking apart of

the world. While he does seem to have sensed that art must become autonomous to be able to heal the social and psychological divides that open up on the way to modernity (or to provide, as later commentators have it, a critical outside perspective on the social world), he may not have realized that for art to become autonomous, it must first dissociate itself from other social spheres; it must participate in the process of functional differentiation that engendered the divides in the first place. This book traces the vicissitudes of this process of differentiation as it plays itself out in the artistic realm, paying particular attention to artists' negotiations of deception as both a crucial subject matter of their art and its—acknowledged or unacknowledged—modus operandi. In the chapters that follow, deception in both of these senses will emerge as a particularly prominent marker of artists' problematization of older, mimetic notions of art that tie it firmly to other social realms and of their striving for a more modern understanding of art as autonomous.

The art of the period abounds in representations of deception: gothic villains dupe their victims with a multiplicity of sensory tricks; the nation's citizens are taken in by picaros and quacks; and sentimental heroines fall for that type of man whom Hugh Blair, a major Scottish aesthetician of the era who was widely read in the early republic, called the "Artful Sentimental Lover" (95). Yet deception happens not only within early American artworks but also *through* them: early American novelists invented fictional worlds that do not exist; Charles Willson Peale and his son Raphaelle Peale strove to trick spectators into mistaking their trompe l'oeil paintings for the real thing; and Patience Wright with her wax sculptures deceived and disturbed no less than Abigail Adams. Studying the role deception plays in these works not only allows us to probe how early American art negotiates contemporaneous fears that the virtuous citizens of the early republic will fall prey to the dissimulations of the confidence men and seducers of the emerging liberal-individualist order. For American artists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, deception and delusion are also topoi that allow them to ask the very same questions that early European aestheticians were asking themselves concerning the nature of art and the reliability of sensuous perception. As Baumgarten noted in 1735, "aesthetics" is, after all, "the science of perception" (*Reflections* §116, 78). In probing sensuous perception, early American artists take us to the heart of their own artistic practice, for art negotiates, initiates, and participates in processes of perception and cognition. There is, then, a crucial self-reflexive element to early American artists' obsession with deception: for them, to inquire

into the causes of deception and the fallibility of human sense perception is always also to inquire into the possibilities of their work in an age that still denied art the autonomy that would so confidently be bestowed on it by theorists and practitioners of Romantic art. In an age that met artists with suspicion and, in the case of novelists, outright hostility, only the bravest of artists—writers of picaresque fiction and Raphaelle Peale among them—would proclaim the artist's right to deceive, tentatively carving out a space for art beyond mimetic imitation and beyond the truth claims imposed on it by morality, religion, and politics. Far from signaling a retreat into apolitical "l'art pour l'art" positions, such paeans to aesthetic semblance paved the way for a modern understanding of art that locates the social and political force of artworks precisely in their distance from other social spheres and their refusal to imitate the structures of empirical reality or conform to its dominant modes of self-description.

My first chapter, "Aesthetics, Politics, and the Early American Novel," outlines why I believe that the study of early American novels can benefit greatly from a convergence of political and aesthetic approaches. Focusing most closely on Hugh Henry Brackenridge's magnum opus *Modern Chivalry* (1792–1815)—the major, multi-volume picaresque novel of the era—I bring early American fictions into a dialogue with the contemporaneous emergence of aesthetics in Europe. Engaging in this dialogue helps us develop a fuller understanding of early novels' much-discussed formal tensions—in particular their strange amalgamation of didacticism, stylistic playfulness, and at times emancipatory, at times conservative politics. While both the earlier liberalism-republicanism debate in early American studies and more recent transnational and hemispheric turns have taught us much about the political significance of these tensions, I contend that they should also be seen as markers of the early novel's own liminal status in a broadly conceived history of Western art. In arguing that this history can best be conceptualized through the systems-theoretic notion of functional differentiation, this chapter also strives to modify well-established discussions of empiricism and liberalism as the major links between eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American art and European scholarship and science. Chapter 2, "Political Deceptions and Sensory Delusions," builds on my observation that the first American novels negotiate constant threats of deception in the early American public sphere as much through their probing of the fallibility of characters' sensuous cognition as through the deceptive actions of picaresque con men, gothic villains, and sentimental seducers. In their focus on the ever-present possibility of self-deception and

delusion, it is especially the gothic novels of Charles Brockden Brown that not only challenge, as previous critics have asserted, empiricist beliefs in the reliability of sensory perception but also raise incisive questions concerning the kinds of knowledge art can impart. I choose Brown's *Wieland* (1798) and *Arthur Mervyn* as my major examples in this chapter because they most deeply probe these questions, bringing together politics, epistemology, and art in ways that connect closely with early European contributions to aesthetics. My third chapter, "The Right to Deception," focuses on those few writers who refused to renounce the right to fiction in the face of the era's powerful anti-novel discourse. Revisiting Susanna Rowson's bestselling *Charlotte Temple* (1791) from this angle allows us to see that it is a more modern text than is commonly assumed. Yet it is picaresque novels such as Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry,* Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive,* and, to a lesser extent, Tabitha Gilman Tenney's *Female Quixotism* (1801) that assert the right to deception, thus most forcefully gesturing toward the modern understanding of art as autonomous that contemporaneous European aestheticians tentatively envisaged. While the bulk of this book is dedicated to exploring early American fictions, my fourth and final chapter, "Visual Artifice," turns to the visual arts to focus on two other media of deception. Charles Willson Peale's and Raphaelle Peale's trompe l'oeil paintings and Patience Wright's wax sculptures assert the artist's right to deception as fully as the bravest of novelists while remaining caught, as all artworks discussed in this book do, in the premodern/modern tensions of art in an age of political and aesthetic transitions. The conclusion consolidates the findings of the present study and takes us half a century forward, to three major novels of the American Renaissance—Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851)—to consider how artistic negotiations of deception, sensuous cognition, and art developed after the early republic had come to a close.

1   Aesthetics, Politics, and the Early American Novel

EARLY AMERICANISTS have long recognized that late eighteenth-century Americans participated in and were subjected to societal changes of momentous proportions. While both republicanism and liberalism are modern ideologies, the gradual, uneven ascendancy during the early republic of liberalism as an individualist ideological paradigm over older, community-oriented republican ideals of vigilance and virtue is a major indicator that America was well on its way to modernity, at the very latest since the ratification of the Constitution in 1788.[1] Unlike republicanism, whose ideological foundations were expressed most powerfully in one of the most widely read political treatises in late eighteenth-century America—John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon's *Cato's Letters: or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and Other Important Subjects* (1720–23)— the liberalism of Locke's highly influential *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) embraced change.[2] Joyce Appleby puts it most succinctly when she labels liberal propositions "very creative responses to the urgent need to bring a constructive theory of change to a changing world" (31). And change there was, most noticeably in the economic field, where Jefferson's agrarian republicanism and its ideal of America as a nation of yeoman farmers came under formidable pressure from Federalist visions of the country as an urban, industrialized free-market society in which banking and financial speculation could serve legitimate purposes. The great enmity that arose between Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton in the early 1790s is but one prominent indicator of ideological transitions and tensions in early America (Elkins and McKitrick). The threats of secession that were made throughout the final decade of the century were another. The historian Marshall Smelser has famously called the 1790s an "age of passion," a period in which debates in the public sphere were greatly radicalized by politicians' and journalists' diverging assessments of the French Revolution

and "every great public decision, every national political act, was somehow governed by fierce passions, by hatred, fear and anger" (419).[3]

Even as tensions ran high, politics gradually became a more professionalized, formalized, and standardized process that functioned largely according to its own laws. With the ratification of the Constitution and its implementation under Washington's presidency and, crucially, under Hamilton's reign as the United States' first secretary of the treasury, the procedural dynamics of day-to-day politics began to obey political rather than economic dictates. Of course, the national government's sale of western lands, its assumption of states' war debts (which greatly enhanced the country's fiscal reputation in the eyes of potential creditors), the founding of the First Bank of the United States, and the raising of an excise tax on whiskey were all economic measures. But they ultimately served political rather than economic ends: the generation of revenue for the new national government; the increase of its power vis-à-vis the states; and the securing of the young nation's manufacture, commerce, and shipping. As such, these measures aimed at allowing the federal government to perform more efficiently the core function shared by all political systems: the enablement and implementation of collectively binding decisions (Luhmann, *Politik* 84).[4] Thus, the founding of a secular, constitutional democracy on American soil further accelerated a process that had already begun in the second half of the sixteenth century (Quaritsch; Münkler): the emergence of politics as a social system whose modus operandi is determined self-referentially rather than in alignment with other social realms such as religion and the economy.

This gradual and conflict-laden consolidation of the political system went along with major upheavals in other social realms. In the economic system, northeastern manufacture was further expanded, mechanized, and centralized outside the home with the help of more efficient engines, pumps, and mechanical devices for weaving and milling that were imported from England. As a result, the division of labor became more complex and refined (Appleby 24), thus further contributing to the kinds of social and psychological fragmentation that functional differentiation generates—and which Schiller describes so vividly in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. While social mobility increased from the late eighteenth century onward, social stratification increased as well, particularly in northern urban centers, which saw a steady influx of factory laborers (Gould 66; H. Roberts 288). Popular protest against harsh labor conditions and social inequality, which in many cases drew its inspiration from republican rhetoric, added further fuel to

the first two administrations' anxieties that the center would not hold.[5] In the countryside, all was not well either. The suppression of Shays' Rebellion in 1787 did not put an end to rural uprisings, which would continue to flare up throughout the 1790s. The western Pennsylvanian Whiskey Rebellion of 1791–94 is but the most frequently referenced incident; other uprisings emerged in Maine, New Jersey, New York, Virginia, Vermont, Kentucky, and the Carolinas (A. Taylor; Humphrey; E. White, "Carwin").

Even though the influx of new immigrants grew significantly only from the 1820s onward, ethnic tensions increased as well. Refugees from the French Revolution, as well as Creole and white refugees from the Saint Dominguan slave rebellions of 1791 and 1803–4, who brought their slaves with them, increased the ethnic diversity of eastern cities and reminded Americans of the country's troubled, violent transatlantic past and present (Nash; Davies). Anxieties were strongest among southern slaveholders, who feared that, inspired by these events, their human property would conspire to throw off their shackles, too (Ashli White 363). And indeed, white fears were not unfounded: "Between 1795 and 1796 alone, white Louisianans uncovered at least four slave conspiracies" (ibid. 376), and in 1800 and 1802, white Virginians were troubled by two related slave conspiracies.[6]

All these developments testify to the state of a country that was drifting apart socially and ideologically even as it was consolidating politically. Starting in 1812, an international conflict would fuel further anxieties of a different kind in the early republic. On June 18 of that year, Congress—which was now under Democratic-Republican control—declared war on Great Britain to assert the nation's sovereignty against British interference in maritime affairs. This decision was highly divisive and opposed by New England Federalists, opposition that many of the ruling Democratic-Republicans regarded as an act of treason once war had been declared. It was only with the conclusion of the war in 1815 and James Monroe's election to the presidency in 1816 that the prospect of peace, unity, and something like a shared vision of the future of the nation seemed to open up for large segments of American society. Yet after the Panic of 1819, which exacerbated social tensions, and the Missouri Compromise of 1820, the "era of good feelings" began to fade, coming to a definitive end with the bitter disputes between John Adams's and Andrew Jackson's supporters in the presidential election of 1824. With the election of Jackson in 1828, the early republic, and with it the era under consideration in this book, ended. Before that, the new nation was riven by ideological, social, and economic tensions even as a modern, autonomous political system was beginning to emerge.

Against this background, and returning from historiography to literary studies, we may ask: how do the novelists of the early republic negotiate these changes and tensions, and how do they comment on and intervene in contemporary social and political debates?

Formal Tensions

Early American novels are strangely hybrid objects characterized by great tensions. On the one hand, classic texts from all three major subgenres of the novel such as Susanna Rowson's sentimental *Charlotte Temple,* Charles Brockden Brown's gothic *Wieland; or, The Transformation: An American Tale,* and Hugh Henry Brackenridge's picaresque *Modern Chivalry* are firmly embedded in a premodern media culture that did not accord literature autonomous status. In many respects, these late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels subordinate what we tend to consider the core business of fiction—to invent a good story and tell it well—to the extraliterary purpose they serve in the worlds of religion, politics, or education. This premodern quality of early American novels, their "ongoing attachment to mimetic-pragmatic precepts" (Reinfandt 155; my translation), is most readily apparent in characters that serve as mouthpieces for the authors' ideological convictions, in novels' claims to truthfulness and social utility, and in their persistent didacticism—which surfaces most prominently in prefaces and in authors' willingness to embark on lengthy digressions from their main narratives to give moral advice to their readers or to comment extensively on current social and political affairs.

Rowson's preface to *Charlotte Temple,* her immensely popular novel about the seduction, abandonment, and death of the eponymous young woman, is exemplary in this respect. Rowson explains the purpose of her book as follows: "If the following tale should save one hapless fair one from the errors which ruined poor Charlotte, or rescue from impending misery the heart of one anxious parent, I shall feel a much higher gratification in reflecting on this trifling performance, than could possibly result from the applause which might attend the most elegant finished piece of literature whose tendency might deprave the heart or mislead the understanding" (6). This is a fairly standard apology of the time, which closely follows earlier British examples. In fact, Rowson's vindication of her work repeats almost verbatim an apology by the English novelist Edward Kimber. In the preface to his *Maria, the Genuine Memoirs of an Admired Lady of Rank and Fortune and of Some of Her Friends* (1764), he states that "if the good

qualities of his characters are able to wield an influence over the future conduct of his readers, it will give more real satisfaction to the author, than all the praise that might result from a display of genius and an elegance of style" (1: 1).[7] To many a twenty-first-century reader, both Kimber's and Rowson's novels seem confined in their utilitarian straightjacket. To a large extent, they conform to a premodern understanding of literature as a medium that subordinates the right of fiction to invent new worlds to the dues it pays to social domains other than art.

Conversely, we can detect in early American novels signs of an emergent autonomy of art, even if that may not be the inference most twenty-first-century readers will draw on a first reading. These protomodern gestures in early American novels do not sit easily alongside their truth claims and didacticism, and much of the fascination these novels exert on critics has to do with the tensions that emerge between their modern and their premodern moments. It is Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry,* one of the most discussed novels of the time, that gestures most forcefully toward a more modern model of the relationship between literature and the world even as it remains embedded in a premodern episteme. Published in seven volumes between 1792 and 1815, *Modern Chivalry* tells the story of the adventures of the aristocratic Captain Farrago and his Irish servant Teague O'Regan. Farrago and Teague are early American versions of Cervantes's Don Quijote and Sancho Panza. At the beginning of the work, Farrago decides to strike out from his farm in western Pennsylvania to "ride about the world a little, with his man Teague at his heels, to see how things were going on here and there, and to observe human nature" (4). Together, they roam the western parts of the new republic and along the way encounter the full diversity of frontier life: excise officers and would-be philosophers, Quakers and conjurers, colleges and brothels, Indian treaty making and local elections. The main narrative thread recounts the illiterate but ambitious Teague's tireless efforts to improve his social standing. Teague's aspirations meet with many an officeholder's and almost all the general public's fervent support, and Teague is in turn offered the positions of state legislator, philosopher, cleric, and congressman. Farrago is appalled by the people's readiness to lift his servant into positions for which he is clearly not qualified, and he musters all his powers of persuasion to talk him out of his ambitions so as not to lose his service.

This storyline is constantly interrupted by long philosophical digressions, extensive comments on current political affairs, advice on how to interpret the text correctly, and moral instruction of the reader. Those digressions

regularly take up whole chapters that are characterized by a fusion of the authorial and the narratorial voice so pervasive that the two can no longer be held apart with any degree of precision. Emory Elliott's decision to name the novel's overt narrative voice(s) "narrator-author" captures this double-ness well (183).[8] These digressive chapters are often entitled "Observations," "Containing Observations," "Containing Reflections," or, in the case of the ultimate volume's final chapter, "A Key to the Preceding." Even if it is, as Cathy N. Davidson (*Revolution* 260–66) and Ulla Haselstein emphasize, extremely difficult to pin down the positionality of Brackenridge's text,[9] one of the primary objects of its satire is clearly the excesses of America's fledgling democracy in general and men "pretending to places of appoint-ment for which [they are] not qualified" (80) in particular.[10] Both Farrago and Brackenridge's narrator-author consistently emphasize that "moral of this book" (440), and the latter states the purpose of the novel in terms that are similar to Rowson's prefatory remarks quoted above: "I shall have accomplished something by this book, if it shall keep some honest man from lessening his respectability by pushing himself into public trusts for which he is not qualified; or when pushed forward into a public station, if it shall contribute to keep him honest by teaching him the folly of am-bition, and farther advancement" (338). Clearly, though, it would be too facile to characterize *Modern Chivalry* as a didactic vehicle for the moral and political education of its readers, even if that is one of the functions the book performs. Brackenridge emerges as a writer of a more modern sort when he repeatedly insists that his work is but an exercise in style devoid of ideas. In the novel's very first paragraph, these assertions are still embedded in a didactic project that connects with textbooks of the era such as John Wood's *Mentor, or The American Teacher's Assistant* (1795) and the anon-ymously compiled *The Cabinet of Genius Containing all the Theory and Principles of the Fine Arts* (1808). These textbooks aim at teaching good style by providing samples of outstanding literary and essayistic writing; at the outset, Brackenridge's narrator-author professes to do the same: "It has always appeared to me, that if some great master of stile should arise, and without regarding sentiment, or subject, give an example of good language in his composition, which might serve as a model to future speakers and writers, it would do more to fix the orthography, choice of words, idiom of phrase, and structure of sentence, than all the Dictionaries and Institutes that have been ever made" (2).

Christopher Looby and Edward Watts have taken this and similar as-sertions at face value, though less as pronouncements on Brackenridge's

part than as the narrator-author's interventions in the early republic's lan-guage politics. Looby argues that Brackenridge's focus on style is part of an "ideological project of language normalization" (257) that the novel ostensibly affirms but ultimately undermines in its own structurelessness and fraying out into a multiplicity of language games. In line with the re-cent transnational turn in American studies, Watts has given this argument a further, postcolonial twist, asserting that while, in his attempt to "fix" the language, the narrator-author aims at "imposing rephrased and mis-represented British notions of authority and propriety on a heterogeneous language and populace," the novel's picaresque multiplicity brings out "the real author's rejection of the lingering orthodoxies of the colonial period and his attempted decolonization of both subject and reader" (29). Watts's reading of *Modern Chivalry* as a postcolonial challenge to authorized co-lonial language usage is of particular interest here, since he interprets the narrator-author's repeated assertions that he focuses on style at the expense of sense as undermining his (colonizing) attempt to "fix" American lan-guage: "The author-narrator also assumes a detachment of 'stile' from 'sense.' According to this logic, what makes sense cannot be good style and what is good style cannot make sense. Any future texts following this code would be ridiculous—language would lose its social viability and beauty would be excluded from everyday life. In either case, Brackenridge suggests that voices such as those of the author-narrator, when publicly accepted, threaten the future of language in America, both political and literary, by constricting its ability to adapt and grow with the new nation" (35). This seems a peculiar assessment that ignores the ludic quality of the narrator-author's—and, I argue, also Brackenridge's—proclaimed focus on style to the exclusion of everything else, which is apparent throughout the novel from the narrator-author's determination to give "all weak and visionary people . . . something to read without the trouble of thinking" (3) to his assertion that all he does is "talk nonsense eloquently" (418). Brackenridge even includes a fictional reviewer's positive appraisal of *Modern Chivalry* as a book that "scrupulously adheres" to its author's profession that "stile only" is "the object of the composition": "Though on some occasions, there would seem to be a semblance of idea, yet this we must attribute to the imagination of the reader, just as in looking upon a plaistered wall, at-tentively for a long time, you will conceive the inequality of the surface, or accidental scratchings, to be the shape of birds and beasts, or the letters of the alphabet" (104).[11] Moreover, Watts's argument works only on the basis of the assumption that literary language has no value apart from its "social

viability" and connectedness with "everyday life." For Watts, all other uses of literature are "ridiculous." Could it be that it is not only colonial strictures but also our own desire to interpret novels as straightforward political interventions that constrains the subversive force of literature—a force that is, because it works through words, first and foremost linguistic in nature but does not necessarily function as a discursive intervention in contemporaneous language policies? To ask this question is not to suggest that literature either is or should be regarded as apolitical play, but rather to argue that the social function of literature manifests itself first and foremost in its work on language, in its insistence on the right to speak *differently* rather than transmit political messages.

Admittedly, this is a modern understanding of literature that does not sit easily with either the unironic didacticism of Brackenridge's contemporaries or with *Modern Chivalry*'s own didactic moments; but it is an understanding that the more playful moments of *Modern Chivalry,* particularly its tongue-in-cheek renunciations of sense-making, gesture toward. Such gestures occur throughout Brackenridge's novel, for instance when his narrator-author makes the following statement: "It may be thought, that though stile is my object, yet I might now and then bring along a thought to entertain the reader, and introduce some subject of moment, rather than the fisty-cuffs of two raggamuffins. I would just ask this question; Is not the talent of the artist shewn as much in painting a fly, as a waggon-wheel. If this were intended as a book of morals, or physiology, and not as a mere belles lettres composition, there might be something said;—as the case is, critics must be silent" (57). To my mind, Watts's reading of this passage misses the point: "Although the author-narrator means this remark to demonstrate the trivial nature of fiction, Brackenridge here suggests a superior power of fiction, since it can address actual subjects unfettered by the restraints of convention or the limitations of a consciousness that claims to be objective" (42). No one suggests "the trivial nature of fiction" here, and Watts's claim that Brackenridge affirms in this passage the "power of fiction" to address real-world issues in ways that challenge conventional or limited modes of representation is simply not borne out by the text. Instead, Brackenridge here stages an attack on utilitarian conceptions of literature—conceptions that are held by two camps of critics: those who would censure Brackenridge for political reasons and the antifictionists, who would prefer a "book of morals" over a bona fide novel, which, they fear, might corrupt the minds of the young. Brackenridge knows that, as a satirist, his repeated assertions that his book contains nothing but nonsense

will be taken by both his critics and admirers for what they are: exercises in irony. But he is perfectly serious when he asks the rhetorical question of whether "the talent of the artist" is not "shewn as much in painting a fly, as a waggon-wheel." Brackenridge here privileges manner over matter and in doing so carves out a space for literature as a verbal form of art whose first duty is neither to politics nor to religion or morality but to art itself. This constitutes the serious core of Brackenridge's playfulness. If read next to the straightforwardly didactic writers of his time, Brackenridge emerges as a protomodern writer who seeks to pry literature away from any immediate utilitarian functions. Contra Watts's censure of the narrator-author as a figure that "defends its own foolishness and escapes safely into the irresponsibility of 'nonsense'" (40), I read him as an advocate for the right of novels to be, first and foremost, what they are: verbal works of art.

And indeed, Brackenridge waves goodbye to a premodern understanding of literature when he satirizes the didacticism of his contemporaries. Brackenridge's introductory remarks concerning his implied readership read much like a parody of Rowson's *as well as his own* didacticism: "Being a book without thought, or the smallest degree of sense, it will be useful to young minds, not fatiguing their understandings, and easily introducing a love of reading and study. Acquiring language at first by this means, they will afterwards gain knowledge. It will be useful especially to young men of light minds intended for the bar or pulpit. By heaping too much upon them, stile and matter at once, you surfeit the stomach, and turn away the appetite from literary entertainment, to horse-racing and cock-fighting" (3). Toward the end of the final volume, Brackenridge gives a tongue-in-cheek assessment of why his moralizing may often fail to reach its audience: "If we should miss the mark, all that can be said, is, that if we mean instruction, we have but an aukward way of conveying it" (497). Indeed, Brackenridge's didactic intent—which is perfectly straightforward and unironic when it comes to the book's main objective, "correcting the errors of ambition" (531)—is constantly being drowned out by the novel's playfulness. And rather than making apologies for this, he defends books that aim at nothing but entertainment, thus striving to wrest literature away from its subservience to morality, religion, and politics: "Have those authors done nothing for the world, whose works would seem to have had no other object but to amuse?" (284).

Moreover, Brackenridge uses notions such as "taste," "originality," "genius," "the sublime," and "imagination"[12]—notions that began to be theorized in new ways in French, British, and German reflections on the nature and

purpose of art in the course of the eighteenth century. These and related reflections on art and beauty would gradually develop into that special branch of philosophy we now know as aesthetics. Brackenridge's frequent recourse to and celebration of "genius" is particularly interesting in this context. Here, he joins other writers of the period such as Rebecca Rush, who repeatedly calls the eponymous poet of her *Kelroy* (1812) a "genius" (29, 30, 31, 32, for example) or Charles Brockden Brown, who in his "Remarks on Reading" (1806) disparages those "esteemed writers" whose "minds were never yet inflamed by an accidental fervour of original genius" (167), as well as contemporaneous commentators on literary culture such as the prominent Federalist lawyer Fisher Ames, who, when comparing the early republic to ancient Greece in his 1803 essay "American Literature," answers in the negative his question of whether "our country [has] produced one great original work of genius" (460). Like his contemporaries, Brackenridge regularly uses "genius" in its modern sense of a human being who possesses "native intellectual power of an exalted type, such as is attributed to those who are esteemed greatest in any department of art, speculation, or practice; instinctive and extraordinary capacity for imaginative creation, original thought, invention, or discovery" (*OED*). Thus, he asserts that "a man of real genius will never walk in the beaten track" (*Modern Chivalry* 7) and that "it is not every one that is born a genius, and can do without the help of education" (257). Brackenridge also identifies a small number of specific men as geniuses: Virgil (146); Sir Robert Harley, the first Earl of Oxford (ibid.); the American general Arthur St. Clair (313); and two artists, the Italian sculptor Giuseppe Ceracchi and the French historical painter Jacques-Louis David, whom Brackenridge characterizes as among "those wonderful personages . . . who possess the sublime of genius in one of the fine arts" (476).[13] *Genius* in this sense began to emerge only toward the end of the seventeenth century—Charles Perrault's "Le Génie—Épistre À M. Fontenelle" (1688) counts as the first programmatic text on the subject— and owes much to early British reflections on art in Joseph Addison's *Spectator* essays of the early eighteenth century; Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition in a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison* (1759); William Duff's *An Essay on Original Genius; and Its Various Modes of Exertion in Philosophy and the Fine Arts, Particularly in Poetry* (1767); and Alexander Gerard's *An Essay on Genius* (1774), as well as to German idealism and its beginnings in the work of Immanuel Kant. Brackenridge here aligns himself with reflections on art that stress the originality and the autonomous, natural force of the artist as genius, that is, as a human being

who is, in Gerard's words, "qualified for making new discoveries in science, or for producing original works of art" (*Essay on Genius* 8). Such reflections prepared the ground for early nineteenth-century theorizations and literary celebrations of autonomous art in the romantic era. By the late eighteenth century, they had found their way not only into a number of novels but also into American textbooks such as Daniel Jaudon's *A Short System of Polite Learning: Being a Concise Introduction to the Arts and Sciences, Adapted for Schools* (1793), where we read that "the rules of poetry are taught by art, and acquired by study; but the force and elevation of thought, which alone makes the poetry of any value, must be derived from nature" (43).

Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry* can, then, serve us as a particularly illustrative example of the strangely hybrid nature of the early American novel because it simultaneously and paradoxically insists both on its social utility and didactic purpose *and* on its right to liberate itself from such demands. This paradox cannot be resolved, and the coexistence of these two divergent strains in *Modern Chivalry* is so pronounced that I find it more appropriate to speak of the work's generic *tensions* rather than its hybridity since, as recent work in postcolonial theory has shown, the very notion of hybridity tends to sublate difference in unity, thus downplaying conflicts and tensions.[14] The kind of structural and semantic doubleness that we can perceive in *Modern Chivalry* is by no means confined to this novel. While the first volume of Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive* gives us a rollicking picaresque tale with strong satirical overtones, the tone shifts drastically as we move into the captivity narrative of the second volume, which stages a straight-faced and deadly serious attack on slavery. William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy,* whose epistolary frame already entails structural looseness, turns out to be so deeply didactic that it threatens to split into two separate parts: a novelistic tale of mistaken identity and seduction, and a series of didactic lessons taught by characters named Worthy, Mrs. Holmes, and (via reported speeches) Rev. Holmes. About Samuel Woodworth's *The Champions of Freedom, or, the Mysterious Chief* (1816), Michael T. Gilmore writes that the text "can be considered the end point of the early novel, the book in which the form's conflicting allegiances erupt into open warfare" (642).

In *Modern Chivalry,* the modern/premodern tensions are all the more pronounced because no clear development from older to more recent conceptualizations of art can be discerned in a novel that was published over a twenty-three-year time span. Considering the long publication history of Brackenridge's seven-volume work, we may expect the later volumes

to reflect a more modern aesthetic attitude, while the earlier ones adhere to an older conception of aesthetic production as directly answerable to demands from outside the realm of art. But in fact quite the contrary is the case: it is especially in the early volumes that Brackenridge ridicules didacticism and asserts that his work is devoid of ideas; and it is in the later volumes that he seeks to ensure most forcefully, and by way of heavily italicized passages, that the book's moral message gets across.[15] In *Modern Chivalry,* the tensions between literary didacticism and autonomy aesthetics remain irresolvable. How should we interpret these and other formal tensions in early American novels?

Early American Studies Now

Early studies such as Herbert Ross Brown's *The Sentimental Novel in America* (1940), Alexander Cowie's *The Rise of the American Novel* (1948), and Henri Petter's important *The Early American Novel* (1971) assessed the inconsistencies and contradictions of early American novels as artistic failures of a fledgling art form. It is only with the publication of Jay Fliegelman's *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750–1800* (1982), Emory Elliott's *Revolutionary Writers: Literature and Authority in the New Republic, 1725–1810* (1982), and Davidson's seminal *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (1986) that criticism shifted decisively from considerations of aesthetic quality to politics. Throughout the 1980s, most critics followed this lead as they interpreted formal tensions in early American novels as reflections of ideological strains in the new republic. In such readings, the gradual transition from a republican culture based on "an abiding concern for the public good, a commitment to virtue, a belief in deference to leadership by the talented, and support for a balanced government" to a "liberal society of self-made men consolidating in post-1790 America" (S. Watts, *Republic Reborn* 53, 44) is a major source of ideological strains that are reflected in early American novels' textual tensions.

Many critics of the 1990s continued to elaborate on the links of literary culture to the emergence of liberalism as the country's new dominant ideology, though with a significant difference. Remaining within the framework of political criticism, works such as Larzer Ziff's *Writing in the New Nation: Prose, Print, and Politics in the Early United States* (1991), Grantland S. Rice's *The Transformation of Authorship in America* (1997), and Gilmore's chapter in *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (1994) assessed

the political valence of early American novels in decidedly less favorable terms than Davidson, Fliegelman, and Elliott. Generally speaking, while the earlier critics were by and large sympathetic to the emancipatory potential of liberalism and, drawing heavily on feminist scholarship, tended to read textual inconsistencies and contradictions as subversive of rigid patriarchal social structures, criticism of the 1990s had a roughly neo-Marxist bent, mourning as it did the passing of a republican culture and its communitarian ethos to argue that formal tensions in early American novels signal their complicity with an emergent liberal-capitalist order. In a striking reassessment of republicanism as "popular," several of these critics subscribe to a number of labor historians' assertion that "republican ideology served perhaps longer than any other dimension of American culture as a legitimization of working-class values . . . [and] a bulwark against the corrosive power of capitalism" (Frisch and Walkowitz xiv).[16]

One major impetus for expanding and revising both earlier accounts came from Michael Warner's Habermasian *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (1990), which provoked a flurry of publications on textual production within early American civil society and the respective importance of printed texts and oral communication for the establishment of a modern public sphere.[17] Much of that work also challenged Habermas's focus on the bourgeoisie and postulated a multiplicity of smaller public spheres, most notably female ones.[18]

Since the late 1980s, a second group of scholars has begun to move away from many of these critics' focus on New England. Spearheaded by historians and spurred on by Philip F. Gura's repeated calls for a move away from what he calls "novanglophilia" ("Colonial American Literature" 310; "Early American Literature" 600), scholars gave increased attention to regions other than New England (the Middle Colonies, the Chesapeake, the Lower South, the Caribbean, Nouvelle France, and Spanish America) in works such as Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole's edited volume *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era* (1984), Greene's *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (1988), Philip D. Morgan's *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (1998), and Carla Mulford's edited MLA volume *Teaching the Literatures of Early America* (1999).

While the bulk of this work was and continues to be done by historians, a third major development from the early 1990s onward shifted the discussion in literary studies even more decisively away from the Northeast

to challenge nation-centered narratives about early America more generally. In line with a broader reconfiguration of American studies as "postnational(ist)," "transnational," or "hemispheric,"[19] and inspired by the work of William Spengemann, David S. Shields, José David Saldívar, Nancy Armstrong, Leonard Tennenhouse, Paul Gilroy, Edward Watts, and Ralph Bauer,[20] a younger generation of scholars has begun to challenge the exceptionalist assumptions inherited from the myth and symbol school and shared by several preceding generations of early Americanists to embed American literary production in a broader geographical framework that includes not only Europe but also South and Central America, the African continent, and the West Indies. In the process, concepts and notions from postcolonial studies such as creolity, subalternity, and hybridity were imported into early American studies.[21]

This is a rough description of the status quo at the end of the twentieth century, when, for the benefit of all scholars in the field, Gura in the July 2000 issue of the *William and Mary Quarterly* published the essay "Early American Literature at the New Century," an assessment of major developments in the field from 1988 to 2000. The tone of this essay is strikingly different from that of its predecessor, "The Study of Colonial American Literature, 1966–1987," which Gura published in the same journal twelve years earlier. The 1988 essay exhorted its readers to reconstitute the study of early American literature. In Gura's analysis, the predominance of Sacvan Bercovitch's work on New England Puritanism was chiefly responsible for major infelicitous trends in the field, among them exceptionalist assumptions that divorce the study of literature from its transatlantic contexts and deny the differentness of early American culture in the search for continuities between colonial and postcolonial America; the tendency to focus on New England culture and religious rhetoric to the exclusion of the cultures and languages of other regions; and a disregard for the embeddedness of literary and other texts in early American print culture. For Gura, early American studies was in dire need of revision.

By the turn of the century, Gura's tone had switched from exhortation to celebration. His admirably broad and knowledgeable overview of scholarly achievements since 1988 sketches a field at the forefront of American studies. Early Americanists have successfully filled many of the gaps pinpointed in Gura's earlier essay and opened up new lines of inquiry not envisioned there. He outlines several major developments: Puritanism is no longer considered the one defining discourse of the era; oral, print, and manuscript culture have received increasing attention in discussions of early American

public spheres; revisionist critics have unearthed the writings and voices of women, laborers, African Americans, and Native Americans; comparative studies have turned their attention to texts in languages other than English; and, most importantly for Gura, a number of new literary-historical approaches to the period have abandoned exceptionalist premises and challenged text-based literary histories that seem to take us seamlessly from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. In what amounts to a summing up of several of the trends outlined above, Gura writes:

> We are at a point, in other words, when we are moving away from studies centered on literary influence per se toward excavations of large-scale cultural sites—such as the book distribution network, the centralization of publishing in urban areas and the ensuing mass advertising, the relation of gender to authorship, the interracial world of the Atlantic Rim, and the like. Only after we explore these sites can we turn our attention to the kinds of subjects Ziff approvingly recommended in 1988, "with strategies of the author and their effect on the reader" still the "meat" of literary analysis. (618–19)

Writing in 2000, Gura welcomed two major shifts of focus: from (literary) text to history and culture, and from the "continuities school" in literary history to an awareness of historical discontinuity and cultural diversity.

Gura links the first shift to the emergence of new historicism and the concomitant waning of textualist approaches influenced by poststructuralist theory—work that too often "seemed based in a brash and finally irrational rejection of the project of literary history as a worthwhile endeavor" (616).[22] So what is literary about the new literary histories that Gura advocates? Do literary texts still have a place in twenty-first-century studies of early America as conceived by Gura? Yes, they do, but a much diminished one. To explore both the reasons for Gura's turn from literature to culture and the links that connect this turn to his rejection of the "continuities" school, we can profitably turn to one of the three responses that Gura's essay received in 2000. In "The Ineluctability of the Peoples' Stories," Carla Mulford enthusiastically joins Gura in welcoming the shift from literary to historical and cultural analysis he describes. Yet her discussion of that shift considers it within the larger framework of debates on canon-formation, thus adding a more explicitly political dimension to Gura's argument:

> The greater grounding in a range of historical areas has led many early Americanists to expand their institutionalized definitional understanding of what *literature* and *the literary* are. *Literature* tends to be used in two ways. Many early Americanists identify it as the written record of persons' thinking and

activities, especially as taught by scholars in departments of English. But it is also employed to mark particular kinds of imaginative, self-consciously written, aestheticized materials, typically inscribed by elites. In the second use, the term denotes a specialized kind of writing apart from oral reports and speeches, sermons, and other "practical" written materials. Those whose concerns have been with aesthetics and foundational ideologies have wished to preserve the term as designating a particular kind of intellectual inquiry apart from history and apart from more generally read writings about day-to-day activities or even, sometimes, matters of faith. Such specialized use can undermine the project of cultural recovery. For this reason, the word in its second, more special usage has come under significant scrutiny, because the term becomes the site of canon and ideology debates, which can be rancorous. Most early Americanists would agree that, however the term is deployed, *literature* names a body of materials that create and shape cultures. (628)

On the way to sketching my own plea for the need to reintroduce aesthetic questions into early American studies, let me spell out a number of assumptions concerning the place of literature within the field that inform this passage. First, in early America, literature in the narrow sense is produced mainly by cultural elites. Second, those early Americanists who strictly distinguish between the literary and the nonliterary are mainly concerned with "aesthetics and foundational ideologies." Third, such strict distinctions threaten the project of recovering texts and voices heretofore excluded from the early American canon. Fourth, what generates "rancorous" debates are definitions of "literature" that are too narrow. Finally, literature in both the broader and the more narrow sense performs cultural work.

Mulford's response to Gura helps us understand how both critics' aversion to the "continuities" school is related to their celebration of the cultural-historical turn in early American studies. Since most of the *literary* texts published in early America were written by a New England elite, so the argument goes, scholarly preoccupation with those texts predisposes critics to postulate continuities with the New England elite that made up the core of F. O. Matthiessen's American Renaissance. What is left out of that kind of literary history are not only texts that do not fit narrow definitions of the literary but, along with those, also the voices of people and communities that did not primarily write imaginative literature: African Americans, Native Americans, laborers, perhaps women.

This account does have considerable explanatory power. However, it is also based on a number of assumptions concerning the social functions of literature that I wish to problematize so as to accentuate the intervention

I want the present book to make in early American studies, a field that is still to a large extent governed by these assumptions. First, while Mulford assigns nonliterary texts a rather specific function ("the written record of persons' thinking and activities"), she remains vague concerning the function of literary texts ("a particular kind of intellectual inquiry apart from history and apart from more generally read writings about day-to-day activities or even, sometimes, matters of faith"). This raises the question of what, precisely, constitutes the differentness (or apartness) of literature. At the same time, it raises the question of whether texts that aspire to be something other than a recording device have any real place in Mulford's account. Michael P. Clark's critique in his own response to Gura's essay, which is close in spirit to mine, a fortiori applies to Mulford: "The purpose of reconstructing the historical context is to establish a set of constraints on and expectations for the literary text that limit its meaning to the reproduction of that context or, at best, to the values of the 'reading public' and its inevitably conservative tastes and expectations" ("Persistence" 643).

Second, to call literary writing "imaginative" does capture something of the differentness of *fictional* discourse, but Mulford does not pause to ask what the function of aesthetic semblance may be. Once we let ourselves be troubled by that question, we may explore the possibility that literature does not aspire to represent—let alone record—the world. Instead, it generates new, fictional worlds. As we have already seen, in the eighteenth century, it was Friedrich Schiller who most eloquently asserted the social and political implications of such world-making. Standing at the beginning of a long line of thought that connects art and the utopian imagination, Schiller's defense of aesthetic semblance merges with the argument that art critiques the status quo by contrasting it with utopia in its twofold sense— a good world (εὐτόπος) that is nowhere in existence (οὐτόπος): "The reality of things is the work of things themselves; the semblance of things is the work of man; and a nature which delights in semblance is no longer taking pleasure in what it receives, but in what it does" (*Aesthetic Education* 193). In this understanding of the social function of art, art does not so much express or record the voices of those who are left out of the official record. Instead, it provides all observers of art with a vehicle for imagining a different (read: better) world and for vicariously experiencing, within the fictional world, different subject positions. This is the kind of cultural work that Schiller envisages for aesthetic semblance.

Third, Mulford's intimation that reading and writing literature are elite activities cannot explain the fact that the early American novel met

with fierce criticism precisely from cultural elites. The U.S. antifiction movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is a well-documented phenomenon whose spokespersons included some of the most prominent public figures of the era: John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Rush, Timothy Dwight, Noah Webster, and Rev. Samuel Miller. These politicians, clergymen, scholars, and educators greeted the newly emergent novel with a hostility reminiscent of the diatribes against fiction staged in England since the late seventeenth century.[23] Such opposition to fiction testifies to an uneasiness whose sources Davidson accurately identifies: "Sustained misgivings as to the social and moral effects of fiction represent, then, an attempt by an elite minority to retain a self-proclaimed role as the primary interpreters of American culture. . . . As novels became increasingly available, increasingly affordable (either purchased or rented), and increasingly accessible to the public (both because of their own linguistic simplicity and their readers' improved literacy), they were increasingly perceived to be eroding the pulpit model of erudition and authority" (*Revolution* 105–6). In its insistence on the subversive potential of fictional discourse, Davidson's *Revolution and the Word*—a major and highly influential work which Mulford rightly critiques Gura for omitting from his account ("Ineluctability" 623) even though it was published a few years outside the essay's temporal range—seems to me to capture one of the functions literature performed in late eighteenth-century America more adequately than does Mulford's dismissal of literature as an elite preoccupation. As Davidson's monograph amply demonstrates, neither the plurality of voices we hear in it nor the plurality of forms it is made up of make the early American novel a likely vehicle for the promulgation of specific ideological interests—let alone a hegemonic Puritan ideology. Studying these novels hardly predisposes us to subscribe to the "continuities" school of early American studies rightly critiqued by both Mulford and Gura.

Finally, I strongly disagree with Mulford's suggestion that the "specialized use" of literature "can undermine the project of cultural recovery." I agree with her that, as students of early America, we should not privilege any kind of discourse or text of the period over another, but neither should we level the divergences between different discourses and texts—which is what Gura also suggests when he writes that we should "explore the manifold ways in which individuals at different points in time made sense of their lives through texts, all manner and all number of them, and all placed solidly within the larger extratextual framework that historians of culture . . . provide" ("Early American Literature" 619). Instead, we should study with

as much precision as possible the specific forms and specific functions of all kinds of texts and other cultural artifacts. Only then can we begin to explain how they—to quote Mulford again—"create and shape cultures."

Mulford inherits her focus on the work texts do from new historicist practitioners, chief among them Jane Tompkins, who introduced the notion of "cultural work" in her influential *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (1985). Clearly, new historicists' determination to read all kinds of texts (court transcripts, political pamphlets, literary texts, primers, cookbooks, and so on) side by side; their leveling of hierarchies in the relationship between literary and other texts; and their discussion of nonliterary texts as co-texts rather than contexts are commendable and liberating—not only because they challenge the totalizing tendencies of what Raymond Williams called "epochal analysis" but also because they have greatly helped open up the canon to voices that had been excluded on the basis of their genre or their authors' ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or class. One need only compare one of the early editions of *The American Tradition in Literature* with the original 1989 edition of *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* to realize how profoundly our notion of what constitutes American literature has changed, and I have no desire whatsoever to mourn that change.

But there is one legacy of new historicism that I wish to contest. In their laudable challenges to elitist presumptions about literary value and their commitment to eliminating hierarchy, many critics inspired by new historicist tenets tend to downplay or overlook the differentness of different sign systems—their diverging shapes and functions. By "differentness" I do not mean "different quality" but "qualitative difference"—the type of difference that comes into view when we acknowledge, for instance, that despite their insistence on the truthfulness of the stories they tell, early American novels make truth claims that are different from those made by early American historiographies or autobiographies even if those narratives, too, contain fictional elements. Novelists do not only make different truth claims than historiographers and autobiographers; they also write differently, address different implied readerships, and are involved in different kinds of processes of print production and circulation. To acknowledge these qualitative differences between different texts and media is not to put literature back on any pedestal; it is to read literary and other texts as *different kinds* of interventions in and contributions to given cultures. Bringing early American art into a dialogue with early European aesthetics allows us to account for the specificity of works of art and of the (cultural) work they do.

Over a decade has passed since Gura's 2000 essay and Mulford's response to it, but most scholarship on the period still follows in the tracks laid out by that essay—an assessment that is confirmed by Catherine O'Donnell's review essay "Literature and Politics in the Early Republic: Views from the Bridge" (2010), the title of which already indicates that politics continues to be at the heart of not only historians' but also literary scholars' concerns. While the emphasis has shifted away from the liberalism-republican debate toward embedding literature in transnational contexts, political-historical readings of early American texts are still dominant. In fact, early American studies of the early twenty-first century has become more political in the sense that much scholarship has moved away from a consideration of the relationships between literary and political forms and toward reading literary texts as expressions or symptoms of geopolitical developments. This is particularly true for the new economic criticism. Eric Wertheimer's fascinating analysis of the structural similarities between literature and insurance in *Underwriting: The Poetics of Insurance in America, 1722–1872* (2006) and Stephen Shapiro's splendid discussion of the rise of the American novel in the context of world-system theory in *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel: Reading the Atlantic World-System* (2008) are exemplary in this respect. Wertheimer argues that literary writers responded to problems of representation that revolved around three notions (loss, risk, and publicity) whose primary frame of reference is not the era's discourse on art but the insurance industry. In his own economic reading, Shapiro claims that the early American novel arose as a result of cataclysms in the circum-Atlantic world that opened the Caribbean up to American trade, thus enabling the rise of a prosperous new class of re-export merchants in the early republic to whose structure of feeling the novel gave expression. Related lines of argumentation can also be discerned in recent scholarly work that follows the paradigm of literary geography. In his important book *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* (2006), Martin Brückner stages an intriguing attempt to theorize what he calls "geographical literacy" and describes the shapes that specific type of literacy took in the early republic. Brückner states his main goals clearly in his introduction: to trace how the "signs and symbols on the map or the rhetoric and narrative structures of geography books affect[ed] the practices surrounding the production of literature" and to explore how "the internalization of geography as a kind of language shape[d] the literary construction of the modern American subject" (12).

Admittedly, to read literary texts, as Wertheimer does, as articulations of cultural assumptions about monetary value is a critical move that is extraordinarily bold, and so is Shapiro's analysis of novelistic production in the 1790s as "convey[ing] a re-export-associated middle-class experience as a means of compensating for its exclusion from traditional institutions and modes of address" (27). Brückner's tracing back of not only literary structures but also early American subjectivities to discourses revolving around map-making likewise paves new ground. But these are moves that fit in with a more general trend in contemporary early American studies: the contextualization of literary production and reception within large socio-economic frameworks that are said to exert a considerable shaping power over not only the social functions but also the forms of literary writing. This is especially true for the recent hemispheric turn in the field. Ralph Bauer's *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literatures: Empire, Travel, Modernity* (2003) has been instrumental in importing this turn into early American studies. Bauer shares Wertheimer, Shapiro, and Brückner's conviction that literary texts are shaped primarily by extraliterary forces: "History *mattered* in this Atlantic world [so] that the differences in literary and generic evolutions in various places must be understood in terms of their distinct socio-historical developments" (8).

It is part of the objective of the present study to test the limits of such readings and to address what Ed White and Michael Drexler have diagnosed as contemporary early Americanists' "unspoken apprenticeship in the guild of History," which "diminishes our theorization of textuality" (469) and has turned "early American literary criticism" into "largely . . . a textual subfield of history" (472). What I am taking issue with is less the tendency of historians to ignore related work in early American literary studies while literary scholars readily cite historiographical work, and more so the use of literature as historical evidence and the often far too ready postulation of homologies between literary and social forms that both go along with much contextualist work. This is not to say, as many a historian would, that literary texts are weak evidence but to point out that we cannot do justice to literary texts if we read them as symptoms, mirrors, or barometers of the world. Literary forms never simply reflect or reiterate extraliterary ones—be they economic, scientific, or ideological. To my mind, literature should not be regarded as—in O'Donnell's characterization—"the bird who rides around on the rhinoceros—a sweet little creature worthy of attention only by its odd connection to that great beast of early republic history, politics," since to do so "sorely limits our understanding of literature's role in the

world, and perhaps also limits, at least in this historiography, our understanding of politics" (290).

Undoubtedly, the shifts of focus since the 1980s from questions of artistic quality (or, rather, its absence) to questions of the political significance of literary form have greatly reinvigorated the study of the early American novel. Unfortunately, though, aesthetic considerations—which are, as we have already seen, by no means limited to questions of artistic quality and taste—were largely abandoned along the way.[24] Within early American studies, one notable exception is the work of Edward Cahill, who in "An Adventurous and Lawless Fancy: Charles Brockden Brown's Aesthetic State" (2001) and *Liberty of the Imagination: Aesthetic Theory, Literary Form, and Politics in the Early United States* (2012) intelligently unravels the dialectic of liberty and constraint that informs the reception of British eighteenth-century aesthetic theory in revolutionary and early national poetry, landscape writing, political treatises, novels, and literary criticism. I will engage with Cahill's argument at some length in my discussion of Brown's *Wieland* in chapter 2. Suffice it to say here that my own focus on art (novels, sculptures, and paintings), my inclusion of continental European thinkers, and my systems-theoretic framework lead me to different conclusions even as I join Cahill in situating early American cultural production within the context of debates in the contemporaneously emerging field of aesthetics. To my mind, these debates are as significant to discussions of the social functions of the art of the period as are more narrowly social and political configurations.

Early European Aesthetics and the Art of the Early Republic

Bringing aesthetic questions back into early American studies allows us to reconsider the uses and limitations of mapping the formal tensions and paradoxical doubleness of texts such as Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry,* Brown's *The Power of Sympathy,* Tyler's *The Algerine Captive,* and Woodworth's *The Champions of Freedom* onto either ideological shifts within the early republic or social and political transformations of a transnational scope. What emerges most prominently from a second look at these novels is that their inner tensions primarily reflect not social and political power struggles but shifts in the positioning of art within the social whole. To my mind, it is the systems-theoretic notion of functional differentiation that allows us best to theorize these shifts, which are as visible in early European aesthetics as they are in the art of the early republic.

For Luhmann, functional differentiation is among the main processes that bring modernity into being: "the theorem of differentiation posits a crucial accent, if not the main criterion for distinguishing modern society from its predecessors" (*Art as a Social System* 133). Luhmann defines functional differentiation as the gradual differentiation of Western societies into social systems that each perform a unique function for society as a whole. Functional differentiation is a long historical process whose very first stirrings Luhmann locates in the fourteenth century, and which results in functionally differentiated social systems such as religion, politics, the economy, education, science, law, or art, each of which operates according to its own logic and performs a social function of its own (*Theory of Society* 2: 65–108; *Beiträge*).

Thus, in the wake of the Reformation and the religious wars of the seventeenth century, politics and religion began to drift apart, forcing each emergent social system to reflect on its own nature and develop its own modus operandi. In the case of the political system, notions such as *reason of the state* or *sovereignty,* in its modern sense of "supreme controlling power in communities not under monarchical government; absolute and independent authority" (*OED*), only began to emerge in the second half of the sixteenth century (Quaritsch; Münkler), when the first stirrings of the evolution of politics into a social system whose functioning is no longer determined by (religious) forces outside itself can be discerned.[25] The emergence of constitutional democracies in the wake of the American and French Revolutions marks an important further stage in the evolution of politics as an autonomous system (Luhmann, *Politik* 69–139; Luhmann and Kieserling 115–225; Stichweh; Kneer and Nassehi 130–31).

In the process of functional differentiation, both politics and religion emerge as self-referential, organizationally closed systems that each have their own semantics and perform a specific function for the social whole that is not shared by any other system. In the case of the political system, that function is the enablement and implementation of collectively binding decisions (Luhmann, *Politik* 84); in the case of the religious system, it is the interpretation of the incomprehensible, or, more precisely, the elimination of contingency by way of the transformation of indeterminable complexity into determinable complexity (Luhmann, *Funktion der Religion* 26). These may sound like both forbiddingly abstract and inexcusably reductive descriptions of the functions the political and the religious system perform. But—and this is crucial to Luhmann's account—these are abstractions and reductions the systems themselves enact as they draw borders that separate

them from other systems so as to sustain their own modes of operation. Moreover, they are reductions of complexity that allow for an increase in complexity *within* each system (Krause 96).

In analogy to the differentiation of the religious and the political systems, other social systems emerge, each performing its own specific function: the function of the economic system is to reduce scarcity, the function of the scientific system is to produce new knowledge, and so on. Luhmann also considers the system of art a functionally differentiated social system: "Art participates in society by differentiating itself as a system, which subjects art to a logic of operative closure—just like any other functional system.... The societal nature of modern art consists in its operative closure and autonomy, provided that society imposes this form on all functional systems, one of which is art" (*Art as a Social System* 134–35). For Luhmann each social system can only perform one specific function for society as a whole, and within systems theory there are several competing definitions of the function of art. Luhmann's own version is this: "The function of art seems to lie in the production of world contingency. The ingrained, mundane version of the world is shown to be dissolvable and becomes a polycontextural reality that can also be read differently" ("Das Kunstwerk" 624; my translation).[26] While Luhmann's nonhumanist social theory moves the subject to the margins of the discussion or, more precisely, to the environment of social systems, another systems-theoretic account brings the subject back into the discussion. For Siegfried J. Schmidt, art holds out the promise of human self-realization and identity-formation, allowing us to dress the psychological wounds the process of functional differentiation has inflicted upon us. "[Art's] function for society as a whole," Schmidt argues, "consists in ... the suspension, by way of the communicative treatment of life world and culture, of the alienation subjects suffer as a result of social differentiation" (*Selbstorganisation* 422–23; my translation). Niels Werber provides yet another systems-theoretic description of art. Focusing on literature, which he describes as a subsystem of the system of art, he argues that its function is to provide entertainment to address the modern problem of leisure time and growing demands for its structuration (27, 64, 76–77).[27]

While any attempt to pin down *the* social function of art is subject to the (fully justified) critique that it is both too general and too specific, the endeavor is worthwhile. Even Werber's surely contentious account can teach us much about the possible social function of art, provided that we are aware that Luhmannian systems theory accounts for all phenomena it

discusses exclusively in *social* terms. With respect to the question of the function of art, we need to remind ourselves that Luhmann and Werber seek to define the function of art for society as a whole, not its function for subjects. Especially pertinent to our discussion of the early American novel is systems theory's insight that modernization is a process of functional differentiation that happens at specific historical moments. As Luhmann points out, painting already showed signs of functional differentiation from the second half of the sixteenth century onward, when "the supporting function of objects defined in religious, political, or stratificatory terms diminishe[d] and [was] eventually cast off as inessential" (*Art as a Social System* 144). With respect to the subdifferentiation of the literary system, Werber and Schmidt agree that the latter half of the eighteenth century marks a decisive shift. In Schmidt's words: "Since the second half of the eighteenth century, literary systems in the sense of self-organizing social systems have begun to emerge in Europe. This emergence occurred within the context of the gradual restructuration of European societies from stratified to functionally differentiated societies as networks made up of social systems" (*Selbstorganisation* 9; my translation). This systems-theoretic account tallies with more traditional accounts of literature's emancipation from court patronage during the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and its emergence as an autonomous medium of art in nineteenth-century Romantic theorizing and literary practice—with the significant exception that Luhmann already regards the move of artistic production from individual monks and guilds to court patronage in fourteenth-century Italy as a crucial first step in the direction of autonomous art. In this version of the story, the next major step was the shift from court patronage to the market from the late seventeenth century onward (*Art as a Social System* 160–67).

By the end of the eighteenth century, literature was not a fully differentiated, operationally closed social subsystem yet. It is only with Romanticism that "the interaction between artists, experts, and consumers differentiates itself as communication, and ... takes place only in the art system, which establishes and reproduces itself in this manner" (*Art as a Social System* 266). Only then did the insistence on the self-legislative nature of art in general and poetry in particular fully come into its own. It takes a Friedrich Schlegel to write, already in 1797, that "poetry is republican speech: a speech which is its own law and end unto itself, and in which all the parts are free citizens and have a right to vote" (8).

With regard to the literature of the early republic, several indicators support the claim that, in the late eighteenth century, functional differentiation

was still work in progress. Apart from the didacticism of early American fictions and their claims to truthfulness, which I discuss above, these texts contain several additional traces of a residual premodern understanding of art. One such trace is many a novel's epistolary form. As Jürgen von Stackelberg has shown, writing a novel that consisted of letters can at least partly be understood as a defensive gesture in the face of a powerful antifiction movement. Writers of epistolary novels could buttress their claims to truthfulness further by suggesting that their books contained nothing but found letters. Though the fictionality of such gestures is obvious, the pretense allowed writers not only to assert the veracity of the words contained in these letters but also to distance themselves from them by assuming the role of editor rather than author. In Charles Brockden Brown's *Clara Howard,* this is taken one step further: the role of editor/collector is passed on to one of the text's characters, and Brown all but disappears behind that fiction. The book's first letter is prefaced by an explanatory note attributed to Clara's lover, Philip Stanley: "You ask me how all these surprising things came about? The inclosed letters, which I have put into a regular series, contain all the information you wish. The pacquet is a precious one; you will find in it, a more lively and exact picture of my life, than it is possible, by any other means, to communicate. Preserve it, therefore, with care, and return it safely and entire, as soon as you have read it" (iv). Such tortured assertions of a narrative's authenticity test the limits of the topos of the found document, exposing the cracks that open up between premodern and modern understandings of the truth value of fictional texts.

Another indicator of premodern residues in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literary culture is the generic porousness of many texts published during the era. In texts such as J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer and Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America* (1782), Brackenridge's *Incidents of the Insurrection in the Western Parts of Pennsylvania, in the Year 1794* (1795), Rowson's fictionalized history textbook *Reuben and Rachel* (1798), David Humphreys's *An Essay on the Life of the Honourable Major General Israel Putnam* (1818), and the uncompleted autobiography "The Life of Charles Willson Peale" (1825)— which Peale wrote in the third person and labeled a novel—the distinctions between the novel and the sociological essay (in Crèvecoeur's case); the novel, historiography, and the apologia (Brackenridge); the novel and historiography (Rowson, Humphreys); and the novel and life writing (Peale) are blurred. Importantly, this blurring functions very differently from the transgressions of generic boundaries that we are familiar with from post-

modern and contemporary literary texts such as Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel; the Novel as History* (1968), Robert Coover's historiographic metafiction *The Public Burning* (1977), and Dave Eggers's heavily fictionalized biography *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (2006). What we find in the early American texts is not a challenge to the rigidity of generic classification but a testimony to the fact that, in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America, the boundaries were not yet fixed.[28] In *Geschichte und Fiktion: Zum Funktionswandel des frühen amerikanischen Romans* (2003), Oliver Scheiding considers early American novels' renegotiation of the relationships and hierarchy between historiography and fiction the central modernizing element of these texts. He argues that American novels self-reflexively challenge epistemic and generic hierarchies and boundaries (most notably those between historiography and fiction) by way of a "laying bare of the fictionality or narrative nature of [all] sense-making processes" that aims at "prying open contemporary determinations of the function of literature that commit it solely to pragmatic purposes" (243; my translation). While I fully concur with Scheiding's assessment of the strongly self-reflexive nature of early American novels, the blurring of generic boundaries in these texts is to my mind much rather an indicator of the genre's premodern/modern tensions. Such porousness of generic boundaries is but one indicator that the system of art was ever so slowly on its way to the Romantic understanding of literature that Luhmann outlines:

> Systemic autonomy, to which Romanticism . . . endeavors to respond, is just what happened to the art system as a result of the functional differentiation of society. One can no longer expect instruction from the religious system, the political or economic systems, nor from the households of the most important families as to how artworks are to be made. For this reason one could almost say: autonomy becomes the destiny which is interpreted as a defence against external intervention; or the invisible cage in which the artist is forced to select, to be original and free. ("Redescription" 514–15)

Reading early American novels, we can detect signs of an emergent self-referential and autonomous system of art even as their truth claims and didacticism remind us over and over again that they are not quite there yet. Such a systems-theoretic account of literary evolution also informs the major claim I make in this book: that formal tensions in works of literature do not merely reflect social and political strains in the society within which they are produced (which remains the dominant reading in current

criticism of the early American novel), but that they are primarily signs of a shift in the positioning of art within the social whole.

That the geographical range of these shifts is by no means restricted to the early republic becomes clear as we turn our attention to contemporaneous reflections on art taking place on the other side of the Atlantic. Like early American writers, both early European aestheticians from Germany (who were not read in the early republic) and their British counterparts (who enjoyed, as we will see, some circulation) acknowledged the obligation of art to perform functions for religion, morality, and politics. At the same time, their work anticipates, as do early American novels, the Romantic notion that art is autonomous and can reject all expectations brought to bear on it from extra-aesthetic realms. Thus, both early European aestheticians and early American artists sit on the fence between a premodern understanding of art as instructor and purveyor of truth and a modern understanding of art as a sphere of human activity that obeys only the laws it gives itself. This is not to suggest that autonomization entails a retreat from the social and the political. The two poles that works of art and aesthetic treatises oscillate between are not political, religious, or moral art on the one hand and apolitical art on the other. As novels such as *Modern Chivalry* and philosophical works such as Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* make particularly clear, they oscillate between an older notion of art as *determined* by politics, religion, or morality and a more modern notion of autonomous art whose very autonomy allows it to observe the social world critically, *from a distance.*

But in what ways does systems theory help us explain why American artists and European aestheticians are riven by the same kinds of tensions and raised the same kinds of questions concerning the nature and functions of art and (in the Baumgartian German tradition as well as British empiricism) sensuous cognition? This question is especially pertinent because European contributions to the emerging field of aesthetics, particularly those by continental European thinkers, had little or no direct impact on American artistic practices. Though Cahill has shown that Charles Brockden Brown's novels engage with several varieties of early British aesthetic theory (*Liberty* 164–99), Brown's ruminations on genius and the imagination and, we may add, Brackenridge's references to William Hogarth, Edmund Burke, and Joseph Addison in *Modern Chivalry* are the exception. More crucially, there is no indication that either Brackenridge or Brown or any other early American novelist consistently drew on eighteenth-century theorizations of art as models for their own writing. Though the line is sometimes hard

to draw, early American writers knew how to distinguish aesthetics from poetics, and they knew the truth of Barnett Newman's famous quip that "aesthetics is for the artist as ornithology is for the birds" (qtd. in Eldridge 3).

Baumgarten's coinage "aesthetics" was itself a late arrival in the English-speaking world and was long considered an overly theoretical and alien element in reflections on art outside Germany. The first occurrence of the term in the English language dates to 1798, in a review of the French translation of Kant's *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* (*Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*) and Anthony Florian Madinger Willich's *Elements of the Critical Philosophy*. Yet unlike in France, this introduction to critical philosophy had no impact on either British or American discussions of similar and related issues. With the exception of Coleridge, Immanuel Kant, the major German philosopher and aesthetician of the time, was generally considered mystical, atheist, and absurd by his English contemporaries, and "Kantism" was a term of ridicule. Only in the 1830s would "aesthetics" and continental European discussions of it begin to have a major impact in the English-speaking world (Barck, Kliche and Heininger 357–58; Guyer, "Beauty" 452n. 3; J. Price vi).[29]

In America, Schiller's seminal *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* was first published in its entirety only in 1861 (Dillon, "Sentimental Aesthetics" 506). In the period covered in this book, Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Wercke in der Mahlerey und Bildhauer-Kunst* (1755) and his monumental *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (1764) were the only books on art penned by a German scholar that were available in a few places. In her invaluable bibliography *Books on Art in Early America* (2007), Janice G. Schimmelman counts five booksellers' or library catalogues that listed the former and six that listed the latter (194–96). Yet Winckelmann does not represent the new generation of European aestheticians, who challenged his firm adherence to a neoclassicist aesthetics of imitation as they proposed an aesthetics of experience, innovation, and originality that moved well beyond Winckelmann's rationalism.

British treatises on aesthetics fared better. The most listed books in early American catalogues are headed by Henry Home, Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism* (1762; 79 references), followed by Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757; 56 references), and Robert Dossie's instructional manual *The Handmaid to the Arts* (1758; 46 references). Other notable British treatises on art that enjoyed some circulation in the early republic include Anthony Ashley Cooper,

the Third Earl of Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711; 42 references), Archibald Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790; 30 references), Alexander Gerard's *Essay on Taste* (1759; 19 references), William Hogarth's *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753; 13 references), Uvedale Price's *An Essay on the Picturesque* (1796; 6 references), and William Gilpin's *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape* (1792; 4 references) (Schimmelman 208–15). Yet as we will see, the understanding of art and sensuous cognition that we can gleam from early American artworks is in fact in many respects closer to continental European thinkers' reflections on art than to British empiricist claims, even if it was the latter that were, not widely, but more readily available.

As far as the origins of a native American aesthetics is concerned, Martha Banta begins her exploration in *One True Theory and the Quest for an American Aesthetic* (2007) only in the antebellum literary magazine the *Crayon* (1855–61), "the first independent periodical devoted entirely to issues of art and the aesthetic" (15). In his presidential address to the first annual meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics in 1944, Thomas Munro references nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, George Santayana, and John Dewey as potential founding figures, but adds that "future historians will probably say that the subject of aesthetics was in its early infancy in the United States in 1944" (39). In the early republic, we do find magazine articles published by artists, announcements by literary and philosophical societies, and literary-critical essays that I will turn to in various parts of this book,[30] but no American published a systematic treatise on art within the timeframe covered here.

So, again, why draw on systems theory to explore how early American art is related to contemporaneous theorizations of art and sensuous cognition on the other side of the Atlantic? After all, there is a well-established, powerful answer to how the two link up: they both participate in and contribute to the empiricist turn initiated by Bacon, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. Since the publication of Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* in 1957, literary critics have learned to understand the emergence of the novel in relation to the rise of British empiricism: in adhering to the tenets of philosophical realism and in identifying the human body in specific times and places as a privileged site of knowledge production, novelists and modern natural philosophers alike challenge traditional rationalist-universalist assumptions concerning subjectivity and the pursuit of truth. Writers' explorations of psychological

interiority and subjective experience within their texts as well as their triggering of subjective responses in their readers further reinforce the empiricist turn toward and validation of individual experience and sense perception. Finally, novelists' uses of perspectival narration, their realistic descriptions of particulars, and their precise characterizations of individuals' external appearances and idiolects parallel the rise to dominance of the empirical method as well as further developments of early modern technologies of observation such as the telescope and the microscope (Watt 9–34; McKeon 1–4, 65–89; Thompson and Meeker; Kramnick). As Watt sums up, both "the novelist" and "the philosopher" share a common aim: "the production of what purports to be an authentic account of the actual experience of individuals" (27).

Like early novels, many early aesthetic tracts also align themselves with the empiricist turn in natural philosophy. Watt already recognizes this when he writes that Lord Kames was "perhaps the most forthright early spokesman" of an "aesthetic tendency in favour of particularity" (16). From the early eighteenth century onward, a growing number of British philosophers began to think about art in ways that differed sharply from the rule-governed, rule-giving, and universalist French and German Cartesian-rationalist tradition shaped by Charles Batteux, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Christian Wolff, Johann Christoph Gottsched, and Winckelmann, and adopted in England by, among others, Thomas Rymer, Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, and Sir Joshua Reynolds. It was Shaftesbury who, with his *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times,* a collection of previously published works, and his dialogue *The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody* (1709) ever so cautiously and inconsistently initiated a move away from inquiries into art that relate it to what one contemporary novel calls "the order, proportion, beauty and harmony of the whole" (Vickery 88), toward questions of taste and, with them, the subjective experience of natural and artistic beauty.

Expanding on Shaftesbury, whose work is still permeated by an older, Neo-platonic understanding of art (Beardsley 179), early British aestheticians—chief among them Francis Hutcheson, Thomas Reid, Addison, Hume, Burke, Gerard, and Alison—began to ask themselves whether there is such a thing as a standard of taste and how it can be determined; how closely connected the aesthetic sense and the moral sense are; how the beautiful relates to the picturesque and the sublime; what role the imagination and genius play in the making of art; and how associationist psychology helps explain the poet's chains of ideas. In their focus on the subjective side of

both the production and reception of art, on what one could almost call the psychological causes and effects of art, these inquiries aligned themselves smoothly with the more general empiricist turn and established an empiricist aesthetics that quickly became dominant in the English-speaking world of the eighteenth century. Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism*, the most widely circulated book on aesthetics in the early republic, sums up this British tradition.

In continental Europe, it was a thinker trained in the rationalist tradition who laid the ground for an experiential turn in the philosophy of art. By defining *aesthetics* as "the science of perception" (*Reflections* §116, 78), Baumgarten prompted further reflections on art that shared scientific empiricism's (much less guarded) valorization of subjective experience, perception, and cognition as avenues to knowledge and truth. Unlike in England, though, on the continent, the new empiricist epistemology (which Baumgarten did not subscribe to) did not displace the rationalist tradition with comparable force. Famously, in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), Kant would seek to strike a middle ground between British empiricist aesthetics and the continental rationalist tradition fifty-five years after Baumgarten's initial spark.

The more political variant of this account of the shared roots of early aesthetics and early American art would stress, again with Watt, that both are fueled by what can be called the political consequence of Lockean empiricism: liberalism. In their focus on subjective experience, both early aestheticians and early novelists subscribe to and foster a worldview that privileges the rights of the individual over the strictures of communal life. In such a reading, novelists' stagings of conflicts between individuals and groups, their striving for psychological realism, and their fostering of reading as a solitary experience contribute to the formation of the individualist ethos of the emergent middle classes in much the same way as do aestheticians' reflections on the moral and the aesthetic sense, the experience of the sublime, taste, and genius.

These two interpretative frameworks—empiricism and liberalism—have considerable explanatory power when it comes to the relation between early European aesthetics and American artistic production in the early republic, but to my mind, it is again systems theory that helps us best make sense of that relation. Systems theory provides a more encompassing account of processes of modernization that subsumes both empiricism and liberalism. From such a perspective, both early European aesthetics and early American art are manifestations of Europe and America on their slow

and winding path toward modernity, and their premodern/modern tensions testify to that transitional state. Let me begin with aesthetics.

In the late eighteenth century, it was Kant's three critiques that most strongly testified to a drifting apart of Plato's triad of "the good, the true, and the beautiful."[31] This triad rests on the premodern assumption that morality, social and philosophical knowledge, and aesthetic pleasure are inextricably intertwined, and Kant's three critiques are modern in the sense that they signal (in however qualified a fashion) that the three are distinct from one another: while the *Critique of Pure Reason* probes the limits of human knowledge, the *Critique of Practical Reason* locates the moral law within subjects, and the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* focuses on, among other things, the perception of artistic and natural beauty. The third critique's contention that "the beautiful, the judging of which has as its ground a merely formal purposiveness, i.e., a purposiveness without an end, is entirely independent of the representation of the good" (§15, 171) ultimately testifies to what J. M. Bernstein calls the quintessentially modern "alienation of art from truth and morality" (67).[32] It is with Kant that we begin to move away from Madame de Staël's conviction that "literature can only derive its permanent beauties from the most delicate and refined morality" (1: 30).[33] Thus, Werber certainly has a point when he reads Kant's third critique as a theorization of art as a functionally differentiated, autonomous system. Moreover, Werber's interesting aside that the phrase *l'art pour l'art* did not originate—as is commonly assumed—in the context of mid-nineteenth-century French aestheticism but rather in Benjamin Constant's reading of Kant from 1804 (47–48) does lend additional credence to readings of Kant as a theorist of autonomous art. Finally, Kant's celebration of genius and originality (*Judgment* §§46–47, 186–89) and his insistence that art "pleases immediately" and "without any interest" (§59, 227) also point in that direction.

Yet Kant's reflections on genius, taste, and disinterest deserve a closer look. *Genius* is one of the two central terms in Kant's reflections on art; *taste* is the other. While taste relates to the reception of art, genius relates to its production. Genius is a natural talent rather than a social being, a force of nature within society that, like nature, continually brings forth the original and the new. Genius harnesses the imagination in ways that go beyond the association and combination of individual sense perceptions; it is a truly original force that is "very powerful in creating, as it were, another nature, out of the material which the real one gives it" (Kant, *Judgment* §49, 192). Thus, artists inspired by genius seem autonomous in a twofold

sense: channeling a force of nature, they stand outside society; as beings capable of creating a second nature seemingly out of nothing, from within, they emancipate themselves even from first nature.[34] However, as Gottfried Boehm has shown, genius itself is ultimately not a fully autonomous force: it is a force of nature, and nature acts through it (lxix–lxxi). In Kant's own words, "Genius is the talent (natural gift) that gives the rule to art. Since the talent, as an inborn productive faculty of the artist, itself belongs to nature, this could also be expressed thus: Genius is the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art" (*Judgment* §46, 186).

Kant's choice to focus on judgments of taste also does not show him as a thinker intent on developing a theory of autonomous art. In fact, his concern with taste reveals him as a philosopher who is decidedly less interested in the status or features of beautiful objects than in the *experience* of beauty. His aesthetics proffers not a theory of art but a theory of the subjective experience of natural and artistic beauty. Hence, to call his aesthetics a theory of autonomous art again makes only limited sense, for what is autonomous for him is not the artwork itself but aesthetic experience. More precisely, what is autonomous for him is our judgment of taste— "which gives the law to itself" (§59, 227)—and the free play of the human faculties, the "unity of imagination with the understanding" (VII, 76) that aesthetic pleasure enables.

Kant's initial assertion in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that beauty allows for disinterested pleasure—which he inherits from Shaftesbury and Hutcheson—has been read as yet another indicator that his aesthetics proposes a theory of autonomous art.[35] In late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century literary theory and criticism, this aspect of Kant's reflections on art has come under particularly harsh scrutiny. For critics of aesthetic ideology like Terry Eagleton, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Jerome McGann, and Tony Bennett, two things are wrong with Kantian disinterestedness: first, it suggests that the experience of art takes place in an autonomous realm that is entirely separate from either ethics or politics; second, its ostensibly apolitical and disinterested stance masks bourgeois interests.[36] Yet Kantian interests and disinterests are neither attitudes nor ideological convictions nor anything related to self-interests that we bring to bear on beautiful objects. Instead, they denote the presence or absence of desire in the experience of pleasure: in the former case, we are dealing with interested pleasure, which describes the experience of the agreeable and the good; in the latter, we are dealing with disinterested pleasure, which describes the

experience of the beautiful. As Kant writes, "One can say that among all these three kinds of satisfaction only that of the taste for the beautiful is a disinterested and free satisfaction; for no interest, neither that of the senses nor that of reason, extorts approval" (Kant, *Judgment* §5, 95).[37] Thus, since disinterestedness relates to aesthetic pleasure itself rather than to anything we might bring to bear on or take away from the encounter with beauty, both Kant's detractors and many of his defenders miss the mark. Except, perhaps, for that brief moment in which the representation of an object evokes a pleasurable response in us, Kant does not suggest that art exists in a separate realm outside of ideology and politics. *Disinterestedness* names a quality of aesthetic pleasure, nothing more and nothing less; it neither masks bourgeois ideological interests, nor does it stand opposed to capitalist consumption.[38]

Kant's third critique is also not a fully developed theory of functionally differentiated, autonomous art because, in discussing both the sublime and the beautiful, Kant builds bridges between art, morality, and religion. In fact, it is the explicitly expressed purpose of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* to bring together the concerns of the first two critiques, to mediate between nature and freedom, between sensuous experience and morality, between what is and what should be so as to "throw a bridge from one domain to the other" (IX, 81). In the mathematical sublime, we become aware of the inexpressible grandeur of nature; nature itself appears as great beyond all bounds, as a "supersensible substratum" (§77, 279) of wholeness and divinity. In the dynamical sublime, we become aware of both our helplessness as physical beings and our superiority as moral beings: "The judgment on the sublime . . . has its foundation in human nature, and indeed in that which can be required of everyone and demanded of him along with healthy understanding, namely in the predisposition to the feeling for (practical) ideas, i.e., to that which is moral" (§29, 148–49). The experience of the beautiful, too, is related to morality because in it, we sense that the harmony of our faculties corresponds to the harmony of nature, which allows us to appreciate the purposiveness of the natural world, of ourselves, and—because of the subjective universality of judgments of taste—also of others. Thus, the beautiful becomes "the symbol of the morally good" (§59, 227). As is the experience of the sublime, then, the experience of beauty is crucially related not only to individual autonomy but also to collective morality.

In discussing the gradual differentiation of art from other social systems in the eighteenth century, Luhmann well captures the kind of doubleness that characterizes Kant's reflections on morality, beauty, and the sublime:

The "beautiful" does not necessarily have to agree with the morally good, and it cannot draw support from such agreement if it doesn't convince as art. Yet there is no such thing as a crosswise identification of codes, as if the beautiful would have to prove itself above all in the realm of moral perversities (such as incest). The distinctions are positioned in an orthogonal relation to each other; they are indifferent to one another. But since one sought to distance oneself from a tradition that thought about this problem differently, the formulations expressing this trend tend to be uncertain and ambiguous. (*Art as a Social System* 189–90)

What emerges from a close look at Kant's third critique is that it should not be read as a theory of autonomous art but as a work that remains indebted to a premodern notion of art as answerable to external demands even as it anticipates the work of Romantic aestheticians such as Schlegel, who seek to set art free from such constraints in order to enable it to confront the existing world with a different, better world. Kant no longer shares the American painter John Trumbull's conviction, expressed in his "Essay on the Use and Advantages of the Fine Arts" (1770), that "the fine Arts" and the "elegant entertainments of polite Literature" necessarily "ennoble the soul, purify the passions, and give the thoughts a better turn" (4). For Kant, the sense of beauty and the moral sense are related, but they are no longer one and the same. As much as his third critique, particularly its discussion of genius, lays the ground for the Romantic celebration of innovation, originality, and the autonomy of art, it nowhere proclaims artworks autonomous. When Kant wrote the *Critique of the Power of Judgment,* the process of functional differentiation was still evolving, and the fact that the third critique gestures toward but never embraces the autonomy of art testifies to its liminal status.

Not only Kant's aesthetics is riven by such modern/premodern tensions; all early aesthetic theories are. In 1800, Johann Gottfried Herder wrote about the "*then* favored form of that holy three, the true, the good, and the beautiful" (94; my translation and emphasis), but throughout the eighteenth century, the good, the true, and the beautiful were still inextricably intertwined. In both Shaftesbury's and Hutcheson's aesthetic treatises of the 1710s and 1720s, quintessentially modern notions such as "the pleasure of sense," the "sense of what is naturally graceful and becoming" (Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men* 62), or the "sense of beauty" (Hutcheson 7) remain so intimately tied up with moral sense that it took a Kant ever so gently to pry them apart. Not even Hume, whose work in the 1740s and 1750s greatly contributed to the shift from an ontotheological

to an epistemologically grounded philosophy of art, made a clear distinction between aesthetic and moral judgments. Baumgarten's two-volume *Aesthetica* (1750/1758) is rightly seen as another starting point of reflections on art that value sense perceptions, and he even formulates in it an early theory of fictionality. But Baumgarten remains firmly embedded within the older, rationalist conception of art and beauty formulated by Wolff and Gottsched, whose ontological-metaphysical bias judges that as beautiful (and good, and true) which best imitates the divine cosmos. Even Schiller, whose celebration of aesthetic semblance is a strong marker of his modernity, occasionally keeps art, morality, and politics together at the end of the century as he puts much of his hope in people's "beautiful soul[s]" to bring the Enlightenment back on track after its descent into bloodshed during the French Reign of Terror. Finally, as Tom Huhn demonstrates, even as early aestheticians developed an aesthetics of expression and subjective experience, their reflections on art remained firmly indebted to theories of mimesis that conceptualize not only art but the totality of social relations in terms of mirroring and replication.

Such tensions testify to early aestheticians being caught in the midst of a process of functional differentiation that was still very much underway in the late eighteenth century. Luhmann adds that these tensions pervade eighteenth-century art as much as they do early aesthetics:

> A clear tendency toward releasing art and literature from its ties to reality cannot be identified yet, especially not as a principle. A certain type of English literature—such as *Pamela*—still teaches that morality may turn out to be quite useful in practice. One has the impression, however, that every restriction to a specific relationship between morals and art/literature is now taken note of and provokes objections, especially when it can be described in a national comparison as typically English or typically French. As a result, art eventually meanders toward autonomy after all. (*Art as a Social System* 155–56)

In early American fiction, such meandering is nowhere more prominent than in *Modern Chivalry,* which loudly voices objections against literature's dependence on other social realms even as it testifies to literature's imbrication in the discourses of morality and other nonartistic social systems. Returning to Brackenridge's novel once more, we can now specify what makes it modern, and where the limitations of such a reading lie. Brackenridge's work is modern precisely to the extent that it observes itself and other works of literature as autonomous, and it is premodern when it insists on its duty to perform functions for other social systems. The

persistent didacticism and the truth claims of Brackenridge's text pay homage to a premodern notion of art for which "the good, the true, and the beautiful" are still inseparable; the novel's parodic subversions of didacticism and its praise of originality and genius gesture toward a modern notion of art. More so than other novels of the period, *Modern Chivalry* testifies to premodern/modern tensions of literature at a crossroads.

Yet Brackenridge is clearly not alone in this. Even in Rowson's deeply didactic, nonparodic, and unironic *Charlotte Temple,* we can detect traces of processes of literary modernization. After an extended allegorical discourse on Humility, Filial Piety, Conjugal Affection, Industry, Benevolence, Content, Religion, Patience, and Hope, Rowson's narrator says, "I confess I have rambled strangely from my story" (35). This said, she immediately justifies such digressions by reaffirming the educational value of her tale. Yet the very fact that the narrator uses the verb *to ramble* and the adverb *strangely* to describe that digression points to the fact that Rowson was aware of expectations on the part of her empirical readers that may well diverge from those of her implied readers—a fact that is also acknowledged by William Hill Brown, who has his moralistic character Mrs. Holmes write that "didactic essays are not always capable of engaging the attention of young ladies" (77). Rowson and Brown were, in other words, aware that many of their readers valued their books less for their moral advice than for their gripping stories and their concealed invitations to readers to sympathize with the wayward heroines' plights. And that awareness registers the existence of a more modern understanding of the social function of art on Rowson's and Brown's parts than the one their moralistic narrators and characters adhere to.

If early aestheticians such as Shaftesbury, Hume, Baumgarten, and Kant observe art from the outside and, in doing so, postulate that it is both autonomous *and* performs heteronomous functions for other social realms including religion and morality, works such as *Modern Chivalry, The Algerine Captive,* and, to a much lesser extent, *The Power of Sympathy* and *Charlotte Temple* engage in acts of (mostly) implicit *self*-observation from within the system of art that reach similar conclusions. In both the aesthetics and the literature of the latter half of the eighteenth century, an irresolvable tension between premodern and modern notions of art obtains, and that very tension testifies to the transitional status of writing in the midst of a process of functional differentiation. And it is those tensions—tensions that are first and foremost aesthetic in nature—that make early American novels such fascinating objects of analysis. This is not to deny that textual

tensions and contradictions have political significance but to insist that they need to be analyzed in aesthetic terms, in their own right, before they are correlated with social and political tensions and contradictions. For the purpose of this book, this means that formal tensions in literary texts first need to be understood in the context of reflections on art taking place within the texts themselves and, secondly, within early aesthetics. In staking out that claim in the following pages, I not only aim to redress what I consider to be an imbalance in much recent work in early American studies; I also wish to shift attention away from reading aesthetics as ideology toward trying to understand it again as aestheticians do—as both a theory of sensuous cognition and a theory of the forms and social functions of art.

I fully concur, then, with William Walker's assessment that aesthetic treatises are interesting first and foremost for what they have to say about art and what they have to say about perception. Walker makes that point in discussing Addison's reception:

> Regardless of how one understands the political meanings of Addison's essays on the pleasures of the imagination, it is not the case, as many critics now seem to think, that these meanings constitute *the* meaning of these essays, that they are their essential meaning, or that all other meanings in some way reduce to these meanings. . . . It is possible that, in writing about art, a person might be doing many things besides defending the interests of a social group, such as intentionally or unintentionally presenting a critique of the general concepts governing our perception and understanding of art; intentionally or unintentionally describing how his and others' erotic energies are implicated in their perception of art; intentionally or unintentionally revising earlier accounts of art; intentionally presenting an account of the nature of art and how we respond to it. And, if a person was doing some of these other things, it is hardly self-evident that they are all superficial, surface actions that are in some sense reducible to the deep, real, essential action that is social, material, and political. (79)

Surprisingly, perhaps, Walker's critique not only applies to adherents of the aesthetics-as-ideology paradigm; it also applies to much discussion generated by what has variously been labeled "the return of aesthetics," "the revenge of the aesthetic," "the new aestheticism," or (in Isobel Armstrong's phrasing) "the radical aesthetic."[39] As we read on the back cover of Emory Elliott, Louis Freitas Caton, and Jeffrey Rhyne's edited collection *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age,* it is not so much aesthetics itself that many of these critics aim to move back into the discussion as the relationship of aesthetics to the political concerns that dominate literary and cultural studies these

days: "Addressing the vexed relation of the arts and criticism to current political and cultural concerns, the contributors to this volume attempt to bridge the two decades–old gap between scholars and critics who hold conflicting views of the purposes of art and criticism." While I share Elliott, Caton, and Rhyne's desire to bring the aesthetic into a dialogue with the political, my concern is that this should not happen too quickly lest the results be the inverse of those reached by the aesthetics-as-ideology camp—namely that, instead of being seen as perpetuating dominant (bourgeois) ideologies, aesthetic objects and aesthetic theorizing are now reconceptualized as allies of more progressive, emancipatory sociopolitical projects and agendas.

This is a danger that I see at work, for instance, in Isobel Armstrong's insistence on "the democratic and radical potential of aesthetic discourse" (2) as well as Elaine Scarry's interweaving of the social, the moral, and the political in *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999). For Scarry, the experience of beauty predisposes us to work toward social justice and an ethically viable care for the world and its objects: "Beauty," she writes, "intensifies the pressure we feel to repair existing injuries. . . . Beautiful things give rise to the notion of distribution, to a lifesaving reciprocity, to fairness not just in the sense of loveliness in aspect but in the sense of a 'symmetry of everyone's relation to one another'" (95). In her desire to put beauty in the service of other values, Scarry not only overestimates the direct, real-world effects our encounters with beauty may have but also ignores the fact that some of those aesthetic objects that actually did promote justice and social change were anything but beautiful in Scarry's sense—think of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) or Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940). With regard to both Armstrong and Scarry, I concur with George Levine's assessment: "It seems that one will get nowhere now in ethics, aesthetics, *or* politics without recognizing also the failure of the project of conflating the three" (908).

My own take on aesthetics is closer to that of Gabrielle Starr, who notes that, reading Scarry's and Armstrong's work as well as that of fellow proponents of a return to the aesthetic, one may be led to believe that "thinking the aesthetic all but requires its immediate translation into something else, whether it is ethics, ideology, or politics; aesthetics may well be uninteresting without such transformation" (366). Against this ready conflation of the political, the ethical, and the aesthetic, Starr aims "to explore what happens when the temptations of hermeneutic and ethical approaches to the aesthetic are held, even briefly, at bay" (362). To my mind, two words are particularly apposite here: "even briefly." My own take on aesthetics starts

from the assumption that neither art nor philosophical reflections on art are either politically emancipatory or ideologically suspect per se, and it insists that asking aesthetic questions about the forms and functions of artworks is not only a worthwhile endeavor in itself but also an indispensable foundation of any serious exploration of the cultural work done by art, by artworks of any period in the history of art, or by one specific work of art. From such a vantage point, one can again begin to look into the strangeness of works of art, the unique qualities of individual works of art, aesthetic experience, and the specific forms and social functions of different artistic media in ways that reduce art neither to the political and historical nor to the apolitical and ahistorical. It is the very success of new historicists' and new Americanists' redefinitions of American literature that makes charges that narrow definitions of literature or scholarly preoccupations with aesthetic questions continue to exclude texts written by the downtrodden and marginalized ring somewhat false in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Perhaps it is safe again to ask ourselves what reflections on art produced by elites as well as nonelites can teach us. In John Joughin and Simon Malpas's words, it may be time to embark on the recovery of a "sense of art's specificity as an object of analysis—or, more accurately its specificity as an aesthetic phenomenon" (1). What is called for, then, is a turn from the hermeneutics of suspicion to a newly configured aesthetics that abandons the "reluctance" of much recent theory and criticism "to recognize the specificity of the poetic work in the field of social action" (Clark, *Revenge* 4) and acknowledges the insights gained through the politicization of literary and cultural studies without being subsumed by them. In the chapters that follow, I continue this line of inquiry as I bring together American artistic production and European reflections on art from the mid-eighteenth to the early nineteenth century to explore the changing status of a notion that belongs as much to political discourse as it does to aesthetics: deception.

2 Political Deceptions and Sensory Delusions

AMERICANS HAVE known the political value of pretense at least since December 16, 1773, when some sixty colonists, most of them disguised as Mohawk Indians, dumped 342 crates of tea into Boston Harbor. As the self-styled Sons of Liberty stormed the East India Company's three vessels, they emitted Indian war cries and used tomahawks to split open the crates.[1] Philip J. Deloria has identified the Boston Tea Party as a colonial reworking of "Old World traditions of misrule" in which social hierarchies were symbolically turned upside down. In North America, such stagings of dissent were "often performed in Indian dress" and "remained a vital mode of American political protest for more than a century" (12). In 1773, no one was fooled by the protesters' disguise: "As shoemaker George Hewes recalled, he transformed himself into a Mohawk by just blackening his 'face and hands with coal dust in the shop of a blacksmith.' Others only had a dab on their face and a blanket wrapped around their shoulders" (Drake 338). But the camouflage served not only to stave off legal retribution but also to underscore both the Americanness of the protest and the protesters' sense that they, too, were victims of colonial oppression—which is, of course, bitterly ironic given the number of Native American lives European colonization had already claimed in the Americas by the end of the eighteenth century.

When thirty-nine of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention signed the Constitution of the United States fourteen years later, they again resorted to deception. Article VIII of the document states that it was "DONE in Convention by the Unanimous Consent of the States present" even though at least three delegates had already left and another three declined to sign it. As Robert A. Ferguson is entirely right in pointing out, "Unanimity is, of course, a lie. Three leading members of the Convention—Edmund Randolph, Elbridge Gerry, and George Mason—refuse to sign the Constitution on the final day of the Convention, and at least three

others—Luther Martin, Robert Yates, and John Lansing, Jr.—withdraw earlier because of their unhappiness with the emerging document. The unanimity injected into the language of the Constitution is instead a useful fiction, a myth of glorious harmony that the Founders wield in the ideological struggle first to elicit and then to enforce allegiance in the process of ratification" ("Ideology" 158–59). Thus, both the agents of one of the major events that sparked off the American Revolution and the founders of the nation that was about to come out of that revolution used dissimulation for political ends. As Hugh Henry Brackenridge puts it in *Modern Chivalry*, "All Americans may be capable of substituting a thing for what it is not" (422). For early American elites as well as nonelites, deception could be a legitimate political strategy—a strategy that finds its literary apotheosis in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (1821). As a secret agent in the service of General George Washington who can perform his patriotic duties all the better because he feigns being a British spy, that novel's protagonist Harvey Birch participates in a complex game of dissimulation that endangers his property, reputation, and life even as it ennobles him as a true, selfless American hero.

Yet in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American culture, artifice and dissimulation for the greatest part were not effective weapons wielded in political and ideological struggles but sources of profound anxieties. To some extent, these cultural anxieties are a legacy of the War of Independence in much the same way that the prevalence of paranoid thought in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century America is a legacy of the Cold War. In the most general terms, cultural anxieties are often fueled by crises of norms and values that grow out of political upheavals. The War of Independence was not over until 1783, when the Treaty of Paris was signed after almost one and a half years of diplomatic maneuvering and power games between as well as within the national delegations. Think of all the scheming and duplicities involved in these events of the period: the Earl of Shelburne's decision to keep secret the provisional understanding reached between the British negotiator Richard Oswald and Benjamin Franklin that Britain should cede Canada to the Americans; Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay's decision to begin separate negotiations with Britain in violation of the Franco-American Treaty of 1778; the French foreign minister Comte de Vergennes's clandestine talks with both the British and the Americans about the future status of the Newfoundland fisheries; Spain's continual stalling of negotiations with Jay; and all involved parties' decision making over the heads of Africans, African Americans, and Native

Americans (Morris; Hoffman and Albert). With regard to the American negotiators, historian Bradford Perkins speaks of their "hypersuspiciousness" (193) and adds that earlier historians' conviction that "the [American] nation's agents were ingenuous actors in a cast otherwise marked by an intriguing spirit" does not hold up to scrutiny: "Rather than contrast American behavior with that of France or Spain, it is perhaps best to agree with a dispassionate historian who simply observes that 'willingness to engage in double-dealing was characteristic of all parties'" (200; quoting Jensen 14). As Bernard Bailyn has pointed out, fears of factionalism, corruption, and conspiracy were a constant presence throughout the American Revolution (*To Begin* 144–59), and during the peace treaty negotiations those fears continued to fuel American delegates' suspicions in general and Jay's anti-French sentiments in particular.

Once the Constitution had been ratified and the U.S. government had become fully operative as the Supreme Court held its first session on February 2, 1790, the newly united states were still far from politically consolidated. The French Revolution, the Citizen Genêt affair of 1793, and the second French Reign of Terror of 1793–94 fostered xenophobia and fears about Jacobin political machinations in the United States that culminated in the passage of the four Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798. The constitutionality of these laws was vigorously challenged by the Democratic-Republicans, who knew full well that while the three Alien Acts were primarily designed to quell Jacobin influence, the Sedition Act was mainly devised to silence Democratic-Republican opposition to Federalist policies. The wording of all four legislative acts testifies to profound anxieties concerning the possibility of treachery and deception during the country's second administration. The Alien Friends Act gave President John Adams the right to order to "depart out of the territory of the United States" all "such aliens as he shall judge dangerous to the peace and safety of the United States, or shall have reasonable grounds to suspect are concerned in any treasonable or secret machinations against the government thereof" (*Public Statutes* Act of June 25, 1798, ch. 58, Stat. 571). The Alien Enemies Act applied even stricter measures to aliens of a country that was at war with the United States. All "males of the age of fourteen years and upwards" that fit this category were "liable to be apprehended, restrained, secured and removed, as alien enemies" (*Public Statutes* Act of July 6, 1798, ch. 66, Stat. 577).

Yet it was the Sedition Act that created most controversy. While the other three acts may be understood as measures that were taken out of a mixture of xenophobia and national security concerns, the Sedition Act was targeted clearly at the political opposition in general and Democratic-Republican newspapers in particular. The tone of this fourth act also differs markedly from that of the other three. Its rapid-fire enumeration of punishable offenses of astonishingly divergent quality (conspiracy, intimidation of officeholders, insurrection, riot, unlawful assembly, defamation of any government official, sedition, libel, and so on) has a feverish and paranoid ring to it. What resonates in the Sedition Act is quite the opposite of republican vigilance: this act does not give expression to fears that power corrupts; it expresses the fears of those who *are* in power of those that might challenge their legitimacy. Sections 2 and 3, which concern the printing and circulation of "false, scandalous and malicious writing or writings against the government of the United States, or either house of the Congress of the United States, or the President of the United States" (*Public Statutes* Act of July 14, 1798, ch. 74, Stat. 596), make clear that Federalist fears are ultimately fears about representation—fears that oppositional writings may deceive (or undeceive) the people about the administration's actions and intentions.

The Sedition Act was but the most prominent indicator that the Federalists held their political opponents in the lowest possible esteem during the "age of passion." For them, Democratic-Republicans "at best ... seemed governed by obstinacy, envy, malice or ambition. At worst they were seditious and treasonable. Federalist private correspondence was peppered with references to Republican disloyalty, insincerity, intrigue and demagoguery, and similar allegations were made in the pamphleteering war" (Smelser 394–95). On the Democratic-Republican side, anxieties over the Federalist leaders' propensity to act against the people's interest and even strive, as Jeffersonians feared, for absolutist power based on the British model were energized by a republican culture of vigilance whose persistence testified to widespread apprehensions concerning the unity and stability of the newly formed nation:

> Americans were anxiety-ridden over whether they were the stuff out of which republicans were made, and they continually called for moral reformation. They experienced constant concern over the need to maintain public virtue and ardently believed that republicanism must ever maintain a regenerative character. . . . Republicanism meant maintaining public and private virtue, internal unity, social solidarity, and it meant constantly struggling against "threats" to the "republican character" of the nation. This led to an ofttimes paranoid outlook on the part of many Americans who were constantly fearful lest irresponsible or vicious fellow citizens were at work to corrupt their

society. This anxiety resulted from the firmly held belief that republics were short-lived due to their innate susceptibility to internal subversion and external attack. (Shalhope 71–72)

It would be too facile to dismiss republican vigilance simply as paranoia, for the emerging culture of liberalism forced early Americans to rethink the relationship between the individual and the community and to assess the benefits and costs of individualism.[2] The rise to prominence of two human types within the early American public sphere, the self-made man and the confidence man, serves as an indicator of the virulence of these debates.[3]

The Politics of Deception

Already in Benjamin Franklin's notion of the self-made man, a penchant for play-acting and dissimulation is deeply inscribed. For Franklin, given the right circumstances, deception is permissible. This becomes especially apparent when, in his posthumously published *Autobiography* (1791), he describes his highly idiosyncratic understanding of the Socratic method. Unlike Socrates, Franklin aims not at the pursuit of truth but at the winning of arguments. For him, artifice is legitimate if it serves that end. Thus, we read how Franklin decided to "put on the humble Enquirer and Doubter" and how he "grew very artful and expert in drawing People even of superior Knowledge into Concessions the Consequences of which they did not foresee, entangling them in Difficulties out of which they could not extricate themselves, and so obtaining Victories that neither myself nor my Cause always deserved" (13). It is passages such as these that have drawn some of the most hostile responses by twentieth-century commentators ranging from D. H. Lawrence to Adorno and Horkheimer and beyond. For them, Franklin (or, rather, the public persona he projects) is the prototype of the modern man whose instrumental rationality reifies both others and himself.[4]

But Franklin's contemporaneous critics were struck less by his often coldly rational calculations than by what they considered his immoral sophistry—a character trait that flies in the face of not only Socratic truth-seeking but also Christian religious doctrines and Scottish common sense philosophers' insistence that human lives should be based on truth. Writing in 1781, Peter Oliver, the loyalist chief justice of the Massachusetts Superior Court, characterized Franklin in these terms: "Pride is Dr. *Franklin's* ruling Passion, & from this Source may be traced all the Actions of his Life.

He had a Contempt of Religion, of Mankind, & even of those whom he had duped; & had he viewed the Subject in a moral Light, he would have contemned hisself" (82). Still irked by "Dr. Franklin's overbearing fame" and the revocation of his own privileges as Minister Plenipotentiary during the Paris peace treaty negotiations of 1783, John Adams makes similar accusations in the *Boston Patriot* of May 15, 1811, charging Franklin with a number of artifices ranging from "downright falsehood" and "duplicity" to "the sophistry of the false accuser" (*Works* 653–56). For contemporaneous detractors such as Oliver and Adams, the Franklinesque self-made man was but one step removed from the con man. In modernist literature, no one has made that point more remarkably than F. Scott Fitzgerald, who has Jay Gatsby create Franklinesque daily schedules for himself.

It is particularly Franklin's obsessive concern with outward appearances that blurs the boundary between the self-made man and the con man. In passages such as the following, self-fashioning and dissimulation are difficult to keep apart: "In order to secure my Credit and Character as a Tradesman, I took care not only to be in *Reality* Industrious and frugal, but avoid all *Appearances* to the contrary. I dressed plainly; I was seen at no Places of idle Diversion; I never went out a-fishing or shooting; a Book, indeed, sometimes debauch'd me from my Work; but that was seldom, snug, and gave no Scandal: and to show that I was not above my Business, I sometimes brought home the Paper I purchas'd at the Stores, thro' the Streets on a Wheelbarrow" (54). To many of Franklin's contemporaneous readers, such open admissions of play-acting seemed dangerously close to exercises in Chesterfieldian civility.

It is difficult to overestimate the impact the publication of selections from the fourth Earl of Chesterfield's over three hundred letters to his son had on the culture of the early republic. Chesterfield, born Philip Dormer Stanhope, did not plan to have his letters appear in print, but they quickly became a bestseller when, one year after Chesterfield's demise, Eugenia Stanhope, the recipient's widow, published them in two volumes under the title *Letters Written by the Late Right Honourable Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, to his Son, Philip Stanhope Esq; Late Envoy Extraordinary at the Court of Dresden: Together with Several Other Pieces on Various Subjects* (1774). In these letters, Chesterfield advises his son on a multiplicity of issues, but what they became famous for is captured by the title given to an early American edition first printed in Philadelphia by Bradford and Hall: *Lord Chesterfield's Advice to His Son, on Men and Manners: Or, a New System of Education. In Which the Principles of Politeness, the Art*

of Acquiring a Knowledge of the World, with Every Instruction Necessary to Form a Man of Honour, Virtue, Taste, and Fashion, Are Laid Down in a Plain, Easy, Familiar Manner, Adapted to Every Station and Capacity. The Whole Arranged on a Plan Entirely New (1781).[5] Chesterfield's letters, which sold over 20,000 copies in the early republic (Fliegelman, *Prodigals* 39), were read and discussed primarily for what they said about politeness and civility. Both in England and in the United States, they were widely used as a conduct book that provided advice on how to get ahead in societies that saw a steady increase in social mobility. The popular appeal of Chesterfield's letters had much to do with their difference from American advice literature of the era, which was written by clergymen such as Henry Ward Beecher and Joel Hawes, educational reformers such as William A. Alcott and Horace Mann, and sentimental writers such as Timothy S. Arthur. Unlike Chesterfield, they were ultimately most invested in the moral formation of American youth (Halttunen 28).

To many a reader of Franklin's *Autobiography,* his insistence on industry would have seemed familiar. One and a half decades before Franklin, Chesterfield already advised his readers to "be doing something or other all day long; and not neglect half-hours and quarters of hours, which, at the year's end, amount to a great sum" (108). Chesterfield was a nobleman, and he wrote his letters to an aristocratic audience of one, but for the greatest part he teaches the same values to which his bourgeois American readership subscribed. For them, conduct books such as Chesterfield's "show[ed] individuals how to survive and thrive in an increasingly fluid social world. Conduct literature taught men (and, to a lesser extent, women) manners that could help them to rise above their social station. . . . In the colonial period, gentlemen had been the main audience for conduct literature. After the Revolution, the overwhelming majority of conduct books addressed middling readers who sought to acquire the accoutrements of gentility" (Kiener 9–10). Yet social elites charged Chesterfield with an aristocratic love of gallantry and external appearances. They argued that his lessons on "the art of pleasing" propagated dissimulation, and some even agreed with Samuel Johnson's harsh judgment that "they teach the morals of a whore, and the manners of a dancing-master" (qtd. in Boswell 202). In a letter to her son dated December 1779, the American playwright and historian Mercy Otis Warren put it thus: "I never see this fascinating collection of letters taken up by the youthful reader, but I tremble, least [*sic*] the honeyed poison that lurks beneath the fairest flowers of fancy and rhetoric should leave a deeper tincture on the mind, than even his documents for external decency and

the semblance of morality" (120). Warren's sentiments were shared by other anti-Chesterfieldians, a fact that the anonymously authored "Advertisement" in the 1781 Philadelphia edition registers: "The novelty of the title, and, to say truth, of the performance itself, for it is written in a manner never before made use of in our language, recommended it to some, and prejudiced it in the opinion of others" (iii). Critiques of Chesterfield tie in with a broader climate of republican suspicion: "In America, the pursuit of republican ideals has always been accompanied by attacks against false representation and fears of the people becoming the dupes of artful words and demagogues" (Gustafson, *Representative Words* 23).

This republican distrust has its major source in the Whig ideology that John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon give voice to in *Cato's Letters,* the central reference text of republican ideology during the colonial period and the early republic: "Even in countries where the highest liberty is allowed, and the greatest light shines, you generally find certain men, and bodies of men, set apart to mislead the multitude; who are ever abused with words, ever fond of the worst of things recommended by good names, and ever abhor the best things, and the most virtuous actions, disfigured by ill names. One of the great arts, therefore, of cheating men, is, to study the application and misapplication of sounds—a few loud words rule the majority, I had almost said, the whole world" (1: 100). Seen in this light, Chesterfieldian civility appears as a private variety of the political abuses of power that republicanism feared and denounced. Chesterfield lays himself open to accusations of artistry and deceptiveness even though he does advise his son, in the section on "Lying," that "nothing but truth can carry us through the world, with either our conscience or our honour unwounded" (81). Contemporaneous detractors would have noticed that even this clear renunciation of lying is qualified by a utilitarian rejoinder. Speaking the truth, Chesterfield adds in the next sentence, "is not only our duty, but our interest; as a proof of which, it may be observed, that the greatest fools are the greatest liars" (ibid.). Chesterfield does not advocate truth-telling only for its own sake but also because it will serve his son's interests. It is precisely this concern for self-interest that had early American elites, for whom republican virtue was aligned with selflessness, suspicious of Chesterfield's moral rectitude. More damningly still, many readers interpreted his teaching about a variety of "arts" less as an attempt to educate his son in specific skills than as an education in artfulness and deceit. When they read that "a man of sense, and of knowledge of the world . . . has art enough to give an outward air of modesty to all he does" (10) or that "the art of pleasing is a

very necessary one to possess" (41), these readers were prepared to call into question Chesterfield's love of truth.

Many early American writers shared that suspicion, and Chesterfieldian seducers and rogues abound in novels of the period, including William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy,* Judith Sargent Murray's serially published *The Story of Margaretta* (1792–94), Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette,* Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* and *Ormond* (1799), Tabitha Gilman Tenney's *Female Quixotism,* and John Neal's *Randolph* (1823). In some cases, these novels' rakes are explicitly identified as "Chesterfieldians." Already *The Power of Sympathy* warns its female readers of men who "plan their advances towards us on the *Chesterfieldian* system" (77); Major Peter Sanford, the seducer of Foster's *The Coquette,* is called "a Chesterfieldian" (111); and in Neal's *Randolph,* we read about "people . . . who are taught to be well bred, by such scoundrels as Chesterfield" (291). When Brown's Arthur Mervyn declares that he is "no proficient in etiquette" (405), he dissociates himself from Chesterfieldian politeness to profess his sincerity and trustworthiness. Rebecca Rush's *Kelroy* is a special case in that its major Chesterfieldian is a woman: the villain of this sentimental novel is Mrs. Hammond, a mother who educates her daughters Lucy and Emily on the Chesterfieldian maxim that "appearances are every thing" (4), turning the former into a heartless, calculating socialite while thwarting, with fatal consequences, the latter's true love for Kelroy, a melancholic and kind-hearted poet of insufficient means. Not everyone agreed with these negative assessments of civility, though: near the beginning of *Modern Chivalry,* Captain Farrago mentions "Chesterfield and his son" as one instance of "sages" that "have had blockheads for their sons" (7). But in early American novels, references to the Earl of Chesterfield or "Chesterfieldianism" for the greatest part connote treachery and deception. Even in *Modern Chivalry,* Farrago's appreciation for Chesterfield may be taken as an indicator that his containment of Teague O'Regan's social aspirations by way of rhetoric is anything but honorable.[6]

Thus, as a conduct book avidly read by the emerging middle class, Chesterfield's letters were regarded by elites as a threat to social stability and disturbance of what a self-styled Cento called "the distinctions of rank" (qtd. in Lukasik 161) in an 1805 issue of the *Literary Magazine and American Register.* Since Chesterfield was an English nobleman, elites—who were more likely to stoke fears about "mobocracy" than grant citizens extensive participation in the democratic process—could easily denounce his writings as residues of an aristocratic culture that was fundamentally

at odds with democratic America. Yet their critiques of civility and politeness aimed precisely at those individuals and social groups that were prepared to take fullest advantage of the possibilities opened up by America's social and political experiment. While, paradoxically, the "middling sort" turned to an aristocrat for models of self-fashioning, the elites could point at the social provenance of those models to discredit them as undemocratic. In republican eyes, little distinguished the self-made man swept up by the emerging culture of liberalism from the confidence man: both are embodiments of fundamentally performative notions of subjectivity that are realized by acts of self-fashioning and duplicity. Thus, "civility's anti-republicanism bec[a]me[ ] associated with immorality, dissimulation, and self-interest" (Lukasik 158).

It is in line with such concerns about deception and moral corruption that early American novels are full of characters that epitomize the dangers of unrestrained individualism, confirming the republican suspicion that the self-made man and the confidence man are separated by only a thin line. Dubious financial plans are hatched throughout these texts, and in many cases, the deceivers themselves are deceived: from Harrington, the seducer of *The Power of Sympathy,* who realizes that a "perfidious ingrate . . . with whom I entrusted a great part of my property, has deceived me" (115) to Welbeck, the murderer and thief of *Arthur Mervyn,* whom Mr. Thetford, a business associate, seeks to "defraud of thirty thousand dollars" (79). Under the new regime created by Alexander Hamilton's economic and fiscal policies, these novels suggest, the price of deception could often be counted in dollars. And that is no coincidence: Hamilton's economic restructuring of the early republic resulted not only in a multiplication of legal, paralegal, and illegal financial schemes but also a proliferation of monetary media of deception: the new national bank's paper money was introduced into markets in which bank notes issued by state-chartered private banks and counterfeit bills already circulated widely. By 1836, when the Jackson administration let the charter of the Second Bank of the United States expire, "the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate banking, as well as between capitalism and counterfeiting" (Mihm 126) had been thoroughly eroded.[7]

Other artifices in early American novels are not necessarily economically motivated. Over and over again, the plots of these novels parade before us innocent sentimental heroines who fall for their seducers' eloquently voiced half-truths and lies, gothic villains who deceive their victims with all kinds of visual and acoustic tricks, and ordinary citizens hoodwinked by quacks and illiterate but shrewd picaros. Fully in line with elites' critiques

of Chesterfieldian civility and politeness, novelists identify language as the principal tool of deception. Early American novels abound in problematizations and denunciations of rhetoric, "that new currency of cultural power in post-Revolutionary American society" (Fliegelman, Introduction xiv). This is particularly evident in Brown's gothic novels. In *Wieland,* it is no coincidence that Carwin, one of the novel's villains, is gifted with speech described as "mellifluent and clear" (59). Later in the novel, Henry Pleyel makes even clearer how close rhetoric and deception are in Carwin's case: "I was not the last to pay my homage to the unrivalled capacity, insinuation, and eloquence of this man" (141). In *Arthur Mervyn,* the eponymous protagonist defends his innocence with elaborate explanations that do not fail to convince his host Dr. Stevens but leave some of Brown's other characters and many of his readers with the suspicion that the protagonist's eloquence is designed to cover up less than honorable deeds. This young man, readers are led to think, protests too much, and at least in this respect is not so different from his villainous mentor Welbeck, who is gifted with a "torrent-like and overflowing elocution" (73). Of course, denunciations of rhetoric are by no means confined to the gothic subgenre. When the narrator-author of *Modern Chivalry* praises men that are "capable of managing the minds of men" by way of "the art of oratory" (492), we are not wrong in interpreting "art" to mean both skill and trickery. More often than not, the most eloquent characters are the greatest deceivers. In Socratic fashion, early American novelists for the most part describe rhetoric as more than a tool of persuasion; for them, it is a form of verbal deception.

Apart from verbal stratagems, visual dissimulations occur throughout these texts. One extended scene in Tenney's *Female Quixotism* illustrates particularly well some of the functions and repercussions of masking and cross-dressing in early American novels. In chapter 14 of book 2 (267–76), Dorcasina's suitor John Brown, a white servant she woos because she imagines him to be "a gentleman in disguise" (230), follows a person that he believes to be a rival suitor. As the reader knows, this person is not a man but a woman in disguise: dressed up as the dashing young officer Montague, Dorcasina's friend Harriot woos her friend so as to make her break her marriage promise to the socially inferior Brown. Thus, the person Brown follows really is a rival suitor, though of a different kind than either Dorcasina or Brown imagines. When Harriot turns a corner "into a bye road which had long had the reputation of being haunted" (271), a ghost emerges to scare the living daylights out of Brown. Again, Tenney uses dramatic irony: while readers know that the "ghost" is Dorcasina's African American

servant Scipio in disguise, Brown believes that the figure that emerges once Harriot has turned the corner is Montague, and that Montague is the devil in disguise. Brown flees in horror.

Tenney's ghost scene and the actions and events that lead up to it involve a multiplicity of deceptions and self-deceptions: Dorcasina, whose head has been turned by the "airy delusions" (4) of novels, deceives herself into believing that her servant Brown is of higher social standing than he lets on; when Harriot enters the stage disguised as the youthful, beautiful, and ardent Montague, Dorcasina, who pines for true romantic love, easily lets herself be deceived by her friend's disguise; driven by jealousy, Brown not only falls for Harriot's cross-dressing but is also more than ready to believe that Montague is Beelzebub; finally, Scipio engages in a double act of deception when he not only takes Harriot's place once she has turned the corner but also faces Brown dressed up as a ghost. In all these acts of dissimulation and misrecognition, deception and delusion go hand in hand. Moreover, in its complex negotiation of racial, gender, and class relations, the ghost scene illustrates the social and political significance of deception in early American novels exceedingly well.

Let me begin with race. Even though he is something of a stock character—the waggish but faithful Negro servant—Scipio is drawn sympathetically. His position in the Sheldon household is an important one: his job is to guard the estate. Moreover, he is not only one of the novel's few trustworthy male characters; in many instances, he is also its voice of reason. For a text written by a white woman during the American Enlightenment, this is a relatively dignified representation of an African American. With regard to the ghost scene, it is no coincidence that a black character is at the heart of the novel's most pronouncedly gothic passage: from Charles Brockden Brown to films such as *The Manitou* (1978), *Poltergeist* (1982), *Hostel* (2005), and beyond, scary ethnic others have embodied the return of the country's history of violence. What is particularly remarkable in Tenney is that the ethnic other wears whiteface. When Scipio faces Brown, he is "wrapped in a sheet, with a white handkerchief, in the form of a turban, upon his head" (271). The turban brings a third ethnic dimension into the equation, but what Brown sees is neither an Oriental nor a black man but "a great white monster" (271). Writing from within a culture marked by ethnic tensions and fears of slave conspiracies, Tenney stages a clever play with racial identities in which white fears of black men are channeled into a gothic encounter with whiteness. In this, Tenney anticipates Herman Melville's critical inquiry into what Toni Morrison calls "whiteness as

ideology" (142) in her influential reading of *Moby-Dick*. In the early republic, the hidden transatlantic history that underlies such serious plays with ethnic and racial identities is explored most fully by Royall Tyler, who in *The Algerine Captive* stages his attack on slavery allegorically. In that novel, the white protagonist Captain Updike Underhill is captured by Algerine pirates and enslaved in North Africa.

Racial boundaries are never fully erased in such reversals of ethnic relations. In *Female Quixotism,* this becomes clear early on when, in the dark of night, Dorcasina encounters Scipio sleeping in the summer-house and mistakes him for O'Connor, her suitor: "She approached him softly, sat down by his side, and, putting one arm round his neck and resting her cheek against his, resolved to enjoy the sweet satisfaction which this situation afforded her, till he should of himself awake" (53). Outside the summer-house, a parallel scene develops as O'Connor mistakes another African American servant, Miss Violet, for Dorcasina and pours forth his love. As "our Hibernian" and "his sable mistress" enter the summer-house, Scipio awakens, starts up and gives O'Connor, whom he takes to be a melon-thief, a thrashing. "Overcome by surprise and terror," Dorcasina jumps out of the window of the summer-house and faints. When she comes to her senses again and realizes her mistake, she is "mortified and disappointed beyond measure" (54–55). Dorcasina's strong reaction confirms that the humor generated by this comedy of mistaken identities is ultimately based on anxieties concerning miscegenation. Thus, humor here marks the novel's limits of cross-racial empathy; racial boundaries are subverted only to be reaffirmed.

Yet the anxieties that the novel negotiates are also class-bound. When, back in the house, Dorcasina reflects on what happened, Scipio's race is not mentioned: "Her delicate mind could hardly bear to reflect on her familiarity with her father's servant" (55). Social distinctions also play a crucial role in the ghost scene. The encounter between Scipio and Brown is an encounter between two servants, but it is clear that Scipio shows no interest whatsoever in asserting class solidarity. In dressing up as a ghost and scaring Brown away, he fulfils his function as the guardian of the Sheldon estate and its proprietors by solidifying social distinctions. Scipio, who is Brown's superior in the estate's servant hierarchy, fully agrees with Harriot that Brown is of far too low social standing to be Dorcasina's potential husband. When Harriot as Montague tells Dorcasina what she would get from switching her affections from the servant to the officer, she puts it thus: "A handsome well bred fellow, for an awkward, ungenteel booby; an ardent

lover for a lukewarm one, a gentleman for a clown, and the applauses of all good people for your choice" (265). That Harriot's assessment of all good people's judgment is correct is affirmed immediately after the ghost scene, when Brown brings a clergyman to the estate to rid it of the devil's presence. The cleric turns out to be less interested in the supernatural than in the maintenance of social distinctions; concerning Dorcasina's choice of Brown, he is "greatly astonished" and "strongly inclined to represent to her its impropriety" (275).

When it comes to Dorcasina's increasingly frantic search for a marriage partner, class and race are only two factors, albeit important ones. *Female Quixotism* is a picaresque novel with a sentimental plot that probes the limitations imposed on early American women by their precarious social and legal position. Eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century American women had neither active nor passive voting rights and once they were married, coverture laws decreed that their rights were subsumed under their husbands' (Salmon; Weyler).[8] Comparing the plot of *Female Quixotism* to that of other picaresque novels of the time such as James Butler's *Fortune's Foot-Ball; or, the Adventures of Mercutio* (1797), *The Algerine Captive,* and *Modern Chivalry,* it quickly becomes clear that the sphere of action of Tenney's heroine is much more restricted than that of her contemporaries' male protagonists. While the adventures of Butler's Mercutio range across the Atlantic; while Brackenridge's Captain Farrago decides to "ride about the world a little," going "here and there" (*Modern Chivalry* 4); and while Tyler's Updike Underhill travels through the northern and southern states before he embarks on a slave ship heading to Africa, Dorcasina's adventures for the greatest part take place in her father's house or garden. The episodic structure of picaresque novels facilitates their coverage of large geographical spaces, but Tenney's female picaro roams only in her imagination. Thus, it is no coincidence that the ghost scene, which is set outside the estate, involves two men and a woman disguised as a man. The novels' multiple acts of cross-dressing—Harriot as a man, Betty as a man, Philander as a woman, the barber as a woman—subtly subvert established gender roles even as they remind readers of the severe constraints imposed on women by these roles. This is a pattern that is also apparent in other female picaresques such as *The Female Review* (1797)—Herman Mann's highly digressive and imaginatively embellished biography of the female soldier Deborah Sampson—and the Martinette-as-warrior sequence in Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond.* Yes, these texts do allow a woman male freedom, but "her very role in the fiction is specious and surreptitious, is conditional upon its

being asserted in ways that challenge neither the status quo nor the double standard" (Davidson, *Revolution* 181). Thus, Mann contains the potentially subversive effects of his heroine's cross-dressing (as well as of his progressive statements concerning the need for better female education) by repeatedly asserting that his heroine's chastity remains untouched, and by affirming, in the appendix to the volume, that she gladly assumed a gender role appropriate to her sex once she was discharged from the army: "I cannot learn, she has the least wish to usurp the prerogatives of our sex. For she has often said, that nothing appears more beautiful in the domestic round than when the husband takes the lead, with discretion, and is followed by his consort, with an amiable acquiescence" (181).

Cross-dressing is a crucial topos in other early American novels, too, and the lines that are crossed in these acts of deception are not always those of gender. In *Modern Chivalry*, Welsh, Irish, and Low Dutch men disguise themselves as Native American chiefs and negotiate treaties with indigenous communities (33–35); an impoverished Irish yarn-merchant passes himself off as a priest (62–66); and in the novel's ultimate volume, two young men seek to parade Teague as a speaking animal to fool their audience into believing "that a beast might be taught to speak" (449). Through these crossings of ethnic, class, and species boundaries, Brackenridge satirizes the fluidity of subject positions in an increasingly liberal culture. In Brown's *Wieland,* finally, we find a striking acoustic equivalent of these primarily visual deceptions. Carwin, the mysterious stranger, engages in acts of cross-sounding when he ventriloquizes and projects first Catharine Wieland's, then Clara Wieland's voice (34–41).

In exploring acts of deception, many early American novelists explicitly take aim at real-life public figures. Both the targets and the forms of these attacks greatly depend upon the writers' self-positioning in the early republic's political debates. Thus, in his epigraph to chapter 21 of the second volume of *The Algerine Captive,* the Federalist writer Royall Tyler launches a frontal attack on two fervent supporters of the French Revolution:

> I'd rather wield as dull a pen
> As chatty B— or bungling Ben;
> Tedious as Doctor P—nce, or rather
> As Samuel, Increase, Cotton M—r;
> And keep of truth the beaten track,
> And plod the old cart rut of fact,
> Than write as fluent, false and vain
> As cit Genet or Tommy Paine. (173)

The political thrust of this poem is somewhat less clear than appears at first sight. The opposition Tyler sets up between the venerable Puritan figures of Thomas Prince and the Mathers on the one hand and the revolutionary fervor of Citizen Genêt and Thomas Paine on the other is clear enough in its entwinement of the linguistic and the political: the Puritans' "tedious" writing style stands for prudence, truthfulness, and stability; Genêt's and Paine's eloquence stands for self-serving ambition, artifice, and the subversion of authority. Tyler here draws on the topos of rhetoric as deception to evoke fears of populist demagoguery and democratic excess. In this, he is fully in line with Federalist denunciations of rhetoric that we find in poems such as "The Present State of Literature," which Warren Dutton delivered at the public commencement of Yale College on September 10, 1800:

> The Son of Bombast comes! Prepare the way,
> And crown this favourite, with a living bay!
> Let shouts and claps, in mingled concert rise,
> And staring ignorance lift her vacant eyes;
> Let hireling journalists announce his name,
> And Jacobins, and pedlars, spread his fame.
> His theme Delusion! Hear his accents flow,
> In all the pathos of theatric woe! (9–10)

But when Tyler takes a stab at "chatty B—" and "bungling Ben," the implications are less clear-cut. The reference is to Benjamin Franklin Bache, the fiercely Jeffersonian editor of the *Philadelphia Aurora* (Cleves 77–78) and his grandfather, Benjamin Franklin. Calling them "chatty" and "bungling," he diminishes their persons (even though Tyler does include a sympathetic portrait of Franklin in chapter 23 of the novel's first volume). But strangely enough, Tyler seems to enlist not only Franklin but also his grandson on the side of the truth-seekers. For a Federalist such as Tyler, this seems an odd move since, in his fervent support for not only the French Revolution but also French revolutionary terror, Bache's Republican politics was no less radical than Paine's.[9] Tyler's concern, then, is ultimately less with politics than with political rhetoric, which is relatively harmless when it is "dull" and "chatty" but eminently dangerous when it is as "fluent" as Genêt's and Paine's.

In line with Tyler's anti-Republican diatribe, many early American novelists either ridicule French characters—the French dancing master scene in *Modern Chivalry* is a benignly funny example (144–49)—or give their villains French names. Thus, in Rowson's *Charlotte Temple,* the seducers

all bear resounding French names even though the male ones are British officers: Belcour (the courtier/cur), Montraville (the urban seducer), and Charlotte's treacherous schoolmistress Mademoiselle La Rue (the streetwalker/strumpet). La Rue's nationality is highlighted throughout the novel: she is called "a French teacher," "the French woman," "that French woman," "the artful French woman," and "that cursed French woman" (11, 41, 49, 61, 87). Thus, in a novel first published in England in 1791, when the French Revolution was already in full swing but had not yet descended into the Reign of Terror, Rowson casts the French as licentious seducers of American innocence. Later novels written in the face of French revolutionary terror and its American repercussions—most notably the Alien and Sedition Acts—would further elaborate on Rowson's anxieties of French influence. In Brown's *Arthur Mervyn,* one minor American character, Achsa Fielding's husband, not only leaves his wife and adopts a French name but also marries a Frenchwoman, joins the revolutionaries in France, and suffers what we are invited to conclude is his just fate: he ends up on "a list of the proscribed under Robespierre" (426). As in *Charlotte Temple,* Francophobia finds expression in a love plot that has transatlantic political ramifications.

In Luhmannian systems theory, every social system has a code according to which the system observes itself and its environment, a "binary schematism that knows only two values" and which has "an asymmetrical form that requires a distinction between a positive and a negative value" (*Art as a Social System* 186). If Gerhard Plumpe and Niels Werber are right in arguing that the code of the literary subsystem is interesting versus uninteresting or boring (22–32),[10] then early American novelists' focus on deception as a crucial subject matter of their art is an eminently *interesting* selection in the specific historical situation of the early republic, where deception was rampant in the literary subsystem's environment, be it in the political system (think of Tyler's stab at American sympathizers of the French Revolution), the economic system (think of Brown's characters Thetford and Welbeck), or the educational system (think of Rowson's La Rue).[11] If we adopt a systems-theoretic perspective, we realize that the literary subsystem's choice of deception as a particularly fascinating element of its environment is dictated not solely by the era's social and political debates but also by the subsystem's development of the guiding distinction interesting versus uninteresting (or boring) in the process of its differentiation, which predisposes it to privilege some subject matters—interesting ones such as deception—over others.

Most critics since the 1980s have chosen to ignore such intra-aesthetic developments as they stress that deception is an eminently political category in early American novels. While my own readings of these texts seek to do justice to both the political and the aesthetic dimensions of deception, I have learned much from these earlier critics' observations: they have highlighted the ways in which hostile responses to Franklin's self-serving rhetoric and Chesterfieldian civility testify to elites' concerns about the negative effects of increasing social mobility; they have allowed me to understand that the cross-dressing episodes in Tenney's *Female Quixotism* illustrate particularly well that deception is a literary topos in which issues of race, gender, and class intersect; and they have shown me that novels as different in the literary forms they employ and the thematic issues they broach as *Modern Chivalry, Arthur Mervyn,* and *Charlotte Temple* register anxieties arising from various processes of modernization (urbanization, the rise to prominence of a liberal-individualist ideology, social mobility, social stratification, and the French Revolution among them) that deeply affect the lives of the young nation's citizens. Thus, it does make great sense to interpret acts of deception in early American novels the way the vast majority of critics still do: politically. Critics of the 1980s and 1990s such as Cathy N. Davidson, Jay Fliegelman, Emory Elliott, Michael T. Gilmore, Larzer Ziff, and Grantland S. Rice did this by interpreting both early novels' formal tensions and their villainous and mischievous characters' deceptions in the context of the gradual shift in late eighteenth-century America from republicanism and its communitarian ethos to liberalism and its individualist ethos. In these readings, the con men and seducers of early American novels exemplify an individualism that has gone wrong, and evil literary characters are those that give free rein to their individual desires without wasting a thought on their communal responsibility. Thus, even though they disagree on the respective merits of republican and liberal ideology, Davidson and Gilmore come to similar conclusions regarding the political meaning of deception. While Davidson asserts that "the early American Gothic often provided a perturbing vision of self-made men maintaining their newfound power" and "created its own symbolic space where the hierarchies of a traditional society and the excesses of individualism could both be called into question" (*Revolution* 314), Gilmore argues that early American novels "encompass modernizing and residual energies: although they give implicit sanction to economic striving by endorsing the credo of self-reliant individualism, they also deplore the bounders and conmen of the new order and try to freeze mobility into stasis" (629). In both

readings, representations of acts of deception assume political meaning in that they respond to and comment on ideological shifts in the early republic. Many contemporary art-historical treatises on the period have adopted this political approach by now. To give but one example: in 2011, Wendy Bellion published her seminal *Citizen Spectator: Art, Illusion, and Visual Perception in Early National America,* which focuses on the era's trompe l'oeil paintings and other types of illusionist objects. Bellion explores an early American visual culture of sensory illusion, deception, and undeceiving that pervaded popular culture as much as it did science and the arts. Within this culture, "illusionist objects reified, contradicted, and occasionally even parodied contemporary ideologies of political looking" to reveal "the extent to which illusion was implicated in larger dilemmas of authority, knowledge, and identity" (16).

Since the 1990s, such accounts have been supplemented by the work of a younger generation of literary critics who situate early novels in their transnational and hemispheric contexts. Criticism by scholars like Ralph Bauer, Edward Watts, Sean X. Goudie, and Tamara Harvey invites us to situate the foundational act of deception I discuss at the beginning of this chapter not only in its transatlantic context to take account of the fact that the disguised revolutionaries were still subjects of the British crown but also in the context of the British colonization of India—in which the East India Company played a crucial role, and without which neither the English nor the American colonists would have developed a taste for tea. Thus, the Boston Tea Party involved two kinds of "Indians" that are connected through a history of colonization that expands far beyond the North American continent. With Russ Castronovo, who notes that American revolutionaries were inspired by "a global sensibility more capacious than the American nationalism that eventually took its place" and "had in mind broader geopolitical ideas of the Caribbean, Africa, and especially East India" ("Propaganda" 184–85), we could reinterpret the colonists' Indian disguise from a transnational perspective to account for the multiple nationalities and ethnicities that intersect in it.

A transnational account of deception can also help us shed additional light on characters passing themselves off as Native Americans in *Modern Chivalry.* It is not for nothing that these deceptions are staged by immigrants (the Welsh and the Irish) that found themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy and were widely despised by native-born Anglo-Americans. Captain Farrago, for one, calls his Irish servant Teague O'Regan his "bog-trotter" throughout the novel. Much of this disdain centered on

the immigrants' languages and dialects, which were denigrated as babble almost as incomprehensible as Native American languages. As an Indian treaty maker explains to Farrago when he attempts to recruit Teague as a fake Indian, "as some unknown gibberish is necessary, to pass for an Indian language, we generally make use of Welch, or Low Dutch, or Irish" (34). Brackenridge's narrator-author concurs with this assessment when he adds that "it would be necessary for [Teague] only to talk Irish, which he might pass for the Shawanee, or other language" (38). Farrago eventually declines the treaty maker's request, but this scene highlights not only "the multiple ways in which Native American languages were read in terms of Irish and Irish in terms of Native American languages" (B. R. Smith 325) but also that, in the early republic, relations between native-born Anglo-Americans, more recent European immigrants, and the indigenous peoples of the Americas continued to be inflected by transatlantic power differentials in which language, race, and class were intimately intertwined.[12]

Apart from British colonialism and European immigration, slavery provides a third major context for understanding deception in early American fictions from a transnational perspective. Take Brown's *Arthur Mervyn* as an example: in this gothic reworking of the yellow fever epidemic that devastated Philadelphia in 1793, we read that Vincentio Lodi, one of the novel's minor characters, was "a planter in the island of Guadaloupe" who "had flattered one of his slaves with the prospect of his freedom, but had, nevertheless, included this slave in the sale that he had made of his estate. Actuated by revenge, the slave assassinated Lodi in the open street, and resigned himself, without a struggle, to the punishment which the law had provided for such a deed" (92–93). In a novel that abounds in acts of deception to such an extent that readers literally do not know what characters' words to trust anymore (the eponymous protagonist is a classically ambivalent figure in that respect), the tale of Lodi's deception and murder embeds the novel's economic schemes, which can for the greatest part be read as allegories on liberal excesses *within* the early republic, in the broader context of the transatlantic slave trade. If, as numerous critics have asserted since Leslie Fiedler published *Love and Death in the American Novel* in 1960, gothic fictions express "a profound anxiety about historical crimes and perverse human desires that cast their shadow over what many would like to be the sunny American republic" (Savoy 168), then Brown's story of Lodi's deception explores the racial, transatlantic dimension of that shadow. Taking account of this additional facet of Brown's novel can also alert us to the fact that Arthur's second love, Achsa Fielding, who is described in gothic

terms as "unsightly as a *night-hag,* tawny as a Moor" (432), is a British Jew of Portuguese descent who fails to hide her ethnic heritage from Arthur. Siân Silyn Roberts interprets their marriage at the narrative's end as part of the novel's gothic "revisions on Enlightenment models of the individual, sympathy, and contractualism in order to yield a citizen who can enter into contractual relations in a setting where disparate people of radically diverse backgrounds and interests—including the American Mervyn and the Portuguese-Jewish-British Achsa Fielding—seek to unite as a social body" (307–8).

Such rereadings of deception in early American novels from a transnational perspective also alert us once more to the fact that many of the deceivers in these novels are cultural or ethnic others: Catholic Spaniards (as is speculated of Carwin in *Wieland*), Africans and Jews (in *The Algerine Captive*), Frenchmen and -women (in *Charlotte Temple, Arthur Mervyn,* and Sarah S. Wood's *Julia and the Illuminated Baron*), Englishmen (in *Charlotte Temple* and Isaac Mitchell's *The Asylum; or, Alonzo and Melissa*), and Irishmen (in *Modern Chivalry* and *Female Quixotism*). In exploring the racial, ethnic, and national(ist) investments of early American writers as well as their novels' transnational dimensions, such rereadings have enriched our understanding of these texts, critically explored their ideological self-positionings, and effectively challenged exceptionalist assumptions that informed some of the earlier scholarly work on the period.

Yet it seems to me that these kinds of overtly political readings of early American novels largely ignore three major aspects of their fictional negotiation of deception. First, in discussing early American writers' selection of deception as a crucial subject matter on the basis of the guiding distinction interesting versus uninteresting, I have already indicated that recent criticism of early novels fails to take into account the systemic, intra-aesthetic dimension of such thematic choices. The second oversight is that early American fictions are as much about delusion as they are about deception; the third that early American novels betray a keen awareness that deception happens not only within their novels but also *through* them. As we will see, the latter two observations are intertwined, but for structural as well as argumentative reasons, I will focus on the treatment of delusion on the plot level and its relation to European reflections on art and sensuous cognition in this chapter and on literary self-reflections on the deceptiveness of art itself in the next.

Zooming in on early American novels' negotiation of sensory delusion allows us to see that these texts are as much interested in characters' prone-ness to be deceived as they are in villainous characters' acts of deception. Though most authors of the period were familiar with the writings of Scottish common sense philosophers, they did not share their belief that "the mind knows directly and intuitively" so that "we can stand up for the trustworthiness of the senses" and "regard the mind as perceiving things immediately and running no risk of deceptions and contradictions" (Riley 475–76). Early American novelists are keenly aware that the senses all too often prove unreliable guides to knowledge and truth. It is for this reason that threats of deception in these novels are always intimately bound up with the specter of sensory delusion. This is a remarkably consistent pattern whose significance extends beyond the obvious observation that every act of deception involves a deceiver as well as a deceived. In these fictions, anxieties about deception and delusion reach deeper and raise fundamental epistemological and aesthetic questions for an age that had learned to consider the experience and observation of nature a more reliable path to knowledge than bookish learning (Schalk 623).

Thus, having fallen prey to a series of seducers, Dorcasina, the protagonist of Tenney's *Female Quixotism,* at one point concludes that she "could hardly credit the evidence of her own senses; or believe that she had been for so long time so grossly imposed upon" (194). In line with the Cervantean tradition, Dorcasina's credulity is ascribed to her addiction to novels and their inculcation of "false ideas of life and manners" (6). However, the fact that one of her few respectable suitors, Mr. Cumberland, also at one point states that he is "not allowed . . . to credit the evidence of [his] own senses" (216) should keep us from attributing Dorcasina's delusions exclusively to her excessive novel reading. The problem, it seems, runs deeper. In Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry,* the threat of sensory delusion has political as well as epistemological ramifications. "If objects of sense," we read, "mock the senses, and deceive vision, how much more, things in the political or moral world, which we cannot comprehend, but by *reasoning*" (384). The narrator-author makes this statement as part of a rambling meditation on the relative merits of deferring to the letter, the spirit, or the application of the law. Speaking as the author's mouthpiece, he makes a case for the necessity of written laws that regulate legal usage and custom and for the importance of lawyers' professional advice in legal reforms. His observation concerning the deception of the senses must be understood in this context: if one individual's senses can be deceived, he asks, how much more confusion is likely to arise when several individuals reason about, or debate, moral or political issues? In Brackenridge's view, then, the need for written

laws and professional legal advice ultimately follows from the fallibility of sensory perception.[13]

It is by no means only in early picaresque novels that characters can never fully credit the evidence of their senses. Yet before we take a close look at how Brown's two gothic novels *Wieland* and *Arthur Mervyn* negotiate the threat of sensory delusion, it makes sense to cast our glance across the Atlantic, where early aestheticians were beginning to reflect on the powers as well as the limits of sense perception in ways that will help us contextualize contemporaneous American novelists' probing of the epistemological, political, and aesthetic ramifications of deception and delusion.

A Science of Sensuous Cognition

Ever since Baumgarten coined the term *aesthetics* in his *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus,* characterized it as "a science which might direct the lower cognitive faculty in knowing things sensately" (*Reflections* §115, 78), and defined it as "the science of perception" (§116, 78), a growing number of philosophers came to understand sensibility— the human faculty of sense perception—as more than a source of delusion.[14] To give but one prominent example at this point: in his *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (General Theory of the Fine Arts; 1771/74), the first comprehensive German-language encyclopedia on aesthetics, the Swiss theologian and Enlightenment philosopher Johann Georg Sulzer insists that pleasure in the perception of art participates in both sensation (*Empfinden*) and cognition (*Erkennen*) (195–201).

Yet both Baumgarten and Sulzer had to contend with a philosophical tradition reaching back to Plato that, while it did recognize that *aisthēsis* in the sense of sensory perception provides a requisite foundation for experience, emphasized its liability to deceive the observer:

> If, according to Plato, *aisthēsis* might reveal the nature of that which senses, it also had other much less positive meanings that were crucial for the tradition to follow. As normal perception, *aisthēsis* provides the adequate basis for most experience, which it does both infallibly and with error; that is, sight does not tell us that a finger is not a finger (*Republic* 523B ff.), but it always presents the given for which the finger is exemplary as possessing variable qualities describable in terms of polarities, such as near and far, dark and light. These, Plato argued, are "productive of thought." The changing coexistences of these qualities make us wonder what they might be in themselves. . . . Plato used such examples to make what proved to be a millennial distinction (524B–C)

> between the intelligible and the visible (or sensible): the intelligible is clear and distinct; the sensible is confused and confounded in the sense that what might be analyzed has not been analyzed. This distinction had many echoes in the tradition down to Baumgarten. Taken altogether, *aisthēsis* had thus become "sense" with the pejorative meaning the idea has had in Platonic philosophies and their many tributaries and adaptations. (Summers 428–29)

Refracted through Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's refinement of the Cartesian differentiation between clear and distinct perception, clear and confused perception, and obscure and confused perception (9–15), the Platonic division between the intelligible and the (less highly valued) visible would continue to haunt Baumgarten's thinking about art and sensuous cognition. Neither Baumgarten nor his disciples Sulzer, Georg Friedrich Meier, and Moses Mendelssohn could easily dissociate themselves from Descartes's observation, in the first of his *Meditations on First Philosophy* ("Of Those Things that May Be Called into Doubt"; 1641), that the senses "sometimes deceive us," for instance when we judge a stick protruding from a body of water to be bent when in fact it is straight. Descartes's conclusion that "prudence dictates that we should never fully trust those who have deceived us even once" (17) still resonates in their ears.

Thus, while it makes perfect sense to consider Baumgarten's valorization of sensory cognition as a critical response to and departure from Cartesian rationalism and its denigration of sensory cognition—an argument made most forcefully by Hans Rudolf Schweizer—his aesthetics is also heir to the rationalist tradition. Baumgarten situates himself in that tradition when he asserts that sensory perception allows us to know things clearly but also confusedly (*clara et confusa*), without the conceptual distinctness of reason—which alone allows for cognition distinguished by clarity intensified by distinctness: "claritatis intensio per distinctionem" (*Aesthetica* §617, 2: 604).[15] This is so because the referents of sense perception are present merely in temporal forms. As such, we can perceive them clearly but are unable to list all the qualities that distinguish them from other referents. The perception of beauty, then, enables what Christian Wolff calls the "intuitive cognition of perfection" (qtd. in Guyer, "Beauty" 445). Within Baumgarten's rationalist epistemology, only the conceptual apparatus of reason can give us access to the perfect distinctness of universal forms. Sensuous cognition, on the other hand, is always limited by an aesthetic shadow or darkness, an "Umbra Aesthetica" (*Aesthetica* §634, 2: 622). Baumgarten's choice to accord the human senses their own place vis-à-vis rational cognition must be appreciated with these doubts concerning the

reliability of human perception in mind (Schneider 23–24; Barck, Kliche, and Heininger 322–23; Gethmann-Siefert 44–50).

Indeed, it is these doubts that prompt Baumgarten to gloss *aesthetics* as "lower-level epistemology" in his famous multipart definition of the term in the first paragraph of the *Aesthetica:* "AESTHETICA (theoria liberalium artium, gnoseologia inferior, ars pulchre cogitandi, ars analogi rationis) est scientia cognitionis sensitivae" (§1, 1: 60). In Jeffrey Barnouw's translation, which includes useful glosses in square brackets, "Aesthetics, as the theory of the liberal arts, lower-level epistemology [*gnoseologia inferior*], the art of thinking finely [literally, beautifully, *ars pulchre cogitandi*], and the art of the analogy of reason [i.e., the associative or natural-sign-based capacity of empirical inference common to man and higher animals], is the science of sensuous cognition" (324).[16] Baumgarten simultaneously makes sensuous perception a legitimate object of philosophical inquiry and calls it an inferior cognitive faculty, thus situating it beneath the superior cognitive faculties of reason and understanding.[17]

Baumgarten's mid-eighteenth-century hesitation concerning the reliability of sensuous cognition left its traces in eighteenth-century aesthetics. Even in Schiller, whose *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* constitutes one of the most ringing defenses of art and the artistic imagination at the end of the century, we can still detect traces of the rationalist mistrust in the senses. While he celebrates the reconciliation of the receptive "sensuous-drive" (*Stofftrieb*) and the law-giving "form-drive" (*Formtrieb*) in the experience of art as a supreme expression of human freedom, he occasionally subordinates sensibility to reason when he insists that aesthetic experience serves a transitional function by leading human beings from sensuousness to rationality: "Our psyche passes, then, from sensation to thought *via* a middle disposition in which sense and reason are both active *at the same time*" (141).[18] While early French aesthetics as developed by Jean-Baptiste Dubos, Jean-Pierre de Crousaz, and Charles Batteux remained fully embedded within the rationalist tradition, early German aesthetics also retained ties to it. In Luhmann's words: "In the eighteenth century—for a relatively short period from Baumgarten to Hegel—the guiding principle of imitation gave way to the guiding principle of aesthetics. The problem became a problem of cognition, a cognition that used the senses—hence the term *aesthetics*—and that therefore had to renounce the highest rank in the hierarchy of cognitions" (*Art as a Social System* 311).

This problem neither emerged nor disappeared with the empiricist turn; it is an enduring legacy of Cartesian rationalism. Even in the physiological

aesthetics that Burke develops in the *Philosophical Enquiry,* we can detect residues of Cartesian skepticism concerning the reliability of the senses. In his chapter on "Infinity" as a source of the sublime, Burke uses an example that is reminiscent of Descartes's observations concerning the optical illusion produced by our senses when we judge a straight stick jutting out of the water to be crooked: "If you hold up a strait pole, with your eye to one end, it will seem extended to a length almost incredible. Place a number of uniform and equidistant marks on this pole, they will cause the same deception, and seem multiplied without end. The senses strongly affected in some one manner, cannot quickly change their tenor, or adapt themselves to other things; but they continue in their old channel until the strength of the first mover decays" (73–74). As we will see in chapter 3, Burke ultimately judges deception *by art* in a light that is incompatible with Cartesian rationalism. Yet his acknowledgment in this passage that the senses can deceive us bears witness to a lingering distrust in the reliability of our sensory apparatus. Among early British aestheticians, it is David Hume who most prominently explores the limits of sensory perception in a long section of *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40) entitled "Of Skepticism with Regard to the Senses." For Hume, whose works enjoyed wide circulation in both the colonial period and the early republic (Spencer), the senses cannot give us images "of something *distinct,* or *independent,* and *external*" because they only allow for "a single perception, and never give us the least intimation of anything beyond" such as resemblances or causal relations between objects: "If our senses, therefore, suggest any idea of distinct existences, they must convey the impressions as those very existences, by a kind of fallacy and illusion" (239). Thus, early aestheticians on both sides of the English Channel ensure that doubts concerning the reliability of sensuous cognition do not vanish with the rise to dominance of the empirical sciences and the parallel shift, in reflections on art, from ontotheological theories of harmony, order, and beauty to aesthetic experience. Quite the contrary is the case: these doubts now move to the center of epistemological concerns; they trouble them from within.

As we move from Baumgarten's rationalism and British empiricism to Kant,[19] who seeks to negotiate between the two, questions concerning what he calls sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*)—that faculty which allows us both to be affected by objects and to acquire representations thereof[20]—become most intimately bound up with reflections on two additional cognitive faculties: understanding (*Verstand*), meaning the faculty of a priori concepts, and the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*).[21] Kant's reflections on

the interplay of sensibility, understanding, and the imagination lead him to postulate three major functions of the imagination: it is a fundamental synthesizing cognitive faculty ("the reproductive imagination"), a fount of artistic creativity (what one could call the positive effects of "the productive imagination"), and a source of deception (what one could call the negative effects of "the productive imagination"). While the reproductive imagination (which synthesizes sensibility and understanding) is subject to empirical laws of association, "the *productive synthesis of the imagination* can take place *a priori*" (*Pure Reason* 238). Kant calls the capacity to harness the productive imagination for the generation of aesthetic ideas "genius" and thus paves the way for Schiller's as well as the Romantics' farewells to mimetic notions of art, their paeans to artistic creativity, and their "privileging of imagination as a site of writerly inspiration and subjective experience" (Packham 151).[22] Kant is not Coleridge, but without his creative reading of Kant, Coleridge's quintessentially Romantic assertion that "the imagination is the distinguishing characteristic of man as a progressive being" (195) is hardly imaginable.

Much more keenly than the Romantics, though, Kant was aware that the faculty of imagination can also be a source of delusion. In discussing the sublime in nature,[23] Kant writes, "If enthusiasm can be compared with the *delusion of sense,* then visionary rapture is to be compared with the *delusion of mind,* the latter of which is least of all compatible with the sublime, since it is brooding and absurd. In enthusiasm, as an affect, the imagination is unreined; in visionary rapture, as a deep-rooted, oppressive passion, it is unruled. The former is a passing accident, which occasionally affects the most healthy understanding; the latter is a disease that destroys it" (*Judgment* §29, 157). Such reflections on the dangers of the unchecked imagination belong to a long tradition in the history of philosophy: already Aristotle claimed that "sensations are always true, while imaginations [*phantasia*] are for the most part false" (III.3, 428a9–10, 107). In Kant's own time, the pathology of the unchecked imagination was a much debated philosophical issue that can be traced back to Thomas Hobbes's assertion from 1650 that poetry springs both from fancy—which, "in its wonderful celerity," can "flye from one Indies to the other, and from Heaven to Earth" but whose "voyage" by itself "is not very great, her self being all she seeks"— and judgment, "the severer sister," which "busieth herself in a grave and rigid examination of all the parts of Nature, and in registering by letters, their order, causes, uses, differences and resemblances" (370).

By and large, eighteenth-century philosophers agreed that the imagination not only elevated human beings above animals but was also, in its most fully developed forms, the distinguishing mark of the artist. Thus, Sulzer calls the imagination "one of the most excellent qualities of the soul whose lack would demean the human being even below the level of animals" and adds that it is "the mother of all fine arts and what distinguishes the artist from all other human beings." But he, too, immediately adds a cautionary rejoinder: "By itself, the imagination is frivolous, riotous, and adventurous," which is why "it needs to be steadily accompanied by a fine sense of order and consonance to impart truth and order to the work it creates" (2: 10–11; my translation). If that is not the case, things can go very wrong: "Woe to the artist of excellent imagination who lacks these companions and rulers! His life will be an everlasting dream and his works will resemble more the adventures of an enchanted world than the beautiful scenes of actual nature. What riotous things would Homer have told us about his heroes if his extraordinary imagination had not been ruled by these higher gifts?" (2: 11; my translation). These words sum up anxieties shared by a host of eighteenth-century aestheticians, including the British empiricists, who were no unequivocal defenders of the imagination. Perhaps this comes as little surprise given that they had to grapple with Locke's contention that "he that hath imagined to himself Substances such as never have been, and fill'd his Head with *Ideas* which have not any correspondence with the real Nature of Things . . . will be very far from advancing thereby one jot in real and true Knowledge" (*Human Understanding* 506).[24] The eighteenth-century ambivalence toward the imagination is expressed most forcefully by Hume. For him, the imagination is not only responsible for transforming sense impressions into ideas but is also the faculty that enables the association of ideas. But he also tells us that things can go awry when the imagination strays too far from the empirically given: "The imagination, when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue, even when its object fails it, and . . . carries on its course without any new impulse" (198).[25] Hume's ambivalent take on the imagination exemplifies what Edward Cahill calls eighteenth-century aesthetic theory's "dialectic of liberty" (*Liberty* 36), which both celebrates the liberty of the imagination and insists on the need to curb that liberty so that it does not devolve into "license."

My review of a number of prominent positions in eighteenth-century reflections on perception, the imagination, and artistic creativity shows that early aestheticians were fundamentally ambivalent about the reliability and

truthfulness of both sensibility and the imagination. Due to the continuing influence of the rationalist tradition, doubts concerning the trustworthiness of sensuous cognition and the salubriousness of the imagination were particularly strong among continental European thinkers, but the British empiricists had their concerns, too. And even though the intellectuals of the early republic ultimately drew less on Hume's than on Thomas Reid's much more optimistic theory of sensory perception, they could hardly overlook that Reid himself—who joined fellow common sense philosophers in explicitly distancing himself from both Hume's and Berkeley's radical epistemological skepticism—acknowledges that the senses can be deceived. As he points out in *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* (1764),

> It is very certain, that as in air uncommonly pure, we are apt to think visible objects nearer, and less than they really are; so, in air uncommonly foggy, we are apt to think them more distant and larger than the truth. . . . Not knowing, or not minding, the effect of a foggy air on the visible appearance of objects, the object seems to me to have that degradation of colour, and that indistinctness of the outline, which objects have at the distance of half a mile; therefore, from the visible appearance as a sign, I immediately proceed to the belief that the object is half a mile distant. Then, this distance, together with the visible magnitude, signify to me the real magnitude, which, supposing the distance to be half a mile, must be equal to that of a man on horseback; and the figure, considering the indistinctness of the outline, agrees with that of a man on horseback. Thus the deception is brought about. (405–6)

In an earlier passage, Reid even goes as far as acknowledging that common sense itself may turn out to be a source of delusion: "Natural credulity has sometimes occasioned my being imposed upon by deceivers" (375). While many of the era's American readers may have been tempted to overlook such cautionary remarks as they fervently embraced Reid's generally highly optimistic assessment of the reliability of the senses, they certainly could not overlook his and fellow Scottish thinkers' diatribes against the imagination: "In the early nineteenth century, suspicion and hostility tinged American attitudes towards the imagination. In a nation founded on Enlightenment principles, adhering to the Scottish Common Sense philosophy, and committed to progress, rationality, and practicality, indulgence in imaginative endeavors was widely regarded as an avoidance of responsibility, as an activity that could render one incapable of distinguishing fact from fiction, and hence, as a significant threat to the social order" (Bedell 111). Such transatlantic transfers of reflections on the reliability of the imagination and the senses invite us to take a second look at the multiple acts of deception

staged in early American novels. In particular, they invite us to consider the other side of deception—delusion—more closely. What emerges from such a shift of focus is an awareness of how closely the politics of deception and the aesthetics of delusion are intertwined in these texts.

The Aesthetics of Delusion

Reading American fictions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, we find that their authors fully shared early European aestheticians' concerns about the trustworthiness of both the senses and the imagination. Take Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* as a particularly prominent example. This gothic novel tells the story of Clara Wieland and her brother Theodore, who live near Philadelphia together with Theodore's wife Catharine, their four children, Catharine's brother Henry Pleyel (with whom Clara is in love), and an orphan named Louisa. Their rural idyll is disrupted when they hear disembodied voices and, soon after, the mysterious Carwin insinuates himself into their circle. Clara, who narrates the tale in retrospect, is immediately attracted to the enigmatic stranger, whose words and actions not only put to the test Clara's love for Pleyel but also Pleyel's Enlightenment beliefs and Theodore's sanity. Carwin is a biloquist whose imitation and projection of voices makes Pleyel doubt the reliability of his senses and fuels the melancholic Wieland's religious fervor. Perhaps mistaking Carwin's aural deceptions for God's voice, Wieland believes he is ordered to kill his family as the ultimate sign of his obedience to the divine will. Having murdered his wife, his children, and Louisa, Wieland is imprisoned but manages to escape. Intent on killing Pleyel and his sister too, Wieland is stopped by Carwin, who uses his ventriloquist skills once more to tell him he was deceived. Realizing the enormity of his crimes, Wieland kills himself. Carwin confesses his deceptions before Clara but denies having fabricated the voices that told Wieland to slay his family. Clara suffers a mental breakdown. The novel ends three years later: Carwin has retreated to the countryside as a farmer, and Clara has fled to France with Pleyel, with whom she is now married. It is from there that she tells the tale we read, in a letter to her friends.

Many political readings of the novel move Carwin, that "walking embodiment of deception and duplicity" (S. Watts, *Romance* 86), to the center of attention. Carwin is read as either a con man who represents the excesses of an emergent culture of liberalism or as an ethnic or cultural other (an American peasant or Jacobin; a Spanish or Irish Catholic; a Bavarian

Illuminatus) whose uncertain origins—identified as unequivocally Ameri-
can only outside the novel, in Brown's companion piece "Memoirs of
Carwin the Biloquist"—allow him to stand in for several groups that came
under increasing scrutiny in the early republic, especially after the passage
of the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798, the year in which *Wieland* was pub-
lished. Since the publication of Davidson's *Revolution and the Word* in 1986,
such political readings have become increasingly prominent. To give but a
small sampling: Davidson herself reads Carwin as a vehicle for "the cri-
tique of individualism in American Gothic fiction" (316); for Steven Watts,
he is a "confidence man" who "embodie[s] the 'serial self' of a liberalizing
culture" (*Romance* 183, 89); Shirley Samuels calls him "the alien intruder"
("Wieland" 52); for Charles C. Bradshaw, he is "an inscrutable foreigner"
and possible "Illuminati sp[y]" (364–65); Fliegelman considers him a fig-
ure that allows Brown to address "larger fears about the Jacobinization
of the impressionable American mind" (Introduction xi); and Ed White
labels him a "peasant rebel."

If we choose to focus on characters other than Carwin, though, it is not
acts of deception but the grounds of self-deception and delusion that move
to center stage. In critical discussions of the novel, the Wielands' family
curse, which both kills Old Wieland in a spectacular spontaneous com-
bustion and prompts his son Theodore to annihilate his family, is usually
traced back to two sources: psychopathology and religion.[26] The male line
of the family is said to be ruled by either religious enthusiasm or madness,
or, as Frank Shuffleton argues, by a successive combination of the two:
"Wieland, given to solitary brooding about religious truth, eventually
believes in the voice's divine origin, but then, driven to madness, creates
for himself an internalized voice of God which orders him to kill his wife,
children, and sister" (102). The line is hard to draw since many of Brown's
contemporaries subscribed to a tradition of thinking about enthusiasm
initiated by Charles Chauncy, who, drawing on Locke's attack on enthu-
siasm in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), had already
denounced enthusiasm as a mental disorder half a century before *Wieland*.
Responding to what he perceived as some of the excesses of the Great Awak-
ening,[27] Chauncy put it thus in his 1742 sermon *Enthusiasm Described and
Caution'd Against*: "The cause of this *enthusiasm* is a bad temperament of
the blood and spirits, 'tis properly a disease, a sort of madness.... None are
so much in danger of it, as those in whom melancholy is the prevailing in-
gredient in their constitution. In these it often reigns; sometimes to so great
a degree, that they are really beside themselves, acting as truly by the blind

impetus of a wild fancy, as tho' they had neither reason nor understanding"
(3). Since Chauncy's sermon, regarding enthusiasm as a mental disorder be-
came a commonplace among those distrustful of mystics and spiritual seek-
ers. In the United States, denunciations of enthusiasm as a mental disease
would be staged well into the nineteenth century. In Herman Mann's *The
Female Review*, an imaginative biography of the female soldier Deborah
Sampson, the effects of enthusiasm on the believer's psyche are described in
stark terms: "Reason being perverted or obstructed in its course, the whole
system of intellect is thrown into a delirium" (76). In his *Medical Inquiries
and Observations, upon the Diseases of the Mind* (1812), Benjamin Rush goes
as far as describing enthusiasts as suffering from a specific "disease of the
mind" that manifests itself in the following symptoms:

1. In a belief that they are the peculiar favourites of heaven, and exclusively
   possessed of just opinions of the divine will, as revealed in the Scriptures.
2. That they see and converse with angels, and the departed spirits of their
   revelations and friends.
3. That they are favoured with visions, and the revelation of future events.
   And,
4. That they are exalted into beings of the highest order. (127–38)[28]

This describes rather accurately some features of Theodore Wieland's psy-
chological aberration. As Peter Kafer has shown, Brown knew religious
enthusiasm and radical pietism from his readings of classic Quaker texts by
Fox, Penn, and Woolman; from Anthony Benezet (a Brown family friend
and one of the most prominent Quakers in Philadelphia); and from the
presence of several religious sects in Philadelphia that included Johannes
Kelpius's Hermits of the Wissahickon and Henry Koster's Brethren in
America (113–31). When Brown traces the source of Old Wieland's enthu-
siasm to a book that "contained an exposition of the doctrine of the sect of
Camissards" (9), he embeds the novel's religious theme in a transnational
context that takes us back to the early eighteenth century:

From 1702 to 1704, Protestant peasants, artisans, and smallholders had engaged
in guerrilla warfare against Catholic authorities, burning over two hundred
churches and killing some priests in the Bas-Longuedoc region of southern
France. . . . By the end of the decade, the "French Prophets" had followers
in cities throughout England and Scotland. The long-term impact of the
movement is attested by an anonymous 1742 Boston polemic against it, *The
Wonderful Narrative: or, A Faithful Account of the French Prophets, their Agita-
tions, Extasies, and Inspirations*, which argued that the prophets "were either

Imposters, or under the Power of Delusion, or an overheated Imagination."
(E. White 46)

French radicalism, Brown suggests, threatened the young American nation
not only in its (largely anti-clerical) Enlightenment guise but also in its
religious varieties. While Brown followed neither Chauncy nor Rush nor
the anonymous Boston polemicist in denouncing religious enthusiasm as
outright madness, the story he tells in *Wieland* suggests that only a thin
line divides the two.[29]

Whether we opt for a psychological or a religious interpretation or a
combination of the two, the focus is less on deception than on sensory
delusion and the pathology of the imagination. Most commentators on the
novel note that it is not only Theodore Wieland but all the members of
the Mettingen community who repeatedly fall prey to delusions. Roland
Hagenbüchle aptly sums up the book's exploration of "the nineteenth-
century crisis in epistemology" in words that apply to a great number of
early American novels: "According to Locke, ideas have their origin in the
senses. Sense impressions may occasionally deceive, but on the whole the
act of perception can be trusted. In *Wieland,* however, sense impressions
are from the start described as untrustworthy; instead of clear ideas, based
on such impressions, and linked together on the principle of association,
we observe an endless sequence of unreliable hypotheses" (124). In line
with more general assessments of gothic fictions as critical interrogations of
the limits of Enlightenment rationality, Hagenbüchle convincingly shows
that *Wieland* can be read as a critique of the kind of optimistic Lockean
epistemology that both Clara and Pleyel espouse.[30] Clara summarizes some
of the basic tenets of that epistemology when she says, "The will is the tool
of the understanding, which must fashion its conclusions on the notice of
sense. If the senses be depraved it is impossible to calculate the evils that
may flow from the consequent deductions of the understanding" (39).
Clara here talks about her brother, but the story Brown tells makes abun-
dantly clear that it is not only madmen and enthusiasts whose senses are
prone to deceive subjects.

Clara, too, repeatedly draws wrong conclusions from what she hears
and sees—for instance when she believes Carwin to be the murderer of
Catharine and her children—and so does Pleyel when his ears delude
him into believing that Clara is having an affair with Carwin. In point of
fact, it is Pleyel, the arch-Lockean, who identifies the limits of empiricist
epistemology most astutely. Early on in the novel, Wieland returns to the

ominous family temple to retrieve a letter left behind when a storm forced
him and his friends to return to the house. Approaching the temple, he
hears his wife's voice even though she has remained indoors. Later on, we
learn that this was Carwin's first aural deception, but when Wieland returns
to the house, speculations as to the source of the mysterious voice abound.
This is Pleyel's assessment: "Pleyel did not scruple to regard the whole as
a deception of the senses. Perhaps a voice had been heard; but Wieland's
imagination had misled him in supposing a resemblance to that of his wife,
and giving such a signification to the sounds" (38). This is a remarkable
judgment given that Pleyel is the Enlightenment empiricist who trusts only
that which his senses perceive. Even he recognizes that human beings can
never fully trust what their eyes and ears perceive. Pleyel here uses "senses"
in a broad sense to include not only external sense perception and inner
sense (the two meanings of *aisthēsis*) but also the further processing of sen-
sory impressions by the imagination (about which more below). On all
these levels, sensory perception is fallible, and the empiricist Pleyel himself
is deluded precisely because he bases his judgments solely on empirically
verifiable phenomena, on that which is in front of his senses. That is why
Carwin declares that "to deceive him" was "the sweetest triumph I had
ever enjoyed" (239). Thus, if Brown critiqued President Jefferson for what
he considered his "defect of mental vision" (qtd. in Looby 198), the story
Wieland tells us implies that *everyone* is subject to this defect. Most force-
fully through the figure of Pleyel, Brown's novel thus explores the limits of
sensuous cognition that troubled Enlightenment aesthetics from within.

Other fictions by Brown also probe the treacherousness of sensory per-
ception. Particularly *Arthur Mervyn,* his second major novelistic achieve-
ment, deserves a closer look. When Dr. Stevens questions the veracity of
the protagonist's self-representations toward the beginning of the novel, he
expresses doubts concerning the very process of perception itself:

> He was far from being talkative. His silence seemed to be the joint result of
> modesty and unpleasing remembrances. His features were characterized by
> pathetic seriousness, and his deportment by a gravity very unusual at his age.
> According to his own representation, he was no more than eighteen years old,
> but the depth of his remarks indicated a much greater advance. His name was
> Arthur Mervyn. He described himself as having passed his life at the plough-
> tail and the threshing-floor; as being destitute of all scholastic instruction; and
> as being long since bereft of the affectionate regards of parents and kinsmen.
>   When questioned as to the course of life which he meant to pursue upon
> his recovery, he professed himself without any precise object. (9)

As he highlights his reliance on Arthur's version of his life story ("seemed"; "According to his own representation"; "He described himself"; "he professed himself"), Stevens calls into question both the veracity of the stories Arthur tells and the reliability of his own empirical observations. That deception and self-deception are closely intertwined emerges even more clearly when Welbeck, the novel's principal villain, describes his seduction of a married woman: "We were mutually deceived. She was the victim of self-delusion; but I must charge myself with practising deceit both upon myself and her. . . . In the high career of passion all consequences were overlooked. She was the dupe of the most audacious sophistry and the grossest delusion. I was the slave of sensual impulses and voluntary blindness" (87). According to Welbeck, then, his victim was self-deceived in her appraisal of his character while he deceived not only her but also himself in the sense that he, who had initially "sought her intercourse without illicit views" (87), underestimated the power of his desires. Knowing Welbeck as a con man and liar, we may well read his assertion that he, too, was self-deceived, as a piece of specious reasoning on the part of a character that Steven Watts aptly describes as a "nightmare vision of what a society of ambitious individualism could produce" (*Romance* 112). Perhaps it is just that, but for a man who has just told his interlocutor that his life has been "one tissue of iniquity and folly" (*Arthur Mervyn* 85), that he has "descended to dissimulation and falsehood" (86), that he is subject to "incurable depravity" (87), for a man who is, moreover, just about to confess his murder of Amos Watson, the brother of the woman he ruined, such subterfuges hardly seem necessary. Whether we take Welbeck's assertions in this specific scene at face value or not, they draw attention to a point Brown makes again and again in his novels: that calamities are as much the result of innocent characters' self-deceptions as they are of villains' dissimulations. Even Mrs. Watson, who has "the purest of hearts and the most vigorous understanding" (87) falls prey to delusion. In Brown's fictional worlds, people are, in Welbeck's words, the "dupe[s]" of both "the most audacious sophistry and the grossest delusion"—a phrasing that recalls Carwin's intent to teach "a lesson to mankind on the evils of credulity on the one hand, and of imposture on the other" (*Wieland* 242). Though the characters that make these observations are the novels' villains, the lessons they teach us are also Brown's.

Arthur Mervyn is a particularly instructive case because it plays off two kinds of cognitive exertions—reading and direct experience—against one another only to conclude that both are subject to the fallibility of sense perception. When Brown asserts in the preface that his fictional negotiation of

the yellow fever epidemic that ravaged Philadelphia in 1793 "performs an eminent service to the sufferers, by calling forth benevolence in those who are able to afford relief" (3), he performs a task that is familiar to readers of early American novels. Like many of his fellow writers, Brown here insists that the principal function of literature is to educate its readers. This affirmation of the educational value of texts is not restricted to Brown's preface. *Arthur Mervyn* is a gothic bildungsroman that tells the tale of the protagonist's initiation into adult life. In that process of education and learning, reading and writing play a crucial role. In telling his life story to his benefactor and interlocutor Dr. Stevens, Arthur emphasizes that he spent his early life more in the company of books and nature than of his peers. "Persons of my own age," he explains, "were totally unlike myself. Their tastes and occupations were incompatible with mine. . . . In my few books, in my pen, in the vegetable and animal existences around me, I found companions . . . with whom I was never tired of communing" (345). For young Arthur, true communication takes place not between human beings but between human beings and nature and between human beings and the texts they read and write. Strikingly, upon encountering the "luxury and pomp" of Philadelphia for the first time after leaving his rural home, Arthur compares the baffling new sights he encounters not to his actual experiences on his father's farm but to knowledge gained from "books," which "had taught [him] the dignity and safety of the middle path," and from his unnamed "darling writer," who "abounded with encomiums of rural life" (47).

It comes as little surprise, then, that, when asked by his future tutor and possible accomplice Welbeck how he might be able to earn his bread in Philadelphia, Arthur replies: "I can, as yet, manage no tool, that can be managed in the city, but the pen" (49). As the narrative progresses, reading and writing retain their important role in Arthur's education. Having been deserted by Welbeck once the latter has confessed to his history of villainous deeds, adolescent Arthur finds refuge in a "quiet, artless, and cordial" (123) Quaker family's home, where he quickly becomes infatuated with the younger daughter, Eliza Hadwin. Reasoning that he would not be able to support a family yet, and fearing that the Hadwins would expect him to convert to Quakerism should he ask for Eliza's hand, Arthur decides to check his passion by embarking on the study and translation of a text that came into his possession via Welbeck. The text in question is "a manuscript" that "contained memoirs of the ducal house of Visconti" (93) and was written by Vincentio Lodi—a minor character whose killing by a slave I discuss above. Penned in the ancient Tuscan language, the manuscript

poses a formidable challenge to Arthur's abilities. But Arthur perseveres, translates the text into English, and emerges with a young scholar's success story. Proudly, he tells Stevens and his wife that "this undertaking, fantastic and impracticable as it may seem, proved, upon experiment, to be within the compass of my powers. The detail of my progress would be curious and instructive. What impediments, in the attainment of a darling purpose, human ingenuity and patience are able to surmount . . . would be forcibly illustrated by my example" (126). In Arthur's account, his heroic struggle with Lodi's manuscript furnishes material for an exemplary tale of both intellectual and moral education. His scholarly efforts not only testify to his capacity for learning but also to his ability to rein in his untimely passion for Eliza. Thus, texts are again presented as powerful sources of knowledge and self-improvement. Arthur's sentimental education is no exception in this respect. Arthur's love of Eliza will be rekindled later in the narrative only to be displaced onto the more mature Achsa Fielding, who "always loved literature" (426), counts books among "not the least of her pleasures" (428), and has "the wisdom of men and of books" (433). Arthur wins Achsa's heart as well as her hand not least by reading to her (398, 429).

Against this background, we may read the novel's surprising shift in narrative voice as further evidence of the success of Arthur's education. At the beginning of chapter 16 of part 2, Arthur bids farewell to Stevens, who hitherto acted as the frame narrator and one of the two narratees of Arthur's embedded narrative (the other is Stevens's wife). Arthur now dispenses with Stevens's fatherly guidance and becomes the author or, in narratological terms, the extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator of his own life story. "Author" can be taken quite literally here, though, since Arthur does not present himself as a speaker but as a writer who takes over Stevens's pen. "I am glad my friend, thy nimble pen has got so far upon its journey" (354), Arthur writes and from now on wields the pen to lay it down only in the novel's ultimate paragraph: "Now take thyself away, quill" (446). In a self-referential passage at the end of chapter 22 of the second part, we can even witness Arthur writing the tale we read (412). In Brown's novel, then, the educational value of reading and writing texts is affirmed not only in the author's prefatory remarks but also by the logic of the narrative. Texts, Brown intimates, serve to educate their readers, and to write the text of one's own life is a sign of the kind of maturity and autonomy we expect the protagonist of a bildungsroman to achieve at the story's end. As Arthur asserts, "the pen and the book" are "the only instruments of rational improvement" (311).

Yet as Arthur Mervyn gets older, and especially once he has undergone "a revolution in [his] mind" (293) concerning his views on city life and the educational value of direct experience, his ambivalence toward bookish learning increases, and in several passages he actually disparages reading books as a pernicious waste of time. Most strikingly, despite Achsa Fielding's love of books, and despite his willingness to read to her "several hours in the day, instead of one" (429) to make her happy, Arthur actually denies the value of communicating with and through books:

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

For Arthur, the problem with books is not only their mediatedness ("They talk to us behind a screen") but also the nonreciprocity of the reading process ("they allow no questions"). In a similar vein, Arthur early on in the narrative looks back upon his youthful infatuation with books and declares it an error of judgment. Considering his "defective education" and "limited views" (292), Arthur revisits his early life in the countryside and concludes that neither nature nor texts have served his education well: "My curiosity and thirst of knowledge had likewise received a new direction. Books and inanimate nature were cold and lifeless instructors. Men, and the works of men, were the objects of rational study, and our own eyes only could communicate just conceptions of human performances. The influence of manners, professions and social institutions, could be thoroughly known only by direct inspection" (293). Arthur here stages a critique of received wisdom with roots in the Enlightenment empiricism of Bacon, Locke, and Newton that inspired the thinking of early British aestheticians.[31] Anticipating Emerson's "The American Scholar" (1837) and its pragmatist successors, Arthur turns his back on the secondhand knowledge of books to embrace unmediated experience and the participation in and observation of human life. In Arthur's own estimation, education must progress from the sterility of reading and writing texts to the fullness of direct experience and human contact. Accordingly, he not only lays down his pen in the novel's ultimate paragraph; he also dismisses writing as mere "pen-prattle" (446).

However, experience is as much a double-edged sword in Brown's book as it is in early American novels more generally.[32] How else to explain the fact that it is Arthur's repeated protestations of his *in*experience that serve him to declare his innocence? When he asserts that he "pretend[s] not to the wisdom of experience and age; to the praise of forethought or subtlety" (323), he protests his lack of guile. More pertinent to our concern with deception and delusion, Brown's narrative repeatedly suggests just how precarious and fallible sense perception, the ground of all experience, is. This, we are reminded, is a bildungsroman with heavy gothic overtones. As is appropriate for a gothic tale, Arthur time and again finds himself in conditions that interfere with his powers of perception. On his very first evening in the city of Philadelphia, a prankster locks Arthur into a dark room under pretenses of securing him a bed for the night. The darkness initially prevents Arthur from realizing that the room is already occupied by sleeping tenants, but when he does, he quickly hides in a closet. When several people enter the room and turn on the light, Arthur hopes to figure out who they are, but to no avail: "Light streamed through the key-hole . . . but the aperture was too small and the figures passed too quickly to permit me the sight of them" (38). Arthur hopes for "more authentic information" by listening to the ensuing conversation, but this too is foiled at first: "Some words being uttered by the man, in too low a key to be overheard, the lady burst into tears" (38). He eventually gathers information about a financial scheme that will prove relevant later in the narrative, but his initial difficulties of perception remain with him throughout his adventures in the city, be it in the concealed recesses of Welbeck's house; on the Schuylkill River at night, where it is "too dark for any thing to be distinctly seen" (115); or in the gloomy dwellings of the plague-ridden, where Arthur mistakes a dead man for Susan Hadwin's fiancé Wallace (147, 151).

Yet the novel's anxieties about the reliability of the senses reach deeper than the fear that external conditions may hamper sense perception. As do early aestheticians in their treatises, Brown probes the powers and limitations of sensuous cognition in writing a work of fiction that does not function as a "mere reflection or reiteration" of contemporaneous developments in the scientific field but is "equally invested in activating and resolving the crises of perception precipitated by the period's empiricist turn" (Thompson and Meeker 186). As the narrative unfolds, Arthur's "senses" are "taught to distrust their own testimony" (*Arthur Mervyn* 107) and, by his own account, he is by no means the only one who is—note the passive voice—"born to be deceived" (320). Thus, he explains that his former

neighbors' judgment of him as "slothful, incurious, destitute of knowledge, and of all thirst of knowledge, insolent and profligate" (341) was guided by misperceptions that are common to the human race: "I am not surprised or afflicted at the misconceptions of my neighbors, with relation to my own character. Men must judge from what they see: they must build their conclusions on their knowledge" (341). Again, Arthur characterizes sense perception as a decidedly imperfect guide to human knowledge.

But can we trust his judgment? As several commentators on the novel have suggested, Arthur may be not the naive but near-saintly figure he styles himself as but rather Welbeck's accomplice and an eloquent master of deception whose professions of innocence may be as artificial as his anti-Chesterfieldian claim that he is "no proficient in etiquette" (404). In Davidson's words, "While the early critics typically blamed the writer for the inconsistencies or excesses in the plot, most twentieth-century commentators have preferred to exonerate Brown and to indict Arthur Mervyn. Any divergences from an implicitly or explicitly promised line of development or other similar 'flaws' become further evidence of Arthur's naivete and of the errors youth is prone to (the more forgiving appraisal) or of his devious nature and dishonest ways (the more censorious one)" (*Revolution* 348). For readers of Brown's novel, it is difficult to judge Arthur's character appropriately since Brown for the largest part of the narrative gives his protagonist free rein to tell his own tale. Moreover, whenever another character's less favorable account of Arthur threatens to undermine his credibility—Mrs. Althorpe's suspicion that Arthur had illicit relations with his father's wife, stole his father's money and horse, and never had any interest in reading books of any kind is a case in point (230–37)—Arthur is given the opportunity to respond to the charges and rectify what he presents as others' misperceptions of him. Thus, it is not only the reliability of Arthur's and his intratextual observers' perceptions that is at stake in Brown's novel, but also our own.

Ultimately, the question Brown's novel raises for its readers is the same that the novel's characters are faced with in their varying appraisals of Arthur's moral makeup—a question that crucially occupied early aestheticians as different in their philosophical outlook as Baumgarten and Hume: how safe a guide to knowledge are our sensory perceptions? For readers of *Arthur Mervyn*, there is no solid ground against which the veracity of the protagonist's tale can be judged. Thus, Brown's novel imposes on us the very same predicament to which he subjects his characters. The most fundamental question Brown raises is that of the truth value of conclusions

drawn from empirical evidence, be it fictional characters' interpretations of other characters' words and actions or our own readings of words on the page. It is no coincidence that this question is raised in a work of art since the emergence of a "science of sensuous cognition" in the mid-eighteenth century testifies to the intricate intertwinement of aesthetics and epistemology.

In fact, once we focus on Brown's probing of the limits of sensuous cognition, we can see that both his shifting judgments of the educational value of books *and* his inquiry into the reliability of sense perception constitute reflections on his own artistic practice. Brown does not consider literature primarily a form of representation. Instead, without ever having touched a book by Baumgarten, he concurs with him and his followers that art is a specific mode of perceiving and of knowing the world. Brown suggests as much in his preface when he sets his own narrative side by side with other discourses on the yellow fever and its repercussions: "Amidst the medical and political discussions which are now afloat in the community relative to this topic, the author of these remarks has ventured to methodize his own reflections, and to weave into an humble narrative such incidents as appeared to him most instructive and remarkable among those which came within the sphere of his own observation. It is every one's duty to profit by all opportunities of inculcating on mankind the lessons of justice and humanity" (3). Brown's insistence on the educational value of his tale rests on a model of literary communication that accords literature cognitive status. Literature for Brown as for Baumgarten does not so much aspire to represent the world faithfully as to allow us to get a cognitive grasp on it and to draw our lessons from the knowledge we gain thereby. At least in this, literature is not unlike medical or political discourse. Thus, Brown's reflections on his artistic practice ultimately belie Arthur's strict distinction between the immediacy of experience and the mediatedness of reading books. Based as it is on a mimetic model of literary communication, Arthur's distinction necessarily assigns books second place behind direct experience and cannot do justice to the cognitive dimension of books.

And yet, Brown's affirmation of the cognitive and educational value of his book is not unconditional. For if we realize, with Brown and Baumgarten, that books and their readers participate in processes of sensuous cognition, we find that Arthur's repeated observation that the senses are prone to deceive us also applies to the communicative situation that the book he figures in enters whenever a reader picks it up. Thus, to assert, as both Brown and Baumgarten do, the cognitive status of literature comes with

a price because it acknowledges that literary experience is subject to the same vagaries of sensuous cognition that also characterize communicative and cognitive interactions between real-world subjects on the one hand and real-world subjects and objects on the other. Literature, Brown invites us to realize, marks a valuable but decidedly slippery path to knowledge. By the end of the eighteenth century, the empiricist paradigm had long displaced rationalist doctrines in the natural sciences, but Brown's turn-of-the-century gothic bildungsroman registers a lingering unease with the empiricist valorization of experience and perception over a priori reason. His fictional probing of anxieties concerning deception and delusion makes visible fundamental limitations of human cognition that were being theorized by contemporaneous European natural philosophers and aestheticians, and that cut to the heart of artistic practices on both sides of the Atlantic. What Bacon, one of the main early idea-givers for the empiricist turn in British natural philosophy,[33] observed in 1620 continued to trouble eighteenth-century American practitioners and European theorists of art as much as it did contemporaneous natural philosophers: "For certain it is that the senses deceive; but then at the same time they supply the means of discovering their own errors; only the errors are here, the means of discovery are to seek. The sense fails in two ways. Sometimes it gives no information, sometimes it gives false information" (*Great Instauration* 26).[34]

In the novels of the early republic, it is not only sense perception but also the further processing of sense impressions by the imagination that is a major source of delusion. In making that observation, they tap into fears concerning the dangers of the unchecked imagination that I have traced back to Aristotle and which reappear in the early aesthetic theories of thinkers as different in their intellectual orientation as Kant, Sulzer, and Hume. All of them at one point or another join Johann Gebhard Ehrenreich Maass, who in his *Versuch über die Einbildungskraft* (1792) calls for a "theory of the disciplining of the imagination" and a "moral disciplining of phantasy" (115, 256; my translation). Even Addison—that greatest of all eighteenth-century champions of the imagination, whose major essays were readily available in the early republic via anthologies such as John Wood's *Mentor, or The American Teacher's Assistant* and John Andrews's *Elements of Rhetorick and Belles Lettres Compiled for the Use of Schools* (1813)—feels called upon to note, in the final part of his essay on "the pleasures of the imagination," that "there is not a Sight in Nature so mortifying as that of a Distracted Person, when his Imagination is troubled, and his whole Soul disordered and confused" (*Spectator,* no. 421; Addison and Steele 114). Fully in line with early

aestheticians' cautioning against the dangers of unchecked "fancy" (a term that both British aestheticians and American novelists of the era still used synonymously with the imagination), the imagination is as likely to deceive as to open up a space beyond sensory perception.

Most writers of the period subscribed to the maxim quoted in Herman Mann's *The Female Review:* "When fancy rides, let reason hold the reins" (82). Thus, in a long disquisition on the dangers of novel reading in William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy,* Mr. Holmes warns of the "luxuriance of fancy," the "heated" imagination, and the "poetical imagination . . . not counterpoised with judgment" (45, 46)—assessments that tie in with several characters' suspicion that "our imagination" may always "dress[ ] up a phantom to impose on our reason" (121). Similarly, in Tenney's *Female Quixotism,* Dorcasina's credulity is fueled at least as much by the "romantic imagination" of this "love-sick girl" (57), her "obstinate adherence to . . . juvenile and romantic ideas" (207), and her readiness to "g[i]ve her imagination the reins" (20) as by faulty sense perceptions. In the letter that concludes the novel, a disillusioned Dorcasina warns her addressee not to "suffer" her future daughter's "imaginations to be filled with ideas of happiness, particularly in the connubial state, which can never be realized" (325).

Among early American novelists, it is again Charles Brockden Brown who explores both the delusional and the creative force of fancy most consistently. A number of literary critics have recognized that his exploration of the untamed imagination adds a self-reflexive dimension to his novels that invites us to read them as comments on his own aesthetic practice. In *Liberty of the Imagination: Aesthetic Theory, Literary Form, and Politics in the Early United States,* Cahill aptly summarizes the similar conclusions reached by several of these critics, including A. Carl Bredahl, James R. Russo, and Michael David Bell: "Critics of *Wieland* have long read the violence at the end of the novel as an indictment of the aesthetic pleasures at the beginning" (65). Focusing on *Wieland,* still other critics see Brown's exploration of the pathologies of the imagination as an indictment of the disinterested aesthetic attitude of the Wielands, which Clara Wieland best gives expression to toward the beginning of the novel as she notes that the French and Indian War "was at such a distance as to enhance our enjoyment by affording objects of comparison" and that "revolutions and battles, however calamitous to those who occupied the scene, contributed in some sort to our happiness, by agitating our minds with curiosity, and furnishing causes of patriotic exultation" (29). Anthony Galluzzo goes as far as reading Carwin's disruption of this false idyll as a salutary antidote to the

Wielands' aesthetic elitism: "Carwin exposes the material and social preconditions of the disinterested aesthetic state at Mettingen in the process of undermining this state. Building on the trope of biloquism as a figure for imagination, I discern in Brown's novel an alternative aesthetic model that is critical—if not wholly destructive—as Carwin, in creatively throwing his voice, makes real the terrors sublimated in and through the category of the sublime" (256).

Drawing on contemporaneous theories of art, the imagination, and perception (especially Addison, Hume, Hartley, Rousseau, Burke, and Blair) as well as Brown's own essayistic writings (especially "The Rhapsodist" and "Walstein's School of History"), Cahill makes a convincing case that the imagination plays a much more ambivalent role in Brown's novels than these critics suggest:

> [The Wielands'] geographic and psychic distance from the reality of the French-Indian War, for example, figures as a complex symbol of their attitudes about the relation between the imagination and a changing world. . . . The political struggles of the nation are perceived as an object of the imagination without any effective reality beyond the ideas and feelings they produce. Two apparently opposite but related conclusions may be drawn from Clara's remark. The first, a standard view, is that the Wielands do not participate in any social world but the private utopia they have created; when that world is finally interrupted by politics and difference in the form of Carwin, it necessarily collapses. The second, however, assumes that social transformations are experienced chiefly in the mind, that an imaginative relation to the nation is not elitist escapism but sensus communis, and in this case, one that reflects an essential understanding of the difference between practical and theoretical ideas of government. Thus, whether we see *Wieland* as a pessimistic allegory of national formation or a more uncertain and speculative apprehension of a relation between mind and society finally depends on which conclusion we emphasize. But if the first conclusion implies the inherent dangers of the imagination in a republic, the second implies its absolute necessity. That is, we may either say that war and national politics had no effect at all on the circle at Mettingen, or that they made it possible both by providing a source of aesthetic pleasure and by symbolizing the inherent relation between the imagination and the ideal society. ("Adventurous" 58–59)

This, it seems to me, perfectly captures the ambivalent status of the imagination in *Wieland.* Yes, the imagination is repeatedly qualified as treacherous: Clara speaks of an aspiring Saxon poet's "adventurous and lawless fancy" (89); the villainous Carwin has an "eminently vigorous and prolific"

fancy (85) that he draws on to "deprave[ ] the imagination of Pleyel" (241) so that the latter "transform[s] shadows into monsters," which "plunge[s] him" into "deplorable errors" (120). There is also much talk of the "fiction of the fancy" (50) and the "illusion of the fancy" (86), and the "distempered fancy" (222, 269) is clearly identified as a major source of Clara's mental disintegration toward the end of the narrative. Most dangerously, both Old Wieland's spontaneous self-combustion and his son's homicidal insanity are triggered by a diseased imagination. While the father "imagined himself beset by the snares of a spiritual foe" (9–10), Theodore is forced to conclude that, having killed his wife Catharine, "I imagined I had set myself forever beyond the reach of selfishness; but my imaginations were false" (195).

At the same time, Brown represents the imagination as an indispensable source of artistic creativity as well as that cognitive faculty which allows characters to think beyond the status quo. While in the case of the Saxon poet fancy may have overstepped its bounds, the creative imagination is portrayed more favorably in other parts of the book. The Wielands' love of literature, music, and polite conversation does afford them "six years of uninterrupted happiness" (29) before Carwin's deceptions rekindle the religious fanaticism of the previous generation. Carwin's biloquism reactivates the family curse but does not necessarily expose the falseness of the Mettingen circle's idyll: what incites Theodore to insanity and murder is the unregulated imaginary of religious enthusiasm, not the power of the creative imagination. In fact, the latter contributes much to the maintenance of a happy, largely egalitarian community of friends that is "variegated, but not tarnished or disordered" (25). In *Wieland,* fancy is by no means only a source of delusion; it is also what enables Clara to experience a sublime "awe," the "sweetest and most solemn that imagination can conceive" (52); and it can open up the present to "blissful imaginations of the future" (108). Such more positive appraisals of the creative imagination tie in with Brown's own ruminations in his essay "The Rhapsodist": "A rhapsodist is one who delivers the sentiments suggested by the moment in artless and unpremeditated language. His reasoning is always introduced to illustrate the circumstance, and the fact to confirm the reason. He pours forth the effusions of a sprightly fancy, and describes the devious wanderings of a quick but thoughtful mind; but he is equally remote from the giddy raptures of enthusiasm, and the sober didactic strain of dull philosophy" (5). As a figure of the artist, the rhapsodist steers a middle course between the overheated fancy of the religious seeker and the regulated imagination of the philosopher. In *Wieland,* it is Clara who resembles the rhapsodist most

closely to provide a salutary counterpoint to her brother's depraved imagination and its manipulation by the imaginative deceptions of Carwin.

Again, it is Cahill who captures this double valence of the imagination in Brown's work best: "The imagination in Brown's novels is the site of fanatical delusion and deceptive error, to be sure, but also correct judgment, rational speculation, patriotic sympathy, moral beauty, and transformative sublimity" (*Liberty* 165). Cahill recognizes that these two diverging functions of the imagination cannot be held apart neatly in Brown's fictional worlds, which is why it is important to "explore his investment in the continuities between the disordered and the transformative imagination" (167). In Kant's terms, Brown probes both the most negative and the most positive consequences of the "productive imagination." Cahill's point is an important one that does not, however, capture the full complexity of Brown's take on the imagination. In Brown's fictions, the deceptive and the creative imagination are not only in constant danger of collapsing into one another; they are even more intricately intertwined than Cahill suggests. For Brown, treachery and delusion are not just dangerous side effects of a cognitive faculty that fuels artistic creativity and allows for the cognitive transcendence of what is; deception is at the very heart of artistic creativity. This becomes most obvious when Clara feels compelled to sketch an image of Carwin's face: "This face, seen for a moment, continued for hours to occupy my fancy, to the exclusion of almost every other image. I had purposed to spend the evening with my brother, but I could not resist the inclination of forming a sketch upon paper of this memorable visage. Whether my hand was aided by any peculiar inspiration, or I was deceived by my own fond conceptions, this portrait, though hastily executed, appeared unexceptionable to my own taste" (61). In this brief passage, Brown decomposes the processes of artistic production and reception into their constituent parts: Clara encounters Carwin through sensuous perception ("seen for a moment"), forms a mental representation ("image") of him, lets her imagination ("fancy") work on that image, and finally sketches a likeness of the product of that work. Once the sketch is finished, Clara switches roles as she becomes the first recipient of her artifact and assesses its quality while stressing the subjective nature of her judgment ("my own taste"). For Clara, whether her work on the sketch was guided by inspiration or self-deception makes little difference as to her judgment of the sketch as "unexceptionable." What precisely she means by this qualification remains unclear, though the fact that Pleyel is able to connect the image with his earlier encounter with Carwin later on (71) does suggest that it achieves a

high degree of verisimilitude. Perhaps, though, Clara finds the portrait unexceptionable not so much for its realism but because it is beautiful—more beautiful perhaps than Carwin himself, whom Clara consistently describes as ugly ("His form was ungainly and disproportioned" [57]; "Every feature was wide of beauty, and the outline of his face reminded you of an inverted cone" [61]). This would help explain why Clara speculates that she may have been "deceived" by her "own fond conceptions," that is, by her sympathy with and desire for Carwin, which may have prompted her to portray him more favorably than his outward appearance warrants. Whether we interpret "unexceptionable" to mean "verisimilar" or "beautiful," what is remarkable is that Clara does not seem to mind that her artistic achievement may well be the result of self-deception. Apparently, beauty, verisimilitude, and deception do not exclude one another.

In fact, in other parts of the novel, deception and delusion are presented as indispensable parts of the creative process. Focusing on these passages invites us to read *Wieland* as an allegory of artistic production that explores deception as both a principal subject matter and the artist's own modus operandi. Thus, when, in discussing the first occurrence of a counterfeited voice with the Wielands, Carwin declares that "the power of mimickry was very common" and adds that "Catharine's voice might easily be imitated" (86), he qualifies precisely that human activity that many eighteenth-century observers still considered the ground of artistic production—imitation—as a tool of deception. Given that Carwin himself turns out to be the masterful imitator of voices, it comes as no surprise that both his person and his actions are consistently described in words that connote both creative skill and treachery: he is repeatedly labeled the "author" of his deeds (57, 107, 160, 182, 259); his tales are qualified as "artful" (145); he confesses that he "had painted [himself] to [Clara] as an assassin and ravisher" (239); and Brown speaks of "the art of the ventriloquist" (226) in an explanatory footnote, where he also mentions examples of biloquism that involved the mimicry of musical instruments. In such passages, the distinction between two meanings of *art*—deception, creative endeavor—is blurred. When Clara calls Carwin "the grand deceiver; the author of this black conspiracy; the intelligence that governed in this storm" (217), she again emphasizes the tenuousness of the distinction between con men and creative minds. Finally, Carwin identifies himself as an artist figure when he claims that his deeds "self-expelled" him "from a scene which the munificence of nature had adorned with unrivalled beauties, and from haunts in which all the muses and humanities had taken refuge" (241).[35]

Such passages add a decisively self-reflexive dimension to Brown's novel in that they explore deception and delusion as not merely aberrations of the creative imagination but also as sources of artistic production. While Brown does not celebrate this convergence of art and artifice, these reflections add an important counterpoint to his repeated assertions that his novel is supported by "historical evidence" and based on an "authentic case" (3–4)—assertions that are further buttressed by explanatory footnotes that quote scientific accounts of spontaneous combustion, mania mutabilis, and ventriloquism to affirm the veracity of the story told (21, 204, 226). While these acts of self-authentication may at least partly be explained as anxious responses to contemporaneous attacks on the deceptiveness of novels, Brown's exploration of the entwinement of deception, delusion, and art does not simply reiterate prevalent antifiction discourse but explores the twin possibilities of deceptive creativity and creative deception without granting either full approbation. In this reading, *Wieland* emerges as a text that both explores deceit and delusion as crucial subjects for early American novels and identifies deception as the modus operandi of fiction. In doing the latter, Brown gestures forward to a modern notion of art that embraces aesthetic semblance and is no longer content with imitating the divine order. In doing the former, he self-reflexively negotiates *within* his fictional world precisely those charges that were made against fictions from *without* in response to novels' gradual autonomization. From this vantage point, deception and delusion emerge as particularly prominent markers of a "first epoch of modern literature" that is characterized by "the self-observation and self-reflection of literature in the process of its differentiation into one of society's subsystems" (Plumpe 60; my translation). Gerhard Plumpe joins other systems theorists such as Sigfried J. Schmidt and Niels Werber in locating that process in the late eighteenth century, an era in which literature was "preoccupied with the question of what it means to be 'autonomous'" (61; my translation). Yet as far as asserting literary autonomy is concerned, Brown stops short of joining some of the more audacious writers discussed in the following chapter. As we will see, it is only a handful of writers who dare to proclaim the artists' right to deceive in the face of the era's exceptionally powerful opposition to fiction.

3 *The Right to Deception*

WHILE IT makes obvious sense to read early American novelists' probing of the treacherousness of the imagination, their assertions of their narratives' truthfulness, their repeated warnings of the dangers of novel reading, and their overt didacticism as responses to the antifiction movement, they equally clearly do not signal unconditional acceptance of the movement's norms and values. Of course, strictures against imaginative literature are no invention of the eighteenth century. For Plato, imitative poetry is an especially pernicious art form in that it sets bad examples in portrayals of vicious characters (books 2 and 3 of the *Republic*) and, more damningly still, seeks to pass off for reality what are merely imitations of appearances of ideal forms (*eidê*). Famously, Plato develops the latter point in book 10 of the *Republic*, where he castigates poetry as *mimêsis*, which he considers a deceptive "imitation of a phantasm" (598B, 823) that allows the poet to "know[ ] nothing of the reality but only the appearance" (601C, 826). *Mimêsis* is two steps removed from ideal forms, incites irrational passions that harm the soul, and must be banned from Plato's ideal community. Already in Plato, then, poetry is attacked for its false representations, its illusory qualities, and its incitement of the passions.[1]

As we saw in chapter 1, in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America, debates concerning the deceptiveness of art were most virulent in the realm of fiction. In *The Origins of American Critical Thought, 1810–1835*, William Charvat aptly characterizes the position from which these early American critics spoke: they considered themselves "the watchdog[s] of society" (7) who insisted that "fiction, like philosophy, must take cognizance of the daily realities of the life of the general run of mankind; yet it must avoid skepticism, pessimism, and immorality—that is, it must idealize the institutions and the virtues which hold society together" (138). Charvat adds that "the emphasis in criticism was upon moral effect, and literature was thought of in terms of the good it might do for the race.

Art for art's sake was in every sense a foreign idea, and the fact explains, perhaps, the neglect of Poe in the following period" (17). The antifiction movement remained, in other words, fully embedded in a premodern order that did not assign literature, religion, politics, the economy, and morality to functionally separate social systems. While it was "in the second half of the eighteenth century" that "art began to distance itself not only from science but also from morality" (Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* 271–72), Charvat's account reminds us of the fierce opposition that accompanied this process.

As Charvat, Terence Martin, Paul C. Gutjahr, and Cathy N. Davidson (*Revolution*) have pointed out, the objections to fiction rest on three major intellectual and ideological foundations. In Gutjahr's concise summary,

> Religious and nonreligious writers of tracts against the novel most often grounded their arguments in two lines of deeply intertwined reasoning. Preeminent among these was a Scottish Common Sense philosophical notion of the importance of basing one's life on the truth. As one critic preached in 1807, novels removed one from the truth through their tendency to "give false notions of things, to pervert the consequences of human actions, and to misrepresent the ways of divine providence." Virtuous action, and thus the ability to lead a worthwhile life, depended on embracing what was true and avoiding even the slightest hint of dissimulation or falseness. A second line of reasoning argued that novels with their romantic and adventurous tales inflamed the imagination, and thus the passions. Awakening uncontrollable animal instincts once again worked at cross purposes with ideals of virtue, which were heavily dependent on notions of hard work, discipline, and perseverance.
>
> Finally, Protestants added a third line of reasoning to these antinovel polemics. They protested that novels were dangerous because they took time away from more worthy activities, principal among these being Bible reading and other devotional practices. Further, they feared that novels, even more dangerously, might so influence American reading tastes that the Bible would come to seem nothing more than "a wearisome book." ("No Longer" 211)

The antifiction movement was fed by several sources and attacked novels for a variety of reasons: they inflame the passions of their mostly female readers and give them morally corrupt ideas; they distort reality out of all proportion, thus giving readers wrong ideas about real life; they instill in readers a yearning for a life better than their own and thus undermine social hierarchies; they enfeeble readers' mental faculties; they serve no moral purpose and, worse, take time away from more serious pursuits such as Bible reading or contributing to the family income; they foster an individualism

that is at odds with republican ideals of community; they do not tell the truth.

The last charge weighed heaviest: that novels are inventions and lies. This charge was largely based on the common sense philosophy of Scottish thinkers such as Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart, Thomas Brown, and James Beattie, who extolled truthfulness as a principal virtue, as well as early Scottish aestheticians such as Lord Kames, Hugh Blair, and Archibald Alison, who maintained that "literature is primarily social, and that the artist must adjust his work to the desires of established society" (Charvat 58). Both the Scottish philosophers and aestheticians were widely read in the early republic's educated circles—Perry Miller even goes as far as pronouncing Scottish common sense philosophy "the official metaphysics of America" (ix) in the first half of the nineteenth century. At Harvard, "Scottish philosophy predominated throughout the first half of the nineteenth century," but "it was Princeton that harbored the greatest interpreters of Scotch realism, and that sent forth apostles to teach the doctrine in the periodical criticism of Philadelphia" (Charvat 34, 35). What was most at stake for American critics of the novel was the truth value of fictional narratives since, by inventing imaginary worlds, fictions threatened to give readers false ideas about life as it really is. In a chapter entitled "American Fiction and the Metaphysics of Actuality," Terence Martin cogently summarizes the Scottish common sense take on novels:

> Reality . . . divides into the actual and the possible, and these two modes of being partake of their existence in distinctly different ways, for in the final analysis one is true and the other false. Life, the totality of one's experience, is actual, is true, and it is the truth of actual experience that enables one to learn from it. A novel, a collection of invented incidents, is possible (artificial), is false, and it is the falseness of possible experience that vitiates any attempt to learn from it. The distinction is imperative: to neglect to make it would be to allow false reality to subvert true reality. (70)

This conviction, that the possible worlds novelists create are false and can therefore impart nothing but falsehoods, runs like a red thread through the many condemnations of fiction published in American magazines from about 1780 to 1820.[2] It is at the heart of an article published in the *Lady's Monitor* in 1801 that contrasts novels with "whatever can awaken attention to obvious and important truths" (199); it constitutes one of the main concerns of James Watters, the editor of the *Weekly Magazine,* when he complains that young women reading novels "are given false ideas of

life" as they "read of characters which never existed, and never can exist" (184–85); and it energizes Samuel F. Jarvis's charge, in an 1806 oration before Yale's Phi Beta Kappa society, that writers "are continually liable to give false notions of things, to pervert the consequences of human actions, and to misrepresent the ways of divine providence" (234).

A certain Alphonzo's vignette in the *American Magazine* of April 21, 1787, offers a particularly instructive case. Alphonzo tells the story of an impressionable young girl named Maria, who, having read "a thousand novels" by the age of ten, stole abroad to pursue the kinds of adventures the novels' heroines lived through. Five years later, Maria is cured of her wild fancy: "Maria's head was once turned with novels—she has now lost her relish for them. Instead of *fiction,* she wished to find *truth* and to conform to it. She wishes for instruction—young, unsuspecting, susceptible, she begs her friends to point out her faults, and she listens to advice with a lively expression of pleasure that marks the goodness of her heart" (986). Even if he does so in thoroughly fictional terms, Alphonzo joins fellow antifictionists in decrying not only the falseness of fiction but also the false ideas it imparts to innocent girls. His moral tale raises a number of crucial issues concerning the status of fiction in late eighteenth-century America: its educational value, its power to incense the imagination of young female readers, and its dubious truth value.

Defense Strategies

To say that novels do not tell the truth indicts all novels, irrespective of the story they tell or their authors' real or professed intentions. Caught as they were between a premodern and a modern understanding of the nature and function of art, early American novelists did not have at their disposal a line of defense that later artists could take for granted: that fiction invents worlds of its own that cannot be judged according to whether they truthfully represent empirical reality or impart moral truths to the novels' readers. Early American writers of fiction were unable to speak for what aestheticians from Schiller to Iser and beyond have considered one of the chief strengths of fiction: its power to invent worlds different from our own that enable readers to reflect on the lives they really lead. Instead, they regularly insisted on the truthfulness and facticity of their tales. This can already be glimpsed in the titles of many an early American novel: examples include William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy: or, The Triumph of Nature. Founded in Truth;* Gilbert I. Imlay's *The Emigrants, or the*

History of An Expatriated Family, Being a Delineation of English Manners, Drawn from Real Characters (1793); the anonymously published *The Hapless Orphan; or, Innocent Victim of Revenge. A Novel, Founded on Incidents in Real Life* (1793); Webster Foster's *The Coquette; or, The History of Eliza Wharton. A Novel: Founded on Fact;* Sukey Vickery's *Emily Hamilton, a Novel. Founded on Incidents in Real Life* (1803); and Isaac K. Mitchell's *The Asylum; or, Alonzo and Melissa. An American Tale, Founded on Fact* (1811). By G. Harrison Orians's count, "fully fifteen of the first hundred American novels italicized on their title pages a declaration of their foundation on truth" (204).

Writers' protestations of truthfulness and factual accuracy were by no means confined to the titles of their works but figure prominently in prefaces and are in many cases also scattered throughout the narratives themselves. I have already mentioned Charles Brockden Brown's prefaces and his explanatory footnotes in *Wieland,* which serve to buttress further the claims for veracity made in the advertisement of the novel, where we read that "the power which the principal person [Carwin] is said to possess can scarcely be denied to be real," given that "no fact, equally uncommon, is supported by the same strength of historical evidence" (3). As far as Theodore Wieland's homicidal madness is concerned, Brown argues in the same vein, reminding his readers that most of them "will probably recollect an authentic case, remarkably similar to that of Wieland" (4).[3] Brown's prefaces, advertisements, and footnotes employ two different strategies to achieve the identical effect: both seek to authenticate the fictional narrative, the first by drawing on historical evidence, the second by citing scientific authorities. Brown's narrator Clara, whose intense psychological distress affects her reliability as a storyteller, also authenticates the tale. Paradoxically, her repeated assertions that the events she narrates had a devastating psychological impact on her lend an *experiential* credence to the tale she tells even as they fuel the reader's suspicions about her ability to tell that tale accurately. Thus, when Clara tells her narratee that "you are a stranger to the depth of my distresses" (5) or asserts that "my blood is congealed: and my fingers are palsied when I call up his image" (56), she authenticates her narrative in much the same way that authors of life writings about traumatic experiences validate their stories of pain: by asserting the continued existence of a violent past in the present.[4] In another passage, Clara affirms the truthfulness of her account in what amounts to the literary equivalent of a preemptive strike: "If my testimony were without corroborations, you would reject it as incredible" (6).

Royall Tyler opens his *Algerine Captive* with an epigraph drawn from Shakespeare's *Othello* that already proclaims the veracity of the text that follows: "By your patience, / I will a round unvarnished tale deliver / Of my whole course" (1). In Shakespeare's play, Othello's promise to tell an "unvarnished tale" is designed to appease Desdemona's father Brabantio, who is furious about his daughter's elopement with the "moor." In the context of early American literary production, "unvarnished" refers as much to the absence of rhetorical flourishes—which Tyler's protagonist Underhill, a staunch defender of plain language doctrines, advocates in several parts of the book (45, 57, 70, 76)—as to a lack of overt fictionality (of which *The Algerine Captive* is, of course, anything but an example). Tyler's preface continues in this vein, asserting (again, falsely) that the book tells "the history" of the author's "own life" (6), a point Tyler reinforces in the final paragraph of the preface, where he recounts the story of a female reader who read *Plutarch's Lives* thinking it was a novel and angrily threw it aside when she learned that it is "founded on FACT" (7). Tyler suggests that his book is precisely not geared at this type of reader since it is a true captivity narrative—a text that "let[s]," as the verse epigraph to chapter XV suggests, "the faithful pen unerring point / The polar truth" (154). What we read, the narrator insists, is not a novel but "memoirs" (225). Now while the very prolixity of both Tyler's and his narrator's assertions concerning the veracity of the story told can be read as irony markers (about which more below), Tyler's decision to publish the text anonymously did invite readings of it as an authentic captivity narrative.

In *Female Quixotism,* Tabitha Gilman Tenney modifies the topos of the found manuscript to advertise her narrative as the elicited story of "the life of Miss Dorcas Sheldon," which "The COMPILER" (3) presents to the reading public. Here too, the author conceals the fact that her book is a work of fiction, suggesting instead that it belongs to what a repentant Dorcasina calls "books of real instruction and utility" once she has realized how detrimental her indulgence in "the extravagant garb of fiction" (324) was to her education. More pervasively than most other fictions of the period, *Female Quixotism* also bears witness to a further, deeply ambivalent defense strategy on the part of early American novelists. Writers like William Hill Brown and Tenney responded to the antifiction movement by incorporating its diatribes against novels into their prefaces, narrators' judgments, and plots. Even in Charles Brockden Brown's gothic novels, which are far less overtly didactic and moralistic than most sentimental novels, we find passages that pay this kind of tribute to the detractors of fiction. In *Arthur Mervyn,* for

instance, among the first objects the eponymous protagonist encounters as he enters Mrs. Villars's brothel are "volumes of novels and plays, some on their edges, some on their backs, gaping open by the scorching of their covers; rent; blurred; stained; blotted; dog-eared" (315). Clearly, these books look read. What Brown stresses here is less that prostitutes treat novels and plays carelessly; he stresses that they read them.

Yet Tenney goes still further to write a strangely paradoxical novel that passes itself off as an antifiction tract in the guise of fiction (whose fictionality is, however, denied in the attempt to resolve the obvious contradiction that haunts any such project). *Female Quixotism* is clearly the most extreme example in this category. Raised by a father who makes the mistake of indulging her appetite for novels, its protagonist Dorcas Sheldon decides to give herself a new name that better reflects her romantic inclinations. In the course of the novel, "Dorcasina" falls prey to a whole series of seducers who have taught themselves to speak like the heroes of the novels she reads. Pining for true romantic love, she suffers disappointment after disappointment at the hands of seducers who are enthralled not by her looks but by her considerable wealth. As the novel ends, Dorcasina is a disillusioned old maid who has given up all hope of finding a husband and decides to channel her passion into charitable work. The book concludes with a letter Dorcasina addresses to Mrs. Harriot Barry, née Stanly, "the only intimate female acquaintance she had left in the world" (319). In it, Dorcasina outlines the lessons she has learned and gives advice to her friend, who is recovering from a fever that she developed after losing her son only three weeks after he was born:

> My fate is singular; and I sincerely wish it may serve as a beacon to assist others, of similar dispositions, to avoid the rock on which I have been wrecked.
>
> My dear father—But I will cast no reflections on his memory. Attached to novels himself, as a source of amusement, from which he had received no injury, he did not foresee or suspect the mischiefs they might produce, in a young girl like me, ignorant of the world, and of a turn of mind naturally romantic. I was therefore left to gratify my taste for this kind of reading, without restraint; and this imprudent indulgence has been the cause of my ruin. . . . And now, my dear Mrs. Barry, if you should ever be blessed with daughters, let me urge you, by all the regard you must feel for their best interest and happiness, to copy in their education, the plan pursued by your excellent mother. Withhold from their eye the pernicious volumes, which, while they convey false ideas of life, and inspire illusory expectations, will tend to keep them ignorant of every thing really worth knowing; and which, if they do not eventually render them

> miserable, may at least prevent their becoming respectable. Suffer not their imaginations to be filled with ideas of happiness, particularly in the connubial state, which can never be realized. (323, 325)

In condensed form, this letter broaches a host of issues at the heart of early American novels: the didactic purpose of literature, the dangers of novel reading, Christian faith as a major force for good, the need for sound female education, charitable work as a suitable occupation for women, the perils of female celibacy, the hardships of married life, infant mortality, and the importance of female friendship in general and the mother-daughter bond in particular. As feminist critics such as Blythe Forcey and Davidson have pointed out, these issues are not merely staples of the sentimental novel; they are matters that deeply affected the daily lives of its contemporary female readers: "Many of the novels of the time are not the frothy fictions that we commonly take them to be but evince, instead, a solid social realism that also constitutes a critique (even if sometimes covert) of the patriarchal structure of that society" (Davidson, *Revolution* 200).

Both Forcey and Davidson acknowledge early sentimental novels' social critique as well as their educational function for women, whom novels allow vicariously to test the range of subject positions and partnership options available in and beyond the age of coverture. In systems-theoretic terms, novels can perform that function by virtue of their "production of world contingency" (Luhmann, "Das Kunstwerk" 624; my translation). But only Forcey tries to square the novels' protofeminist slant with their didacticism (Forcey's example is Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*): "Without the protective boundaries established by a controlling narrative presence, . . . Charlotte's simple, quiet voice could easily have been misread or ignored. Most readers would have found the persuasive, self-justifying speeches of her seducers just as compelling. Charlotte would have been unfairly represented and her story misconstrued" (230). I find this attempt to reconcile cultural critique and didacticism tempting but ultimately unconvincing. Not only does it underestimate late eighteenth-century female readers' ability to comprehend the "moral" of stories whose narrative and moral logics are anything but difficult to follow even without a narrator's guidance; in the attempt to claim sentimental novels as feminist fictions, Forcey also downplays the patriarchal assumptions that underlie the well-meant advice of Rowson's narrator. Moreover, Forcey is in danger of treating a fictional character (Charlotte Temple) like a real-life human being who somehow needs to be protected by a motherly figure (who is, of course, just as much a

product of Rowson's imagination and artistic choices as Charlotte). Finally, Forcey seems to ignore that narrators' voices in sentimental novels are by no means uncontested sources of truth.

Tenney's narrator's response to Dorcasina's letter shows the latter point particularly clearly. In introducing the letter, she comments on Dorcasina's continuous addiction to fiction: "Notwithstanding the evils she has suffered from her attachment to novels, she cannot yet dispense with them" (323). Dorcasina herself, who continues to read novels "with the same relish, the same enthusiasm as ever," suggests that this poses no problems since she has learned to approach them with a different, less dangerous set of expectations: "Instead of expecting to realize scenes and situations so charmingly pourtrayed, I only regret that such unalloyed felicity is, in this life, unattainable" (325). Who are we, as readers of *Female Quixotism,* expected to give credence to: the narrator, who mildly reprimands the protagonist for her inability to foreswear novel reading, or Dorcasina, who asserts that she has learned to channel the reading of fiction into safer forms of knowledge acquisition? On the one hand, the narrator seems to strike the right cord. At the end of a novel that persistently qualifies novels as "false," "infamous," "pernicious," "poisonous," and "fateful" (11, 50, 77, 144), and which characterizes their most avid reader as "gone with the novel-mania" and "deranged" (57, 277), we can hardly expect a last-minute acquittal of an unregenerate addict. On the other hand, Dorcasina's assertion that she no longer falls for the illusions of romantic fictions rings true given that she is described as an old woman of "withered form, sallow complexion, and toothless mouth" (290) as the novel ends. Her signing of the letter as "Dorcas Sheldon" (326) further suggests that she has come to her senses. One could attempt to resolve the contradiction between the narrator's and Dorcasina's assessments by concluding that novel reading is dangerous only for some, such as young impressionable women. However, the narrator's "yet" does give expression to the hope that this old maid may still outgrow her novel-mania. The gap between the narrator's and the character's judgment remains, and rather than trying to close it, we should read it as evidence of the irresolvable contradictions that haunt any attempt to write antifiction fictions.

To a lesser extent, writers' recourses to their third major defense strategy, didacticism, also exhibit some of the strains introduced into early American novels by their authors' attempts to accommodate the concerns of their fiercest critics. Particularly for women writers, didacticism is more than a defensive move: partly in line with their Wollstonecraftian conviction that women deserve a sound education, most women novelists of the era seem

genuinely interested in educating their readership. Thus, when Vickery promises "moral instruction of the youthful mind" (4) in her introduction to *Emily Hamilton;* when, in her preface to *Charlotte Temple,* Rowson expresses her hope that her novel will "be of service to some who are so unfortunate as to have neither friends to advise, or understanding to direct them" (5); when Rowson tells a story that extols the virtues of charity and has her heroine found "a little seminary for the education of female children" (88) in *Lucy Temple: Charlotte's Daughter* (1828), her posthumously published sequel to *Charlotte Temple,* we have no reason to doubt the authors' sincerity. Yet for twenty-first-century readers of early American novels, it is hard to shake off the feeling that some of their prefaces protest too much. Perhaps, Vickery's and Rowson's contemporaneous readers felt this too and responded to prefatory admonitions in the same way that they did to the equally didactic unhappy endings. As Davidson speculates, "If the reader is forewarned by a dedication (*The Power of Sympathy* promises to 'expose the fatal consequences of seduction') and knows the unhappy ending in advance, then that ending is pro forma—so expected—that one can ignore it, simply enjoying the unfolding plot, which is, after all, about a woman indulging her desires. . . . The preface and the last three or four pages of the novel provided enough moral improvement that the reader could enjoy the intervening two hundred pages guiltlessly" (*Revolution* 37). Davidson makes a valid point here that also helps explain why Rowson's novels were bestsellers while Vickery's was not. With its steadfast protagonist, who never succumbs to temptation, *Emily Hamilton* provides little of the excitement and titillation that both *Charlotte Temple* and *Lucy Temple* do. However, given that many novels of the era feature either highly overt moralistic narrators (*Charlotte Temple* is the most striking example here) or, especially in epistolary novels, characters that seem to function as their authors' mouthpieces (Mr. Holmes in *The Power of Sympathy,* perhaps Lucy Sumner in *The Coquette*) to reinforce the novels' moral lessons, I am not so sure that guiltless enjoyment was easily attainable. Rather than dismissing these novels' didacticism as a facile gesture designed to appease the antifictionists, we should acknowledge that these texts are crisscrossed by competing impulses because their authors seek to serve too many masters: their readers' appetite for good storytelling as well as advice; their detractors' calls for socially useful literature; and their own desire to write good books that sell.

To sum up, then, three major strategies are at the disposal of early American writers trying to counter charges of deception, uselessness, and immorality laid at their door by eighteenth-century detractors of the novel: truth

claims, antifiction stances, and didacticism. It is the second of these strategies that most manifestly pushes early American writers' defense mechanisms to their limits. An antifiction novel is a performative contradiction that didacticism cannot contain and truth claims cannot resolve. And indeed, already the first American novel registers the cracks that open up in the attempt to incorporate antifiction stances in works of fiction. The epigraph of William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* prepares the reader for a novel that is designed to "win the Mind to Sentiment and Truth" (27), and the text that follows reinforces that point. In letter 22, Harriot, the novel's unfortunate heroine, further elaborates on the avowed purpose of novel writing when she declares that "it is the duty of the moralist, then, to deduce his observations from preceeding [*sic*] facts in such a manner as may directly improve the mind and promote the economy of human life" (66). In letter 61, the eminently respectable (and aptly named) Worthy repeats this assessment as he advises his friend Harrington, "If you are disposed to argue, do not put foolish cases that never existed; take the lights of facts and reason from them" (122). In these passages, the moral and didactic purposes of speaking and writing are firmly grounded in facticity and truthfulness. When the moralistic Mrs. Holmes advises Myra to "habituate your mind to remark the difference between truth and fiction" (77), this point is further reinforced. Like other writers, Brown makes use of a lengthy footnote that affirms the foundation of the tale on an authentic case—that of Elizabeth Whitman, whose moral and social decline was reportedly precipitated by an excessive indulgence in fiction (46–49). Yet Brown's reference to real-life incidents has a paradoxical effect in that it both serves to strengthen the novel's claims to truthfulness, thus enacting a common defense strategy used by writers faced with the suspicion that their fictions are lies, and confirms the antifictionists' worst fears concerning the corruptive effects of novel reading. Thus, already the first American novel is caught up in the contradictions that ensue when novelists try not only to cater to novel-readers' expectations but also to incorporate cultural arbiters' condemnations of fiction into their own fictions. Such premodern/modern tensions and contradictions pervade early American novels to such an extent that I do not agree with Oliver Scheiding's assessment that, in their self-reflexivity, these texts "aim at highlighting the meaninglessness of [utilitarian] functional constraints for literature" (23). In these categorical terms, this seems true only for the picaresque fictions I discuss further below, which come closest to an outright rejection of premodern expectations concerning the social functions of literature.

America's first novelists only gradually emerged from the cloud of suspicion concerning the moral integrity of their work. In 1788, Isaiah Thomas announced his *Massachusetts Magazine* in words that anticipate novelists' defense strategies: "Poets, favoured with the gift divine, can furnish us from the Parnassian mount with those beauties of sentiment which have a tendency to improve the mind and mend the heart. . . . From the gardens of Literary Amusement we would strive to cull the choicest flowers, but would carefully avoid the thorns" (10–11). Fifteen years later, Harvard University still chose "Novel Reading, a Cause of Female Depravity" as the topic of its commencement address (Davidson, "Life and Times" 177). It was not until the early 1820s that significant changes in the public estimation of novels were registered. By 1824, the author of an *American Monthly Magazine* piece entitled "On the Causes of the Present Popularity of Novel Writing" is able to assign the antifiction movement to the recent past: "To us it appears as if it were but yesterday, that the grave, the serious, the religious, and the prudent, consigned novel reading as an employment utterly beneath the dignity of the human mind; nay, in some austere corners of the world, such may be to this day the opinion" (1). Before the third decade of the nineteenth century, however, novelists were faced with a decidedly hostile climate that made them resort to complex and often contradictory responses.

The complexity of these responses is perhaps most apparent in the sentimental novel, that most ostensibly didactic subgenre of the early American novel, whose valorization of female experience and stern moralistic tone are difficult to reconcile. Bringing early American sentimental writers into a dialogue with contemporaneous European aestheticians helps us understand the extent to which these writers' anxieties concerning the power of their work to either educate or lead astray and deceive its readers are more than defensive (or disingenuous) responses to those who disdained literature for its lack of moral or religious rectitude. These anxieties are real in the sense that they bear witness to more broadly based concerns about the reliability of sensory perception. Just as our senses can always deceive us, art—which contains and mediates sensuous perception—can trick us. Writers' suspicions that deception may not only be a relevant subject matter for their work but its very modus operandi—a suspicion that Brown's gothic novels register, as we have seen, in ambivalent ways—becomes especially noticeable in the case of sentimental fiction, whose power to move its readers revolves centrally around *aisthēsis,* or sensation, here understood in the sense of inner sense or feeling.

As revisionist scholarship by Jane Tompkins, Joanne Dobson, Shirley Samuels (*Culture of Sentiment*), Elizabeth Maddock Dillon ("Sentimental Aesthetics"), and others has argued, sentimentalism's emotional appeals have a political valence. Far from merely pandering to their readers' affective needs, sentimental writers highlight the tearful anguish of innocent characters for the purpose of cultural critique. By establishing strong emotional bonds between readers and characters that suffer at the hands of the dominant culture, they elicit our sympathy for socially marginalized groups and our moral outrage at their plight: that of unmarried women in Foster's *The Coquette;* that of displaced Native Americans in Lydia Huntley Sigourney's poem "The Cherokee Mother" (1831); and that of African American slaves in the case of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). In Tompkins's influential phrase, these texts are important because they perform "cultural work," that is, because they are engaged in "providing society with a means of thinking about itself, defining certain aspects of a social reality which the authors and their readers shared, dramatizing its conflicts, and recommending solutions" (200). Yet there is a major problem inherent in the affective economy of sentimentalism. For all of sentimentalism's claims to authenticity and truthfulness, the success of its emotional appeals does not depend on the veracity of the feelings that trigger processes of sympathetic identification. This problem—the problem that faked emotional distress can call forth heartfelt sympathy—haunts sentimentalism.

Rowson's *Charlotte Temple,* a veritable bestseller in its time, is full of emotionally charged scenes that are designed to enlist the reader's sympathy with the eponymous young woman's fate. At the age of fifteen, innocent Charlotte is seduced by the British officer Montraville, who musters all his powers of persuasion to make her elope with him to America. On their journey across the Atlantic, the lovers are accompanied by Montraville's evil sidekick Belcour and Charlotte's treacherous schoolmistress Mademoiselle La Rue—*nomen est omen.* All three major villains of the novel bear French names and, as if that did not constitute enough of a warning signal in postcolonial America, the male ones are British officers.[5] Once they have arrived in New York, Montraville soon forgets his promise of marriage and displaces his affection onto a more fashionable and wealthier woman. When Belcour maneuvers Charlotte into a compromising situation, Montraville dissolves all ties with her. Pregnant with Montraville's child, deserted by her false friend La Rue, and cut off from familial support by Belcour, who intercepts her letters to her mother, Charlotte is reduced to a life of ignominy, poverty,

and ill health. Not even her neighbor Mrs. Beauchamp's benevolence and charity can halt her demise. When her father finally crosses the Atlantic to locate her whereabouts, he finds an emaciated figure, half mad with grief, who has just given birth to her daughter Lucy. Charlotte sinks into his arms, begs him to protect her illegitimate child, and expires. The final two chapters dish out poetic justice. A repentant Montraville kills Belcour and is himself plagued by "severe fits of melancholy" (118) for the rest of his life. La Rue dies "overtaken by poverty and sickness" (119).

Reading *Charlotte Temple,* we encounter weeping characters—both men and women—on almost every single page. At times they weep over their own misfortune, but most often they weep for the plight of others. It is these latter emotional outbursts that are valorized most consistently by Rowson's motherly narrator. Tears shed on behalf of others dignify and even sanctify the one who grieves, be it Mr. Temple's "friendly gush of tears" (52) when he learns of Charlotte's elopement, Mrs. Beauchamp's "pellucid drop of humanity" (75), which she sheds over the heroine's sad song, or the "tear of pity and pardon" (82) Charlotte asks her parents to let fall to her memory. As the narrator puts it, "For ever honoured be the sacred drop of humanity; the angel of mercy shall record its source, and the soul from whence it sprang shall be immortal" (67). In *Charlotte Temple,* the strongest emotional bonds between characters are based on feelings of sadness, grief, and mourning. In this, Rowson's novel participates in what Joanne Dobson calls sentimentalism's "emotional and philosophical ethos," which "celebrates human connection, both personal and communal, and acknowledges the shared devastation of affectional loss" (266).

Rowson not only knits those affective bonds between her characters but through her narrator explicitly and consistently invites her readers to establish such bonds with Charlotte. The narrator does not merely assert that she "mean[s] to write" her tale "to the heart" (99) but specifies what kind of emotional reaction on the reader's part she deems appropriate: "a tear of compassion shall fall for the fate of Charlotte," she writes, and adds that "for Charlotte, the soul melts with sympathy" (99). Rowson, then, sanctions the expression of strong emotions both inside and outside of her fictional universe and provides the reader with what I call affective guidance. Through her narrator, she invites us to join a community united in its sympathy with Charlotte's plight, a community that distinguishes itself from "a very unfeeling world" (68) that does not forgive Charlotte her misstep. Our emotional involvement ennobles us as much as it does Rowson's characters, chief among them Charlotte's parents and Mrs. Beauchamp.

For revisionist feminist critics, sentimentalism's emotional appeals are directly linked to its claims to educate its readers. Thus, Davidson suggests that sentimental novels allow young female readers to encounter in the world of fiction issues concerning matrimony and sexuality that were lined with pitfalls for them. In doing this, they both stage a critique of patriarchal society and educate young women. Having reminded us that eighteenth-century laws of coverture defined a married woman's legal rights as "covered" by those of her husband and effectively barred her from making a will, inheriting property, and signing legal documents, Davidson writes:

> Addressed to young female readers, the first novels performed vital functions and did so more than parallel vehicles such as sermons or advice books. . . . By reading about a female character's good or bad decisions in sexual and marital matters, the early American woman could vicariously enact her own life as largely the consequence of her own choices and not merely as the product of the power of others in her life. . . . Thematicizing, then, the necessity of informed choice, these fictions championed the cause of female education that they typically proclaimed in their prefaces. (*Revolution* 200)

For Davidson, literary didacticism is neither an artistic flaw nor primarily an anxious response to the detractors of fiction. Rather, she takes seriously sentimental writers' claims to educate their readers. From this perspective, the sentimental novel's constant appeals to the reader's emotions are crucial not only to the cultural critique it performs but also to its educational function, since the processes of identification those emotional appeals trigger enable the vicarious enactment Davidson speaks of in the first place.

Yet Rowson's novel does not affirm emotional expressiveness unequivocally. Its affective economy registers a major problem. It is in line with early American novels' near-obsessive concerns about the ever-present possibility of deception and delusion that *Charlotte Temple* repeatedly warns its readers that feelings may be dissimulated. La Rue, the treacherous schoolmistress who convinces Charlotte to elope with Montraville, is the master dissimulator. Her displays of emotion are repeatedly qualified as false and staged. When, returning with La Rue from a garden party that deeply offended Charlotte's sense of propriety, Charlotte suggests that the school's headmistress would have strongly disapproved of their presence at the party, La Rue paints the consequences of letting the headmistress know in the darkest colors:

> "Nay, Miss," said La Rue, "perhaps your mighty sense of propriety may lead you to tell her yourself: and in order to avoid the censure you would incur, should she hear of it by accident, throw the blame on me; but I confess I deserve it; it

> will be a very kind return for that partiality which led me to prefer you before any of the rest of the ladies; but perhaps it will give you pleasure," continued she, letting fall some hypocritical tears, "to see me deprived of bread, and for an action which by the most rigid could only be esteemed an inadvertency, lose my place and character, and be driven again into the world, where I have already suffered all the evils attendant on poverty." (30)

While La Rue's fears concerning her position at the school may be entirely justified and sincere, her tears are qualified as "hypocritical" and thus fake. La Rue plays upon Charlotte's feelings and instrumentalizes the power of sympathy to further her own illicit ends. Such stratagems are a recurrent feature in early American novels: in *Female Quixotism,* the seducer O'Connor "weep[s] and sigh[s] most bitterly" before Dorcasina's servant, but his eyes are "dried as soon as she disappear[s]" (41); in *Arthur Mervyn,* Welbeck plays upon Arthur's feelings, and Arthur possibly plays upon Dr. Stevens's; and in *The Coquette,* the rakish Major Sanford throws himself at Eliza Wharton's feet to gush forth "a flood of tears" (92) that is designed to divert his victim's affections away from the honorable (but boring) Reverend Boyer. In *Charlotte Temple,* La Rue is successful because "this was touching Charlotte in the most vulnerable part" (30)—her heart. Such scenes raise a crucial problem for novels whose whole affective economy *and* educational function are based on the possibility of sympathetic identification. If dissimulated feelings can provoke real emotional responses within fictional space, what guarantee is there that sentimental readers are not subjected to the same manipulation of their feelings? Sentimental novels repeatedly prove wrong one character's assertion in *The Power of Sympathy* that "in the feelings of the heart there can be no dissimulation" (72). This is remarkable since, as Frank Kelleter has shown, sentimentalism's adulation of benevolence and sympathy is literary culture's response to the "disconcerting experience that the senses can deceive" in the sense that it gives expression to the era's "search for a common sense that is supposed to be unerringly and undeceivably at work in every human being's 'heart'" (741–42; my translation). Inadvertently, perhaps, by raising the specter of sensory deception, Rowson and other sentimental writers evoke one of the major charges detractors of sentimental literature lay at its feet: that it deals in false emotions that manipulate its readers' feelings. For early American novelists, this presented an especially formidable challenge since they also had to contend with the antifiction movement's grounding in the Scottish common sense idea that truthfulness was a central human virtue.

Aesthetic Semblance and Freedom

In the late eighteenth century, it was Rowson's older German contemporary Friedrich Schiller who most stridently sought to wrest art in general and fiction in particular away from truth claims imposed on it by its detractors. His *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* stages the era's most eloquent defense of aesthetic semblance and artistic license. With Schiller, we are decisively moving toward a modern understanding of art that does not celebrate artistic autonomy for its own sake but insists on the social and political value of aesthetic experience as our encounter with an "imaginary world" offers, in Luhmann's words, "a position from which *something else* can be determined *as reality*" (*Art as a Social System* 142). At first sight, Schiller's aesthetic theory appears very far removed from Rowson's overt truth claims and didacticism. But bringing the American writer and the European aesthetician into a dialogue helps us see that even *Charlotte Temple* gestures forward to a modern understanding of art—if ever so cautiously.

Schiller's name was known in the early republic. For instance, in his *The Universal Preceptor; Being a General Grammar of Arts, Sciences, and Useful Knowledge* (1817), David Blair writes that "GERMANY [boasts] of its Schiller, Kotzebue, Klopstock, and Wieland" (707). Yet Schiller's major aesthetic treatise was available to American readers of the era neither in translation nor in the original language (Schimmelman). Thus, in drawing on Schiller's aesthetics to discuss *Charlotte Temple,* I do not assume that Rowson was familiar with any of his writings, just as I do not assume that any of the other writers under consideration modeled their narratives on European theorizations of beauty and art. Instead, I argue that, despite surface appearances, Rowson and Schiller held in common certain assumptions concerning the functions of art that inform both late eighteenth-century American artistic production and contemporaneous European reflections on art more generally, testifying to their shared liminal position in the course of Western modernization.

In *On the Aesthetic Education of Man,* Schiller forcefully asserts the artist's right to invent worlds that sever all ties with empirical reality. Schiller meets charges of deception head on by distinguishing between two types of semblance:

> It goes without saying that the only kind of semblance I am here concerned with is aesthetic semblance (which we distinguish from actuality and truth) and not logical semblance (which we confuse with these): semblance, therefore, which we love just because of its semblance, and not because we take it

> to be something better. Only the first is play, whereas the latter is mere deception. To attach value to semblance of the first kind can never be prejudicial to truth, because one is never in danger of substituting it for truth, which is after all the only way in which truth can ever be impaired. To despise it, is to despise the fine arts altogether, the very essence of which is semblance. . . . Only inasmuch as it is *honest* (expressly renounces all claims to reality), and only inasmuch as it is *autonomous* (dispenses with all support from reality), is semblance aesthetic. From the moment it is dishonest, and simulates reality, or from the moment it is impure, and has need of reality to make its effect, it is nothing but a base instrument for material ends, and affords no evidence whatsoever of any freedom of the spirit. (193, 197)

Schiller here radicalizes a defense of fictionality that Baumgarten had already staged six decades earlier. At the closing of the century, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* represents the apex of a broader eighteenth-century development during which "the theory of literature adjusted to a (positively valued) fictionality" (Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* 146). Schiller boldly reverses the hierarchy between fiction and reality, exploiting the difference between them "in order to attribute to reality the hardships one actually experienced" and invoking that difference "to stimulate critique, if not reform" (274).

Baumgarten's more moderate and more cautious theory of fictionality, which he introduced in his *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* and further developed in *Aesthetica,* revolves around the notion of "heterocosmic fictions." In §51 of his *Meditationes,* Baumgarten distinguishes between two types of fictional worlds: "true fictions" (*figmenta vera*) are possible in the real world; "fictions" (*figmenta*) are impossible in it in the sense that they involve contradictions or lack sufficient reason for their existence.[6] As far as the *objects* of either type of fictional world are concerned, Baumgarten adds an additional differentiation in §52: they can be utopian (*utopica*) or heterocosmic (*heterocosmica*). While the former are impossible "in all possible worlds," the latter are impossible only "in the real world." In §53, he concludes, "Only true and heterocosmic fictions [*figmenta vera & heterocosmica*] are poetic" (§§51–53, 55). Thus, for Baumgarten, only those fictions that (a) are for the greatest part possible in the real world and (b) contain objects that are impossible in the real world but possible in possible worlds, are poetic fictions. Such artifacts, which bring together the known and the unknown (§48, 55), the familiar and the unfamiliar (§59, 60), can lay claim to truth in so far as their objects agree with transcendental truth, that is, in so far as they agree with

the most general principles of being.[7] The artist, then, may swerve into *possible* fictional worlds ("alios mundos possibiles") but not into fabulous worlds that lack truth ("regiones mundi fabulosi") (*Aesthetica* §475, 1: 472). What Baumgarten ultimately demands are fictions that introduce elements unfamiliar to our everyday experience but neither incongruous with the fictional world nor so far removed from what we imagine possible that they make us question the coherence, unity (of action, place, and time), or rationality of the invented world. Such fictions possess "heterocosmic truth" (*Aesthetica* §441, 1: 418, 420; my translation) and can be enjoyed with impunity. In fact, Baumgarten explicitly sanctions poets' "magnificent lies" as well as readers' "pleasurably giving themselves up to the deceits of the poet's senses" (§868, 2: 890; §599, 1: 579; my translation).[8]

What makes Schiller's theory of fictionality more radical than Baumgarten's is the stricter distinction he makes between fictional and empirical reality. The publication of Schiller's reflections on aesthetic semblance in 1795 can rightly be called a watershed event in the history of aesthetics. Here, for the first time, we get a sustained defense of fiction for its fictionality that decisively breaks with mimetic understandings of art. While Baumgarten still advises poets to ensure that "those things that diverge from this world are as similar to and congruent with the world of the poets as the beauty of the whole that you think up allows for" (§595, 1: 575; my translation), Schiller imposes no such restrictions on the creative imagination.

Clearly, Schiller's understanding of the nature and function of art differs considerably from Rowson's. Rowson in her preface insists on the facticity and truthfulness of her tale, encourages her "fair readers to consider it as not merely the effusion of Fancy, but as a reality," and states that "the circumstances on which I have founded this novel were related to me some little time since by an old lady who had personally known Charlotte" (5). Accordingly, Rowson published her first American edition under the title *Charlotte. A Tale of Truth* and toward the end of the narrative reaffirms that she is "writing a tale of truth" (99). For Rowson, her novel can achieve its stated aim of protecting young women from Charlotte's fate best if its readers believe that what they read is based on a true story. Thus, for Rowson, the emotional impact of her tale, its educational function, and its veracity go hand in hand.

While Schiller is as concerned as Rowson to counter charges that art deceives the world in its make-believe, his answer to such charges is at first sight a very different one. Far from defending art for its truth content, he asserts the artist's right to invent new worlds. For Schiller, art can educate

its recipients to freedom precisely because it is neither subject to nor reproduces the strictures and fragmentations of the modern world. Art is there to heal the inner split that modern specialization and the division of labor have imposed on us. Thus, art functions not as an imitation of or approximation to empirical reality but as a utopian space of freedom that is opposed to the real world of alienation. It is by entering this realm of the imagination that we can achieve wholeness of being and become free: "In the midst of the fearful kingdom of forces, and in the midst of the sacred kingdom of laws, the aesthetic impulse to form is at work, unnoticed, on the building of a third joyous kingdom of play and of semblance, in which man is relieved of the shackles of circumstance, and released from all that might be called constraint, alike in the physical and in the moral sphere" (*Aesthetic Education* 215). In its celebration of the imagination, Schiller's aesthetic theory decisively moves away from an Aristotelian understanding of art as mimesis. Far from imitating the world, art opens up an alternative, utopian realm that is opposed to the alienation of empirical reality.

Writing against the background of a French Revolution that had devolved into *terreur,* Schiller considers the experience of freedom in the world of aesthetic semblance a necessary training that prepares human beings for the political freedom the Enlightenment project envisaged. As a classicist, Schiller aims at recovering, by nonrevolutionary means, a classical Greek ideal of human unity and freedom from which his contemporaries were estranged in the process of modernization. For Schiller, only a recovery of that ideal makes human beings ready for political freedom, and aesthetic experience plays the pivotal role in this forward-looking process of recovery.[9] To put it in some of the most often quoted words from *On the Aesthetic Education of Man,* "it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom" (9). Monroe C. Beardsley is certainly still correct when, in his history of aesthetics, he asserts that "no greater claim for the aesthetic education of man has ever been staked out" (230).

Contrary to Schiller, Rowson has little faith in her readers' ability *freely* to channel their aesthetic experience in socially useful ways. As Charlotte's example demonstrates, human beings are so prone to be swayed by their feelings that they need guidance in regulating their affective economy. Rowson resorts to didacticism as one of the staple techniques of sentimental writing to ensure that our sympathy attaches itself to the right characters. In La Rue's case, to give but one example, the motherly narrator reminds us that her death is "a striking example that vice, however prosperous in the beginning, in the end leads only to misery and shame" (120). Keenly aware

of the power of emotional appeals, Rowson's didacticism aims at enabling her readers to achieve a certain distance from a purely affective experience of the text, thus immunizing them against emotional manipulation and deception.

In Schiller's model of aesthetic education, any such determination of the reader's response interferes with the educational function of art. As a matter of fact, Schiller explicitly defines his notion of aesthetic education against didactic art: "Not less self-contradictory," Schiller writes, "is the notion of a fine art which teaches (didactic) or improves (moral); for nothing is more at variance with the concept of beauty than the notion of giving the psyche any definite bias" (*Aesthetic Education* 157). Schiller's strictures against didactic art resonate with Kant's assertion that art allows for the free play of the faculties (*Judgment* §9, 102–4).[10] Yet Schiller's aversion to didacticism is most firmly grounded in his anthropology, which considers human beings to be possessed of a dual nature. Two drives are at war within us: the "material" or "sensuous drive" makes us receptive to the demands of external reality and strives for ever new sensory input; the "formal drive" or "form-drive" seeks to impose order and give a shape to the world and the self. In its passivity, the sensuous drive is linked to sense, sensation, and feeling, while the formal drive is linked to reason, understanding, and the law. For Schiller, human beings are whole only if the two drives balance each other out, and he postulates a third drive, the play drive (*Spieltrieb*), that continually plays the other two drives off against one another: "Reason, on transcendental grounds, makes the following demand: Let there be a bond of union between the form-drive and the material drive; that is to say, let there be a play-drive, since only the union of reality with form, contingency with necessity, passivity with freedom, makes the concept of human nature complete" (*Aesthetic Education* 103). This play drive, Schiller adds, is activated in the presence of beauty in general and the fine arts in particular. Thus, it is in the experience of art that human beings may live the fullness of their existence: "Since in the enjoyment of beauty, or *aesthetic unity,* an actual *union* and interchange between matter and form, passivity and activity, momentarily takes place, the *compatibility* of our two natures, the practicability of the infinite being realized in the finite, hence the possibility of sublimest humanity, is thereby actually proven" (ibid. 189). Schiller subscribes to Kant's idea that human perfection is attained in human beings' free and autonomous choice to exert their will in alignment with the demands of reason. Yet Schiller seeks to temper Kant's ethical rigor by stressing that the moral law cannot be imposed on

human beings against their inclination. The morality of human behavior cannot be grounded solely in the demands of reason but must be supported by subjective dispositions. For Kant as for Schiller, human perfection is moral perfection and beauty is, in Kant's words, "the symbol of the morally good" in the sense that it allows us to become "aware of a certain ennoblement and elevation above the mere receptivity for a pleasure from sensible impressions, and also esteems the value of others in accordance with a similar maxim of their power of judgment" (*Judgment* §59, 227).[11] But Schiller adds that this human ideal can be reached only when "reason and the senses, duty and inclination, are in harmony" ("On Grace" 207). Thus, the freedom Schiller speaks of when, in his Kallias letters, he defines beauty as "freedom in appearance" (10; my translation) is the free interplay of sensuousness and reason.

To sum up, for Schiller, beautiful human beings are free and autonomous agents who exert their will in alignment with the moral law, and whose freedom and autonomy is grounded in the reconciliation of the competing demands of feeling and reason. And this reconciliation is achieved in the experience of art. In allowing for human beings' self-realization, aesthetic experience can even pave the way to freedom since by balancing out the demands of the sensuous and the formal drive, of feeling and reason, it liberates us from being determined by either.[12] Thus, it is aesthetic education that prepares individual human beings for the free society the Kantian Enlightenment promises but in its appeal to only the rational nature of human beings—an appeal that found its perverted expression in Robespierre's will to establish an "empire of reason," an "order of things where all the low and cruel passions are enchained, all the beneficent and generous passions awakened by the laws" (*Aesthetic Education* 3)—cannot realize.

Schiller and Rowson, then, seem to draw up two entirely different maps of the relationships between art, its spectators or readers, and the world. For Rowson, literature educates its readers by way of emotional appeals and moral instruction. By way of contrast, Schiller's program of aesthetic education to human autonomy and freedom functions precisely in the absence of such determinations. Yet once we take a closer look at *Charlotte Temple,* we discover that both Rowson's anthropology and her model of aesthetic education are closer to Schiller's than appears at first sight. To perceive this, we need to shift our attention away from Charlotte and toward one of Rowson's minor characters. In Rowson's fictional world, it is Mrs. Beauchamp, Charlotte's benevolent and charitable friend, who serves as

the model of ideal humanity. When we first meet her, she is introduced as the daughter of Mr. Crayton, "an officer of large unincumbered fortune and elevated rank" (57) whom La Rue seduces on the passage to America. In the novel's affective economy, Crayton is Charlotte's male counterpart: her faults are also his. "He was beloved for his humanity and benevolence by all who knew him," Rowson writes, "but he was easy and unsuspicious himself, and became a dupe to the artifice of others" (58). His daughter, Mrs. Beauchamp, however, is "endowed with all the virtues of her mother, without the weakness of the father" (58). Unlike Charlotte and her own father, Mrs. Beauchamp is able to exert some form of control over her emotional life without suppressing her sensuous nature.

While it is her compassion that sanctifies Mrs. Beauchamp in both Charlotte's and the motherly narrator's eyes, it is not her fellow feeling that distinguishes her from the other characters. It is the fact that her acts of kindness are based on conscious decisions rather than on irresistible calls from the heart. Thus, when she learns of Charlotte's distress, Mrs. Beauchamp does not immediately follow her inclination to call on her. Instead, she considers how her neighbors would judge her visit to the house of a fallen woman: "Dear sufferer," she says half to herself, half to Charlotte, "how gladly would I pour into your heart the balm of consolation, were it not for the fear of derision" (74). Only once she discloses to her husband her desire to pay her distraught neighbor a visit and receives his approbation does Mrs. Beauchamp "resolve to brave even the scoffs of the world" (74).

At first sight, we might interpret Mrs. Beauchamp's delayed response to Charlotte's signals of distress as signs of her moral timidity and lack of autonomy. Yet this is clearly not the preferred reading. After all, by writing that Mrs. Beauchamp "*resolved* to brave *even* the scoffs of the world," Rowson stresses both the formidable power of public opinion Mrs. Beauchamp's plan comes up against and that, in the end, it was *her* decision, not her husband's, to put the plan into practice. Rather than letting her mind be ruled entirely by her heart, she considers the possible consequences of her actions, gets a second opinion, and only then makes an informed decision. As her husband points out, that decision "follow[s] the impulse" of her "generous heart" (75), but the impulse is tempered by reason.

Mrs. Beauchamp's action exemplifies what Samuel Richardson called "prudence"—a careful balancing of feeling and judgment (Izubuchi 85–86). And it is precisely her interposition of a moment of rational deliberation and consultation, her ability to translate her sympathetic response to another's

plight into rationally informed decisions, that sets Mrs. Beauchamp's actions apart from Charlotte's and prevents her from plunging headfirst into emotionally devastating situations. Conversely, Charlotte's fate is sealed by her inability to achieve any kind of distance from her affective experience. Charlotte is an easy prey for Montraville, La Rue, Belcour, and their dissimulations because her sensuous nature is developed to such an extent that she remains an almost entirely passive recipient of the sensory data that keeps coming at her. As she writes in a letter to her mother, she has "a young heart glowing with sensibility" (80). Unable to distinguish between being and appearance, artifice and honesty, she believes that the force of her own emotional response to Montraville's love letters or La Rue's protestations of friendship is sufficient proof of her antagonists' sincerity. Charlotte is all feeling and little reason and as such is unable to exert rational control over her emotions. In Kelleter's words, "The heroine's problem is *communicative incompetence. . . .* Unable to perceive the workings of others' manipulations in her own desire, she consistently understands her sentiments as irrefutable imperatives, as messages from the heart. . . . Through the figure of Emily [Beauchamp], the novel suggests that sensibility is the solution rather than the cause of Charlotte's dilemma. The fallen woman's flaw is not her sensibility but her inability *to bring her emotional life into a communicative relationship with the external world*" (747, 750; my translation). In *Charlotte Temple,* then, it is Mrs. Beauchamp who approaches Schiller's ideal human being whose freedom and autonomy is guaranteed by a harmonious interplay of feeling and reason—an ideal that Judith Sargent Murray encouraged especially women to aspire to (Baker 137–56). In early American novels, we frequently encounter such figures: Achsa Fielding in Brown's *Arthur Mervyn,* whose "sympathies are enforced by reason" (433), and whose "personal defects are outweighed by her heart and her intellect" (414), is one case in point,[13] and so is Brown's Clara Wieland. Yet in my reading of *Charlotte Temple,* Mrs. Beauchamp is more than a character in a novel, she is also *the figure of the reader in the text.* Her sensuous-rational response to Charlotte's fate provides a model for a reading of Rowson's novel that has little need of didactic guidance because its aesthetic experience does not exhaust itself in sympathetic identification. Such a reading is enlightened—and thus modern—in the sense that our feeling and our reason are engaged in it in equal measure to ensure that we are not determined by either.

This returns us to the major problem *Charlotte Temple's* affective economy registers. If, as La Rue's example suggests, feelings can be dissimulated

to manipulate others' emotional responses, how can we—as readers of sentimental novels—be sure that we are not manipulated in the same way? In other words, if sentimental novels thematize, as Davidson claims, "the necessity of informed choice" in matters of matrimony and sexuality, how can sentimental writers ensure that their primary readership—young, unmarried women like Charlotte—actually *has* a choice given that it is assaulted by the novels' powerful emotional appeals and didactic intent? From the perspective of Schiller's aesthetics, literary didacticism and appeals to the reader's emotions alone are unlikely to produce an enlightened citizenry that freely aligns its actions with the moral law. Wary of the power of sympathy it wields, a text like *Charlotte Temple* for the greatest part replaces patriarchal coercion with the more subtle but no less effective maternal coercion of Rowson's narrator.

My contention is that Mrs. Beauchamp functions as an aperture for an alternative reading that manages to disengage itself, ever so cautiously, from the force of both Rowson's emotional appeals and her didactic intent. Responding to the text as Mrs. Beauchamp responds to Charlotte, readers may experience something of the autonomy and self-determination Enlightenment thinkers championed. Thus, readers of Rowson's novel are educated in ways that immunize them against emotional manipulation *without* recourse to the stock phrases of literary didacticism. Rowson's decision to name her model character Mrs. Beauchamp is therefore entirely appropriate. Its literal translation, "beautiful field," aligns her not only with the countryside as the preferred space in the republican imagination;[14] it also aligns her with the realm of beauty that the *artistic* imagination opens up. As we enter that realm, the pressures of the empirical world lose their hold over us so that we can experience the fullness of our humanity and, by extension, freedom.

In stark contrast to the antifiction agitators of his time, Schiller's reflections on the aesthetic education of humankind open up the possibility that it might be precisely repeated immersions into fictional worlds that inoculate us against deception. This does not make *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* a fully modern theory of autonomous art, though. In linking artistic and personal beauty, Schiller does pay homage to an older, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century understanding of beauty for which "it was impossible to separate artistic beauty from natural beauty, the good looks of people, the elegance of their behavior, the eloquence of their speeches, or the dissimulation of their imperfections" (Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* 246–47). In this framework, "knowledge remained focused on truth versus

untruth, and for ontology or, later, the purposes of actions, the issue was being versus appearance. As long as this was so, art was forced to position itself on the side of untruth and appearance and to affirm this position, if it was to distinguish itself from a knowledge that conformed to reality" (256). Still, Schiller does not stop here. As the links Luhmann establishes between beautiful appearances and dissimulation as well as between art and untruth suggest, it may be precisely Schiller's at least partial adherence to a premodern understanding of art that makes his categorical distinction between aesthetic and logical semblance so very necessary. By distinguishing between the two, he distinguishes between beauty and truth and radicalizes one strand of the autonomization of art that made its first appearance in the late Renaissance but had to wait until the nineteenth century to come to full fruition. Again in Luhmann's words,

> One can easily maintain that art establishes a kingdom of its own in the realm of an artificial-artistic semblance, which seeks to compete neither with the abstractions of mathematics nor with the pedantry of factual knowledge, but rather develops internal criteria of success for its own representations and ought to be allowed to search for ways of affecting its audience. . . . When insisting on the rights of beautiful appearance, one means more than deception. The point is not simply to deceive, but to break apart a simple, bivalent ontology and to reinvent the place of mankind within the cosmos. (257)

For Schiller, then, to insist on the right of the artist to create beautiful appearances is not reducible to the right to deceive; it paves the way for a more modern understanding of art that no longer has to pay dues to morality and religion to assert its power to change the world. As the writers discussed in the following section demonstrate, such a modern concept of art was beginning to emerge on both sides of the Atlantic as the functional differentiation of society consolidated.

Asserting the Right to Deception

Quite obviously, even if Mrs. Beauchamp functions as an aperture for a reading of *Charlotte Temple* that runs counter to the novel's didacticism, we would be hard pressed to read Rowson's novel as a forceful response to the antifiction movement's strictures on novelists. Other writers of the period addressed the hostility that met their work in more determined fashion, poking fun at literary didacticism even as they engaged in it and satirizing truth claims even as they made them. Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern*

Chivalry is a particularly illustrative example. The novel repeatedly lampoons writers' claims to truthfulness. A case in point is the mock-heroic poem "Cincinnatus" (173–94), which the narrator-author claims he has found in a deceased poet's home.[15] Like Tenney, Brackenridge here uses the topos of the found manuscript, a time-honored strategy of asserting the facticity of fictional texts. Yet the narrator-author's attempts to preempt possible objections to such truth claims undermine those very claims in their prolixity:

> I have discovered some scraps of great merit, and particularly a finished poem, of considerable length. . . . I know it will immediately be surmised by some, that the whole is a fiction, and that I myself have written this poem, and that the story of an author, &c. is an invention to make it the more interesting to the reader, and to keep myself out of sight and behind the curtain; in the same manner, as Cervantes, in his Don Quixotte, pretends that his history is a translation from a Moorish writer, Cid Hamed, if I forget not. . . . Many writers of fictitious works, in order to give them an air of truth and reality; or to delight the reader by relating some accidental manner of coming at what was nearly lost, invent tales of finding shreds and scraps of compositions, and thence tracing to the source; or that by taking lodgings that had been before occupied by some poet or philosopher, they discover in an old trunk, or elsewhere, the lucubrations which they now offer to the public, so I may be suspected of adopting a common mode of introducing what I myself have written; but the fact is as I have stated. (113–14)

This narrator-author, we are given to understand, protests too much. When, in the course of the poem, the "Cincinnat"—the poem's pseudo-hero and target of its satire—calls a corporal who fulminates against his airs of superiority "a Teague O'Regan fool" (186), the narrator-author's claims to veracity and verisimilitude fully collapse as Brackenridge inserts his own fictional character, who is himself modeled on a fictional precedent (Sancho Panza), into a poem that the narrator-author (but not the implied author) seeks to pass off as "the real thing." Such metaleptic passages testify to Brackenridge's self-reflexive awareness of critics' expectations concerning the truth value of fiction. This is no anxious defense strategy but a subversive play with expectations brought to bear on the novel by its detractors.

Taking a second look at Tyler's *The Algerine Captive*, we find that he engages in a similar game. While some contemporaneous readers may well have taken his repeated assertions of his tale's veracity at face value and read this anonymously published novel as an authentic captivity narrative, Tyler's truth claims, his didacticism, and his negotiation of antifiction stances have

a very different quality from what we find in novels such as *The Power of Sympathy* or even *Female Quixotism*. Tyler's response to the antifiction movement is less anxious and more complex. Following a chapter-long "sketch of Algerine history from actual information, obtained upon the spot, and the best European authorities," Tyler's first-person narrator Updike Underhill asserts both the educational value and the veracity of his account when he chastises those readers "who read for mere amusement" and fail to grasp what "this concise memoir" has to teach them, not only about Algerine history but also about the wisdom of the first U.S. administration's peace treaty with the "despotic government" of Algiers and its dangerous, unruly privateers (161–62). Throughout the text, Underhill asserts the truthfulness of the story told in this vein, with recourse to two discourses that lend support to the strong truth claims he makes: historiography, which he corroborates with references to scholarly texts ("the best European authorities") and autobiography, for which he draws on empirical evidence ("obtained upon the spot"). Underhill's brief history of Algiers is largely factual, and Tyler is very careful about making the dates of the story, which the narrator specifies throughout the narrative, cohere with the dates of known historical events. Thus, we read that, after "the treaty of Paris, in one thousand seven hundred and eighty two," Britain not only withdrew its protection of American ships but also incited Algerine pirates to attack them, which forced the United States to "conclude[ ] a treaty with this piratical state on the fifth of September, one thousand seven hundred and ninety five" (161). Underhill the character manages to escape bondage four months and two days before this treaty was signed: "on the third day of May, one thousand seven hundred and ninety five, I landed in my native country, after an absence of seven years and one month; about six years of which I had been a slave" (225). While Caleb Crain explains, in his notes to the Modern Library's 2002 edition of *The Algerine Captive*, that "most of the American hostages in Algiers did not return home until February 1797" (255n3), Underhill the character's escape at an earlier point in time is not inconceivable, and Underhill the narrator's reference to the U.S. treaty with Algiers from September 1795 also makes sense even though the narrative ends in May 1795. Narrators, after all, always tell their stories in retrospect.

Yet even though Tyler defends the veracity of his narrative much more elaborately than either Tenney or Brown, he does not, as Davidson claims, "rail[ ] against fiction" (*Revolution* 292). In fact, toward the beginning of the fact-driven second volume, Underhill stages a cautious but remarkable defense of fictionality as he recalls his captivity:

It is true, I did not meet, among my fellow slaves, the rich and the noble, as the dramatist and the novelist had taught me to expect. To betray a weakness I will confess that, sometime after I was captured, I often suffered fancy to cheat me of my "weary moments," by portraying those scenes, which had often amused me in my closet, and delighted me on the stage. Sometimes, I even contemplated with pleasure the company and converse of my fellow slaves. I expected to find them men of rank at least, if not of learning. I fancied my master's cook an English lord; his valet an Italian duke; his groom a knight of Malta; and even his foot boy some little lively French marquis. . . . Indeed, so sweet were the delusions of my own fancy, I am loth to destroy the innocent gratification, which the readers of novels and plays enjoy from the works of a Behn and a Colman; but the sober character of the historian compels me to assure my readers that, whatever may have happened in the sixteenth century, I never saw during my captivity, a man of any rank, family, or fortune among the menial slaves. (118–19)

Strikingly, Tyler, who consistently draws on the discourses of historiography and autobiography to announce the veracity of his narrator's tale, here has Underhill stress the consoling power of delusional flights of fancy in and out of literature even as he disavows his own story's fictionality. True, his references to Aphra Behn's novel *Oroonoko; or, the History of the Royal Slave* (1688) and possibly George Coleman's play *Turk and No Turk* (1785) (Tyler 243n2) serves to emphasize, once again, that *The Algerine Captive* is the work of an autobiographer and historian rather than a fictional tale. But Underhill's and, by implication, Tyler's assertion that immersion in the imaginary worlds of fiction provides readers with "innocent gratification" is a far cry from the antifiction diatribes we find in *The Power of Sympathy* and *Female Quixotism*. Tyler does not provide what an early critic called "a somewhat tedious account of actual conditions" (Loshe 25) here but engages in a clever play that challenges antifictionists' contention that novels are nothing but dangerous lies.

It is overtly ironic fictions such as *The Algerine Captive* and *Modern Chivalry* that prompt us to realize that even heavily didactic and blatantly antifiction novels such as *Female Quixotism* contain passages that subvert their own truth claims. In her preface, Tenney, or rather the fictional compiler of Dorcasina's life story, makes a telling comparison of the heroine's adventures and those of Cervantes's Don Quijote. Addressing the reader, she writes,

I am sensible you will find it a very singular and extraordinary piece of biography, and that you may suspect it to be a mere romance, an Hogarthian

caricatura, instead of a true picture of real life. But, when you compare it with the most extravagant parts of the authentic history of the celebrated hero of La Mancha, the renowned Don Quixote, I presume you will no longer doubt its being a true uncoloured history of a romantic country girl, whose head had been turned by the unrestrained perusal of Novels and Romances. (3)

The compiler here insists on the facticity of the story that follows by comparing it to the "authentic history" of Don Quijote. This is, of course, meant ironically since Tenney knows that her readers know that Don Quijote is a fictional character. This is a remarkable gesture in a novel whose repeated attacks on fiction position it within a Cervantean tradition. What we can witness here is not an inadvertent coming into presence of the contradictions that haunt antifiction fictions; before the proper narrative even begins, Tenney deliberately parodies and undermines its antifiction tirades and multiple truth claims.

It is no coincidence that the sharpest challenges to hegemonic antifiction stances are staged in picaresque novels such as *Modern Chivalry, The Algerine Captive,* and, to a lesser extent, *Female Quixotism*. Playful and insouciant like their heroes and heroines, these texts refuse to renounce the right to fiction and, in doing that, gesture toward a more modern, autonomous notion of literature whose power to provide a critical, outside perspective on the social world derives precisely from its autonomy, for "only when a reality 'out there' is distinguished from fictional reality can one observe one side from the perspective of the other" (Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* 142). Out of the three, Brackenridge's novel most audaciously attempts to wrest literature away from its subservience to other social realms. Paradoxically, perhaps, Brackenridge emerges as the most modern writer of the three because he realizes that the detractors of the novel actually have a point. From a twenty-first-century perspective, the antifictionists' diatribes against novels may well appear naive—they not only ignore that fictional texts perform social functions different from nonfictional ones; they also underestimate readers' ability to discriminate between fact and fiction and rely on an unexamined notion of truth that both ideology critique and poststructuralism have taught us to distrust. Yet it would be both shortsighted and anachronistic simply to dismiss those critiques as misguided. Deception is, after all, integral to novelists' creations of worlds of as-if. Fictions are *meant* to deceive, and it is for this reason that the eighteenth-century opposition to fiction takes us to the heart of the novelist's enterprise. Keeping in mind that novelists themselves asserted the truthfulness and facticity

of their work even as they sought to emancipate their art from immediate social obligations, it may be more fruitful to think of the antifiction movement as a response to a transitional phase in the history of art on its way to modernity than the misguided rearguard defense of philistines.

One of the aims of the present book is to supplement political readings of deception with an awareness that questions concerning semblance, dissimulation, and the fallibility of human perception are also at the heart of mid- to late eighteenth-century reflections on the nature and function of art taking place in a variety of venues, including magazine articles, advice literature, treatises on art, and works of art themselves. In eighteenth-century Europe and America, deception is as much an aesthetic as it is a moral and political category. As a matter of fact, the emergence of first art criticism and then aesthetics itself can be seen as a response to uncertainties concerning the value of artworks once they began to be sold and bought on the market from the late seventeenth century onward:

> No longer dependent on a patron's decisions and on negotiations with him, art found itself in the double grip of the demands raised by the art market and a public art criticism. To the extent that the art market relied on economic trends, it was unstable. But it offered two advantages. On the one hand, the market could use the general economic medium of money, while on the other hand, it operated without competition and without the threat of being displaced, which facilitated its isolation from other markets within the economic system. . . . But the market also generated deception and the need to protect oneself against fraud. . . . The relationships between the art system and the economic system could no longer be controlled via the notion of generally accepted criteria. . . . Academic philosophy in Germany reacted to increased uncertainty in the realm of evaluative criteria by developing a specialized aesthetics that pursued theoretical projects of its own. (Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* 164–65)

"One could not," Luhmann adds, "respond to the market as one responded to a person" (164). Thus, one way of accounting for the emergence of art criticism in the seventeenth century and aesthetics in the eighteenth century is to note that they responded to art collectors' as well as artists' need for criteria that would enable them to distinguish between good and bad art as well as between art and non-art. This helps explain not only the centrality of taste in early aesthetic discussions—both in Europe and in the early republic, where Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism,* Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste,* and Gerard's *Essay on Taste* were among the most widely circulating books on art—but also early aestheticians'

attempts to define the nature of art as well as their contributions to the modern system of fine arts. In this respect at least, early aesthetics functioned as a safeguard against the specter of deception that haunted both the producers and the consumers of artworks once they were released into the market.

Yet if we shift our attention from the social functions early European aesthetics performed to the claims it made about art, we see that it registers not only the dangers of deception but also its enabling potential. Despite their well-documented concerns about the propensity of the imagination to deceive, many an early aesthetician shared the understanding of early American writers such as Charles Brockden Brown, Brackenridge, Tyler, and Tenney that deception is a necessary component and outcome of much artistic production. Yet unlike the American detractors of the novel, eighteenth-century European thinkers as different in their aesthetic sensibilities as the French Charles Batteux, the English Edmund Burke, and the German Gotthold Ephraim Lessing did not attack art on the basis of that insight. On the contrary, they proclaimed deception to be one of the basic functions of art, and some of them extolled those artworks that deceived best. Writing half a century before Schiller, these thinkers already went beyond his insistence on the artist's right to create beautiful appearances.

Strikingly, we can trace the first stirring of such an understanding of artistic deception back to Plato. While Plato's main contention in book 10 of the *Republic* is with imitative poetry, he also censures painters for the deceptive appearances they create: "For example, a painter, we say, will paint us a cobbler, a carpenter, and other craftsmen, though he himself has no expertness in any of these arts, but nevertheless if he were a good painter, by exhibiting at a distance his picture of a carpenter he would deceive children and foolish men, and make them believe it to be a real carpenter" (598B–C, 823). We are not wrong in interpreting this as an early discussion of trompe l'oeil paintings—a genre that we will return to in chapter 4. What intrigues me about this passage is not so much Plato's condemnation of deception by means of art (which comes expected) but his acknowledgment that only "a good painter" can deceive spectators. While his moral judgment remains unaffected by this acknowledgment, we can already see here a (qualified and perhaps grudging) appreciation of the skill and craft it takes for artists to hoodwink their beholders.

In declaring deception to be a crucial purpose of art, a small number of early European aestheticians judged artistic dissimulation much more favorably than Plato. Asking himself what the function of all painting is,

Batteux answers this in his influential treatise *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe*: "To deceive the eye by resemblance, to make us believe that the object is real, whereas it is nothing but an image. That is evident" (258; my translation). Discussing music and dance in the following chapter, Batteux puts it even more succinctly: "Nothing is real [*vrai*] here, all is artifice" (277; my translation). Paradoxically, Batteux's paean to painterly deception is based on a traditional aesthetics of imitation—the shared principle he postulates for the arts—even as it cautiously gestures toward a more modern notion of art as free from heteronomous constraints.[16] This is indeed a paradox rather than a contradiction, since, as we have seen, already Plato betrays an awareness that the most accomplished form of painterly imitation is that which deceives its recipients into believing that what they see is the real thing.

Eleven years later, in his seminal 1757 treatise on the sublime, Burke went one step further as he declared deception to be a sine qua non of great art: "A true artist should put a generous deceit on the spectators, and effect the noblest designs by easy methods. Designs that are vast only by their dimensions, are always the sign of a common and low imagination. No work of art can be great, but as it deceives; to be otherwise is the prerogative of nature only" (76). This passage is taken from the section entitled "Magnitude in BUILDING." In it, Burke argues that great human-made edifices acquire sublimity only if the artist manages to strike a proper balance between length and height. Excessive lengths detract from the sublime effect of great heights, and vice versa. Thus, when Burke speaks of deception, he has something different in mind than Batteux. For Burke, deception is not an effect of supreme verisimilitude; for him, deception is a result of intelligent design, of artifice. Yet while Burke's notion of artistic deception differs from Batteux's, they agree that only particularly skillful artists are capable of creating art that deceives. In these two aestheticians' works, two different senses of art are intricately intertwined: art as skill; art as imaginative or creative pursuit. Again, we encounter a paradox: Burke's and Batteux's blending of these two meanings of *art* testifies to a lack of functional differentiation between the fine arts and other artifacts while their elevation of deception to a major principle of artistic production gestures forward to art under conditions of functional differentiation in that it problematizes the truth claims inherent in mimetic understandings of art.

The assuredness of Batteux' assertion from 1746 that it is "evident" that the proper purpose of painting is deception testifies to a broader, often implicit understanding that deception is a legitimate end of artistic production.

Lessing's *Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (*Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry;* 1766) is a case in point. Lessing notes that there is a crucial difference between Virgil's account of Laocoön's ordeal in the *Aeneid* and the famous sculpture attributed by Pliny the Elder to Agesander, Athenodoros, and Polydorus: while Virgil's poetic representation shows Laocoön and his sons draped in robes, the sculpture shows them naked. Censuring previous critics for either ignoring that difference or putting the sculptors' choice down to difficulties involved in sculpting drapery, Lessing asks rhetorically, "Is a garment, the work of our poor human hands, as beautiful as an organic body, the work of eternal wisdom? Does it require the same talents, is it of the same merit, does it bring just as much honor to imitate the former as it does the latter? Is it only deception that our eyes require, and is it a matter of indifference to them with what they are deceived?" (38). Unlike Batteux, Lessing does not claim that deception is a major purpose of art; he takes it for granted. After all, as he notes in the first paragraph of his preface to *Laocoön,* already Horace thought that both poetry and painting "deceive, and both deceptions are pleasing" (3; my translation).[17]

With Kant, the situation is as it tends to be: more complex. In §53 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment,* he hails poetry as the most valuable of the arts and defends its right to deal in appearances: "It plays with the illusion which it produces at will, yet without thereby being deceitful; for it itself declares its occupation to be mere play, which can nevertheless be purposively employed by the understanding for its own business" (§53, 204). Statements such as these, which Schiller would elaborate on in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man,* are far removed from either Batteux's or Burke's ringing defenses of the right to deception. Yes, poetry may create illusory worlds, but they must always remain identifiable as illusions. All else would be deception in the most negative sense. On average, German aestheticians of the era are more wary of deception than their French and British counterparts.[18] In §42 of his third critique, Kant gives two examples of aesthetic deception: a lover of beautiful nature is deceived by artificial flowers; to trick his guests, a "jolly landlord" hires "a mischievous lad" (§42, 182) who can imitate birdsongs. In both cases, Kant argues, the recipients' pleasure vanishes when they see through the artifice: "It disappears entirely as soon as one notices that one has been deceived and that it is only art" (§42, 181). Kant sustains this strict opposition between nature and art throughout his reflections on the relative merits of natural and artistic beauty in §42, where he unequivocally privileges the former over the latter because he who takes

an immediate interest in the beautiful in nature "can do so only insofar as he has already firmly established his interest in the morally good. We thus have cause at least to suspect a predisposition to a good moral disposition in one who is immediately interested in the beauty of nature" (§42, 180). When he turns to discussing the beauty of art, Kant makes an important distinction, though:

> That the satisfaction in beautiful art in the pure judgment of taste is not combined with an immediate interest in the same way as that in beautiful nature is also easy to explain. For the former is either such an imitation of the latter that it is deceptive, and in that case it has the effect of natural beauty (which it is taken to be); or else it is an art that is obviously intentionally directed toward our satisfaction, in which case the satisfaction in this product would, to be sure, occur immediately by means of taste, but would arouse only a mediate interest in the cause on which it is grounded, namely an art that can interest only through its end and never in itself. (§41, 181)

Thus, while, compared to the beautiful in nature, both types of artistic beauty are more tenuously connected with the moral good, and while art that intentionally deceives is morally corrupt, Kant does privilege those arts—the so-called "beautiful" or "fine arts" (*die schönen Künste*)—whose most accomplished forms deceive the spectator into mistaking the artwork for the real thing over those—the so-called "agreeable arts" (*die angenehmen Künste*)—whose only purpose is to please us. Only the beauty of imitative art allows for the kind of disinterested pleasure that, following Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, Kant champions. To praise, in however qualified a fashion, art that harbors the power to deceive is a remarkable gesture for an Enlightenment thinker who privileges reason above every other human faculty. The paradox in Kant's reflections on artistic beauty is this: while Kant's aesthetics of imitation remain embedded in an older, ontotheological understanding of beauty for which the beautiful, moreover, remains linked to the true and the good, his guarded privileging of deception as the highest form of imitation cautiously looks forward to a more modern notion of art. I write *cautiously* because artistic deception ultimately relies on even as it problematizes a mimetic notion of art and thus does not cut all ties with ontotheological theories of harmony, order, and beauty. Again, we find that early aesthetics is riven by a paradox that is a direct effect of the young discipline's liminal status in the history of reflections on art.

No early American writer understands as fully as Brackenridge this liminal status of art. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,

Brackenridge seems to have sensed that the antifictionists' disparagement of novels as lies was no longer the only legitimate type of response to artistic deception. When the narrator-author of *Modern Chivalry* ironically disavows any attempt at satire toward the beginning of the first volume, he not only engages in forms of talk that complicate the distinction between what is said and what is meant but also ends up disavowing the use of irony itself:

> Indeed, as it has been known that I was engaged in writing something, persons who either took, or pretended to take, some interest in my affairs, have urged me very much to depart a little from my usual way, and make use of a little irony, by way of seasoning to the composition . . . . But the truth was, I could see nothing to be ironical about; owing, perhaps, to my not being in the habit of looking for the ridiculous, and so having lost the talent of discovering it. But my resolution that I had taken would have fully preserved me from such a lapse, however numerous the objects of ridicule might be, that presented themselves. This will serve as an apology to those who have solicited me on this head, and relieve me from such solicitations for the future. (27)

Brackenridge here engages in a clever play of concealing disclosure that is anything but "the truth" and which defies any cultural arbiter's judgment concerning the truth value of fiction. Indeed, *Modern Chivalry* is full of assertions by either Farrago or the narrator-author that their words are truthful (e.g., "the truth is," "to say the truth of it," "to tell you the truth," "to speak the truth," "that is the truth of it"), and in the vast majority of instances, Brackenridge's readers are given to understand that what they read and other characters hear is either less than the truth or its opposite.

Brackenridge takes his play with authorial truth claims one decisive step further when he writes, in the introduction to the third volume, that the good writer must "be able to deceive the world" (103).[19] Rather than asserting, with whatever degree of seriousness, the truthfulness of his narrative, he here acknowledges that deception is the core business of his art, whose games of make-believe invite readers to take for real persons, actions, and events that are products of the imagination. In making that acknowledgment, Brackenridge subscribes to a more modern, transatlantically shared notion of art according to which "deception deserves admiration as deception, as *artificium*. . . . Rather than aim at a reality behind deception . . . , art sought to make transparent the worldly fact of deception. The *machina mundi* was copied as *machinatio*. . . . By proclaiming and demonstrating such positions, art asserted—*itself*" (Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* 264).

Thus, in affirming the right to fiction, Brackenridge taps into a broader, protomodern discourse on art as deception. Over and over again, *Modern Chivalry* highlights that deception names not only one of the crucial subject matters of early American art but also one of the effects art can have on its recipients: "Art brought cunning, deceit, and illusion onto the stage," Luhmann writes, "and in this way it copied into itself what it practiced. . . . The difference between being and appearance, between everyday life and the extraordinary was replicated within the world of appearance. To invoke Spencer Brown once again, the distinction 'reenters' the distinguished" (266). Reading Brackenridge, we realize that artists' turns toward deception as a subject matter of their art is, in fact, intimately related to their insistence on their right to deceive their spectators and readers.

As far as writers are concerned, Brackenridge is, at least in this respect, clearly the most audacious voice of the era. Yet while many post-revolutionary novels show the strains imposed by heteronomous demands placed on an art form that was slowly moving toward describing itself as autonomous, and while many novelists play with the fact-fiction distinction in ways that challenge antifictionists' self-assured condemnations of fictions as lies, books are not the only medium in which artists of the early republic claimed their right to deception forcefully and assuredly. In my final chapter, I turn to the trompe l'oeil paintings of Charles Willson Peale and his son Raphaelle Peale as well as Patience Wright's wax sculptures. In these artworks, whose effect on spectators crucially depends on their power to deceive, the right to deception comes into its own. While all three artists' insistence on that right is a marker of the modernity of their art, deception and autonomization are nowhere more intimately bound up than in the work of Raphaelle Peale.

4   Visual Artifice

IN THE COURSE of six decades, from 1763 to 1824, Charles Willson Peale painted over a thousand portraits, no less than seventy of which depicted George Washington. Perhaps he hoped, as his biographer David C. Ward suggests, "to become the de facto, if not official, 'court painter' of America, a position that would give him both a steady income and institutional status" (47). But it is his 1789 portrait of Benjamin Franklin as a patriot, an inventor, and a writer (fig. 1) that hints best at his character and ambition. Peale painted three portraits of Franklin, who is a particularly apt subject for his art because Peale, too, was a patriot, an inventor, and a writer. Not only that: Peale wrote an autobiography in which he styles himself a self-made man not unlike the figure that emerges from Franklin's *Autobiography*. Both men also subjected their bodies and lives to an exacting regime of bourgeois self-discipline, which in Peale's case involved physical exertion, teetotalism, a strict diet, purgations, and constant writerly productivity bordering on compulsion (Ward 111–32). Like Franklin's autobiography, moreover, Peale's uncompleted "The Life of Charles Willson Peale" (1826) reveals the thin line that divides the self-made man from the con man.

Similar to Franklin, Peale resorted to a number of omissions, embellishments, and dissimulations, both in his writing of the autobiography and in the activities he describes therein: from misdating a letter he received to make his courtship of Rachel Brewer, his wife-to-be, look more romantic and less like the attempt to marry into a richer family that it also was, to his complete silence concerning the annulment of Benjamin Franklin Peale's first marriage and the concomitant confinement of the son's ex-wife to an asylum, to claiming that he had cured another of his sons, the younger Titian Ramsay Peale I, of yellow fever while conveniently concealing that he died soon thereafter (19–21, 120, 125).[1] As it was for Franklin, a major driving force of Peale's career was his desire to maximize his public appeal. Appropriately, when rebuking his eldest son Raphaelle Peale

for his fecklessness and dissolute lifestyle, he took recourse to a theatrical metaphor: "Why not act the *Man*" (*Selected Papers* 3: 548). Given all these similarities between Peale and Franklin, Peale's decision to name one of his other sons Benjamin Franklin appears entirely consistent.

Figure 1. *Benjamin Franklin,* Charles Willson Peale, 1789. Oil on canvas, 36 × 27".
(Courtesy of the Philadelphia History Museum at the Atwater Kent, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania Collection)

Self-Portraits, Trompe l'Oeils, Still Lifes

Peale's own desire to "act the *Man*" so as to emerge from under the shadow of more highly renowned contemporaries such as John Singleton Copley and Benjamin West also shaped his productivity as an artist and a writer, in several ways. Peale painted no less than eighteen self-portraits, a feat that itself already testifies to his commitment to control his public image. Peale's dedication to self-fashioning comes out particularly clearly in the subjects and titles of three of the self-portraits, all of them oil paintings, which he completed between 1822 and 1824: *Self-Portrait, "In the Character of a Painter"* (1824), *Self-Portrait, "Painted in the Eighty-First Year of His Age without Spectacles"* (1822), and *Self-Portrait, "For the Multitude"* (1824). While the first asserts his self-understanding as an artist both through its title and by showing him with a utensil of his craft (a brush), the second does the same (this time with several brushes and a palette) while also underlining the physical prowess of which he was so proud (no spectacles needed, thank you), and the third (fig. 2) shows him in his roles as museum owner and educator who, for the benefit of the "multitude," presents one of the (decidedly phallic) bones from the mastodon skeleton that was the trademark and major attraction of the Philadelphia Museum, which he founded in 1786.

In the years 1821 to 1824 alone, Peale, by now in his early eighties, painted no less than seven self-portraits. With this concerted (though only partially successful) attempt to assert his place in his present as well as the country's cultural history in mind, it comes as no surprise that he also sat down to write his life-story the year after he had completed the last of these portraits. Peale began writing "The Life of Charles Willson Peale" in the fall of 1825, completing almost a thousand notebook pages before he stopped working on it in April 1826.[2] He died on February 22 of the following year.

But the full extent of Peale's ambition is perhaps disclosed only if we take a look at three major, closely related works of his: his trompe l'oeil portrait of two of his sons, *The Staircase Group (Portrait of Raphaelle Peale and Titian Ramsay Peale)* (1795); his largest painting, the life-size self-portrait *The Artist in His Museum* (1822); and an almost equally large trompe l'oeil painting and self-portrait titled *The Staircase Self-Portrait* (1823).

The Staircase Group (fig. 3) was first exhibited in the spring of 1795 at the Columbianum Exhibition, the nation's first collective art exhibition, which celebrated the founding, by Peale and fellow Philadelphian artists, of the nation's first art academy, the short-lived Columbianum. The painting
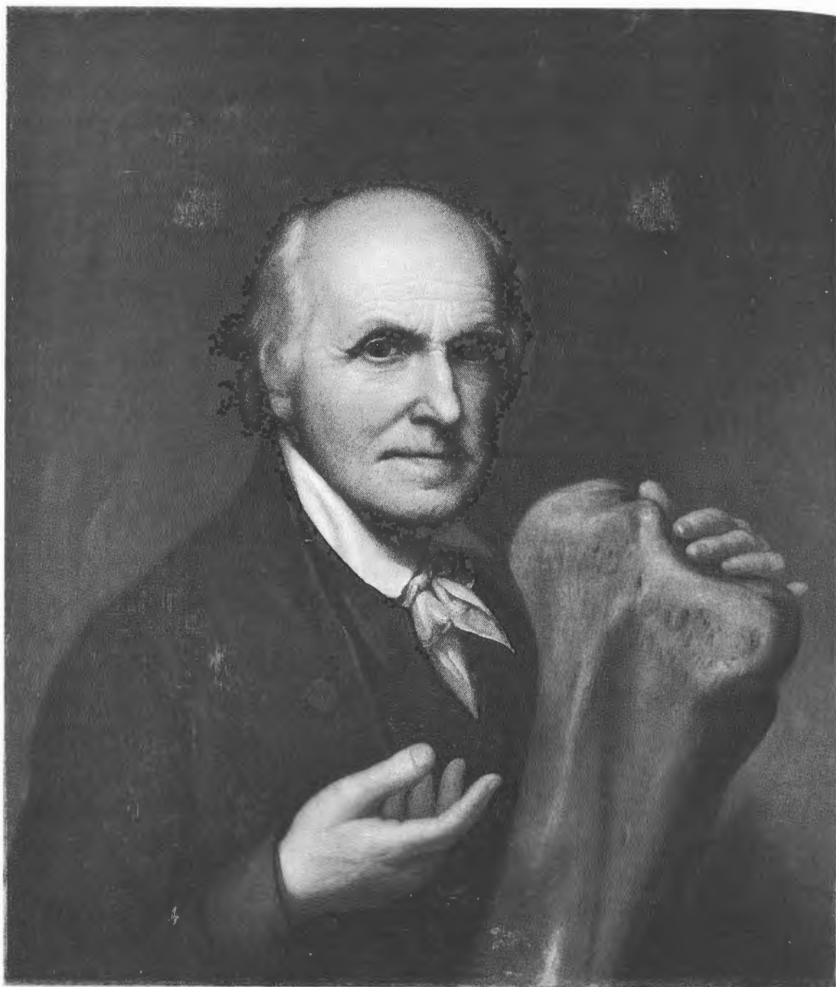
Figure 2. *Self-Portrait, "For the Multitude,"* Charles Willson Peale, 1824. Oil on canvas, 26¼ × 22". (Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society, object number 1940.202)

shows Raphaelle Peale looking back at spectators as he ascends a flight of stairs holding a palette and a set of brushes in his left and a maulstick in his right hand, and Titian Ramsay Peale I, the short-lived son, leaning into the picture from a higher step that is located outside the image, wistfully gazing downward. The painting became famous because George Washington allegedly fell for its supreme verisimilitude and politely bowed to Peale's painted sons on a visit to the Philadelphia Museum in the late 1790s.[3]

The Artist in His Museum (fig. 4) depicts a life-size Peale who proudly lifts a curtain to allow his audience a glance at the interior of his Philadelphia Museum and its mastodon skeleton, portrait paintings, and glass cases of stuffed birds. As he lifts a draped red curtain with his right hand to unveil a view of the museum's Long Room, the palm of his almost fully extended left hand faces the audience. Peale's open hand and the slightly oblique angle at which he stands at first sight seem to invite the observer

Figure 3. *The Staircase Group (Portrait of Raphaelle Peale and Titian Ramsay Peale)*, Charles Willson Peale, 1795. Oil on canvas, 89½ × 39⅜". (Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art)

to walk past Peale into the museum's interior. But prospective visitors would be deceived to think this: Peale does not, as Roger B. Stein suggests, "invite[ ] us in" (168). Even if Peale's audience braved the artist's stern gaze and impressive posture, they would still have to squeeze past between
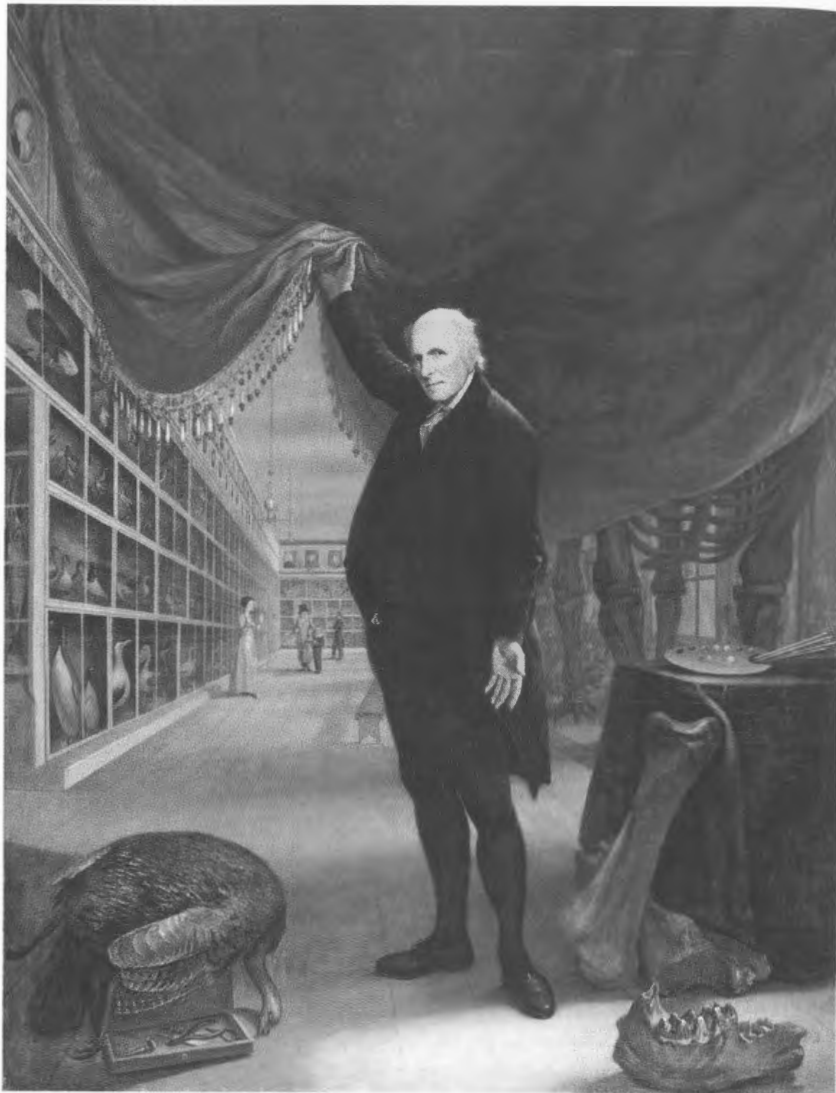
Figure 4. *The Artist in His Museum*, Charles Willson Peale, 1822. Oil on canvas, 103¾ × 79⅞". (Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia; gift of Mrs. Sarah Harrison, the Joseph Harrison, Jr. Collection)

him and the dead turkey—Benjamin Franklin's preferred national bird.[4] In the painting, the turkey lies at Peale's feet, draped over a taxidermy kit and communicating with a stuffed version of the successful contender for national bird in the top left corner of the canvas. To the other side of Peale, in the painting's right foreground, further objects obstruct the virtual visitor's passage: Peale's palette and brushes lie on a small, baize-covered table, and, leaning against the table, there are two leg bones—a femur and part of a smaller bone—from the mastodon skeleton that was exhumed under his direction. Closest to the viewer, part of the mastodon's mandible further clutters the ground at Peale's feet. As Stein, Ward (155–92), and several other critics have observed, Peale casts himself into a multitude of roles in his most famous painting: he is the artist, the showman, the magician, the impresario, the educator, the natural historian, and the cultural gatekeeper. But he is certainly not the doorman who politely invites us in. What the painting as a whole enacts is a proud display of the lifework of the man who created both the painting we look at and much of what we see in it. Appropriately, this work, which Peale completed in his eighty-first year, is widely regarded as his major achievement.

Rubens Peale commissioned his father to paint the third painting in question for the Baltimore Museum. *The Staircase Self-Portrait* develops themes and subjects explored in the two earlier paintings and gives us excellent insights into both Peale's acts of self-fashioning and his artistic deceptions. The painting was probably destroyed in a fire in 1851 and remains unlocated to this day (Bellion, *Citizen Spectator* 329–30n1). Luckily, Peale describes it in several letters to his family and friends as well as in his autobiography. In a letter to Rubens dated August 5, 1823, he writes,

> It [is] a bold, and good work, cost about $20. I have painted 2 steps within the picture and painted a carpet on the outer steps, as also on the inner steps. . . . I shall be descending the steps; my right foot on the first step in the picture, my left foot on the upper step, with a foreshortened leg. a front face, the head alittle inclined to make a gentle curve of my figure[.] By this I give my exact high, with my Pallet on the left & Moll-stick in my right hand—behind me my Easel with a picture on it and other apparatus of a painting-room—from which I meditake making 2 steps to enter a Gallery of great length.
>
> I borrowed a handsome Carpet from Mr. Rhea, and contrary to usage I paint the bottom of the picture to a finish or nearly so before I sketch in any other part of the picture[.] I mean to make the whole piece a deception if I can. . . . The steps will certainly be a true elusion, and why not my figure? (*Selected Papers* 4: 301–2)

Twenty days later, he supplemented this description in another letter to Rubens that further highlights the similarities between this painting and *The Artist in His Museum:*

> A Saddlers hammer in the step to shew that I have laid down the hammer to take up the pensil, a picture of your mother on the Easel behind me looking with pleasure on a sleeping infant, beyond the Painting-room one step leads into a Spacious Museum ador[n]ed with birds and part of the Skeleton of the Mammoth at the end of the Room, & intend a group of figures as visitors. (*Selected Papers* 4: 313)

In what respects does *The Staircase Self-Portrait* pick up the earlier paintings' themes?[5] Let me begin with *The Artist in His Museum.* Contrary to what he states in letters that he wrote while working on this painting, Peale does not let the mastodon hold center stage. Instead, in addition to the bones placed in the foreground, we get to see only about the lower third of the skeleton in the shaded right background of the painting, probably because a full view of the mastodon (which in the museum itself was exhibited not in the Long Room but in the separate Mammoth Room adjacent) would have inevitably dwarfed Peale's figure in comparison, drawing attention to the dead animal's massive presence rather than his own.[6] After all, Peale meant the painting to celebrate both his museum and himself. As he puts it in a letter to his son Rembrandt, "I think it important that I should not only make it a lasting monument of my art as a painter, but also that the Design should be expressive that I bring forth into public view, the beauties of Nature and art, the rise and progress of the Museum" (qtd. in Stein 142).

Peale's solution to this problem of representation in a double sense was to add a Quaker lady to the left side of the painting, whose show of fright or awe testifies to the mastodon's imposing force without detracting from Peale's own. The rising of the curtain conceals as much as it discloses. But while the mastodon is rendered partially visible, several objects displayed in the Long Room entirely disappear from view. We know this from *The Long Room, Interior of the Front Room in Peale's Museum* (1822; fig. 5), a watercolor study Peale did together with Titian Ramsay Peale II.

A comparison of the two paintings shows that the space taken up by the mastodon skeleton in *The Artist in His Museum* is in Peale's museum occupied by a row of cabinets with natural history objects (insects, fossils, minerals), landscape paintings hung on the cabinets' side walls, plaster busts of scientists by William Rush and of George Washington by Jean-Antoine Houdon sitting on top of the cabinets, and an organ case.[7] Peale's decision
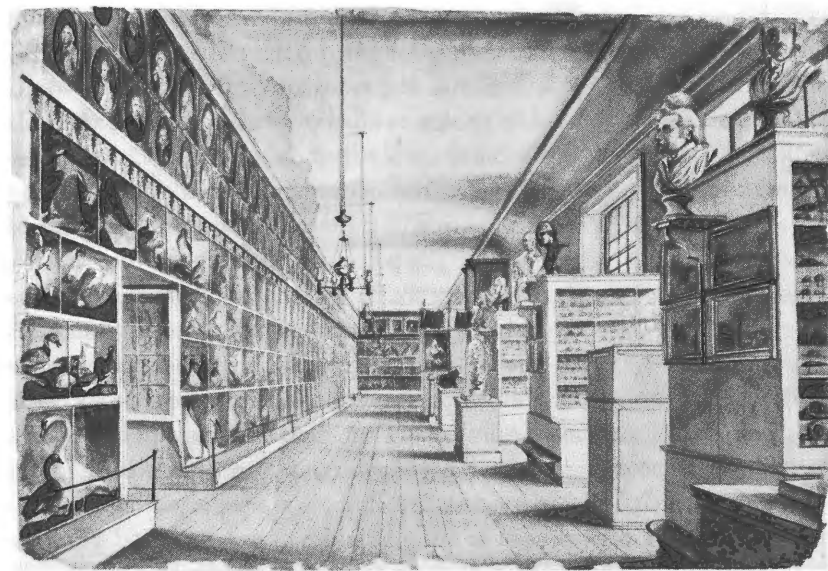
Figure 5. *The Long Room, Interior of the Front Room in Peale's Museum,* Charles Willson Peale and Titian Ramsay Peale, 1822. Watercolor over graphite pencil, 14 × 20¾". (Courtesy of Detroit Institute of Arts, Founder's Society purchase, Director's Discretionary Fund/Bridgeman Images)

to replace all of these objects with the mastodon skeleton (as well as a number of heads of other animals that are barely visible through the mastodon's legs) allows Peale to display, in the space of one painting, not only his work as a painter and museum owner but also one of his career's most spectacular achievements: the recovery of the mastodon's bones, which he had already memorialized in another painting, *Exhuming the First American Mastodon* (1806–8). Clearly, the mastodon skeleton was the museum's greatest crowd puller and a major source of pride for Peale. The dead animals at his feet further reinforce the artist's strength and virility as well as the forbidding nature of his life-size presence at the center of the painting. Thus, *The Artist in His Museum* presents spectators with a grand survey of Peale's life and work. Not only that: by way of its illusionism, *The Artist in His Museum* also asserts that everything we behold was created in a sovereign act of self-making.

At the same time, the painting's illusionism undercuts Peale's legacy-making as it highlights the fleetingness of his creations. True, Peale's imposing presence at the center of the painting suggests that he is the creator of all that we see. But it simultaneously gives us the strange feeling that

everything we perceive would disappear from the face of the earth should the magician decide to close the curtain again. Thus, the painting is inscribed by a dialectic of permanence and transience of which Peale seems to be at least partly aware. His choice to fill about half the canvas with the bodies of dead animals produces an eerie effect. Taken together, the turkey and mastodon bones at Peale's feet in the lower two-fifths of the painting constitute a still life made up mainly of dead animals: a *natura morta* of *natura morta*. This morbid aura of the painting is further reinforced as we glance past Peale into the Long Room. Apart from the lower part of the mastodon skeleton on the right, we see stuffed birds exhibited in four rows of glass cases on the left and back walls, above which are two top rows made up of Peale's head-and-shoulders portraits of revolutionary heroes, their immediate successors, and a number of French and German public figures including Lafayette, Baron Cuvier, and Alexander von Humboldt (Stein 151). Peale himself belonged to the revolutionary generation, and, reproducing the portraits of people he himself had painted, he could not have overlooked the fact that some of them (Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, General Henry Knox, and General Johann de Kalb among them) were already dead. Others (most prominently John Adams and Thomas Jefferson) were in their late seventies or eighties and would die within five years. Moreover, though *The Artist in His Museum* does depict several human figures toward the far end of the Long Room—the Quaker lady, a middle-aged gentleman and his son, and a younger single male visitor—it has a profoundly static atmosphere. While the gentleman and his son stroll toward the observer, the Quaker lady is paralyzed by awe or fear as she beholds the mastodon, and the single man examines the bird cases with folded arms. It is as if the static group of background spectators mirrors the still life of the group of inanimate objects in the foreground. While the painting as a whole loudly proclaims Peale's continuing influence in the worlds of art, science, and education, its morbid strains and lack of movement undermine that assertive note with equal force. Peale's black clothes further add to that sinister strain even as they allow him to cut a stern, impressive figure. Thus, even as *The Artist in His Museum* works toward the creation of a living legacy through a multiplicity of optical tricks, it also announces the waning of that legacy—a waning that was accelerated when Peale was forced to move his museum from the political center of Independence Hall to the economic center of the Philadelphia Arcade in 1826. By 1854, that process was completed when, less than three decades after Peale's death, his museum collection was sold to P. T. Barnum (Ward 190).

Yet one would be mistaken to set up a strict opposition between Peale the educator and Barnum the frivolous showman, for Peale's self-fashioning as an educator of the American public is riven by tensions, too. Around the early 1780s, Peale, who had so far mainly worked as a portrait painter for the wealthy, began to rethink his public role. Most significantly, he began to envision the creation of a museum that would display portraits of notable Americans painted by him. In addition to the portraits and the other objects visible in *The Long Room* (cabinets with natural history objects, landscape paintings, plaster busts, an organ case), the Philadelphia Museum also showcased optical instruments (to view the insects), magic mirrors, an anamorphic print, a trompe l'oeil grotto, wax sculptures, Native American remains, and, of course, the mastodon. With the museum, Peale strove to educate the budding nation's citizens about history and science in entertaining ways. Yet the museum was by no means the only project through which he sought to consolidate the nation. In 1780, Peale helped organize the public hanging in effigy of the treasonous General Benedict Arnold; in 1783, he built a forty-six-foot-high wooden "triumphal arch" that was meant to celebrate the end of the war but created a mass panic and killed one man when it was set on fire by a rocket that exploded too close to it; in 1785, he staged a display of moving pictures that was enhanced by spectacular sound and light effects but that Philadelphians did not much care about; after the 1793 yellow fever epidemic in the new nation's capital, he began to use his museum as a forum for advocating personal and public health as well as moral reform; in 1794, he cofounded the Columbianum; in 1823, he began and soon abandoned an unsuccessful lecture tour on natural history; and well into old age, he kept inventing new tools and machines, ranging from a polygraph that he sold to Thomas Jefferson (and which is still displayed at Monticello today) to an unspillable milk cart.[8]

Peale was the sole proprietor of the Philadelphia Museum, and from the late 1780s onward, it served him as a linchpin for most of his artistic, social, and educational activities. Though the primary incentive behind Peale's various activities was to secure a source of income for his large family, much of his work was driven by a genuine commitment to meet his civic responsibilities. With his museum, he succeeded in providing the public with what he called "rational pleasures" to achieve some of his educational objectives. Yet as the disastrous triumphal arch incident and the failure of his moving-picture theater indicate, his showmanship and love of spectacle could get the better of him. The sheer multitude of his projects and the speed at which he moved from one to the next likewise testify to anxieties

concerning the ever-present danger that his often frenzied attempts to "act the *Man*" could fail. Taking another look at *The Artist in His Museum*, I believe that we can detect his awareness of that danger—a danger that must have been acutely palpable for a man whose father, Charles Peale, was convicted as a thief and forger and only narrowly escaped the death penalty. For Ward, the legacy of the father's crime is crucial to any understanding of Peale's life and art, which is why he begins his seminal study of the artist, *Charles Willson Peale: Art and Selfhood in the Early Republic* (2004), with an account of Charles Peale's crime and conviction:

> Not all great families are founded on a crime, but the Peale family was: Charles Peale (1709–50), the artist's father, was a convicted felon, transported to America after the commutation of a death sentence he received upon being found guilty of theft and forgery while an officer of the London Post Office. "Charles Peel of St. Mary Woolnoth [London]" was indicted on five counts of theft and embezzlement, including embezzling £170 by stealing, forging an endorsement, and then passing a bill of exchange. Tried at the Old Bailey, he "pleaded Guilty, and thereupon receiv'd Sentence of DEATH" in May 1735. The frequency with which the death penalty was imposed and the expansion of the definition of capital crimes were hallmarks of eighteenth-century English jurisprudence as the magistrates relied on the noose to protect and maintain both property and property relations. (Ward 3)

For Ward, the father's run-in with the law, his forced transportation to the American colonies, his inability to put his family on a secure financial footing in the new surroundings, and his failed stab at gaining access to the Tidewater gentry decisively shaped his son's outlook on life. And indeed, many of Charles Willson Peale's ambitions and activities can be read as attempts to extricate himself from under the spell of his father's failures: his desire for self-determination and social mobility, his perseverance and stern self-discipline, his sometimes bungled attempts to marry into wealthy families, his professed disdain for inherited wealth and the property-owning class, and even his fervent activism as a confiscator of loyalists' and half-hearted patriots' estates in revolutionary Pennsylvania may all be seen as conflicted efforts either to correct his father's errors, to succeed where he had failed, or to avenge the wrongs he had suffered at the hands of his betters.

While it would be shortsighted to reduce Charles Willson Peale's career to an ongoing attempt to extricate himself from anxieties of paternal influence,[9] I do believe that Ward's brief sketch of Charles Peale's life and his detailed exploration of Charles Willson Peale's various activities provide

us with an important key to the son's art. While only the father took to crime, it is clear that only a thin line divided self-fashioning from dissimulation in both the father's and the son's lives. The son's embellishment, in his autobiography, of several episodes in his life; his misdating of a possibly forged letter that precipitated his marriage to his first wife; his silence about the death of a son he claimed to have cured of yellow fever; and his concealment of his former daughter-in-law's commitment to an insane asylum can all be read as attenuated variations on the father's more dangerous and illegal acts. How can we make this knowledge useful for understanding Peale's paintings? I do not wish to suggest that his art reflects either his own or his father's precarious balancing between self-fashioning and deception. Also, I neither aim at illuminating art through life, nor do I intend to do the reverse. Instead, taking my cue from the artist's and his father's lives, I argue that Peale's paintings explore that moment at which deception becomes an integral part of artistic creativity that both affirms and undermines the artist's striving for autonomy in and through his art. In other words, while I seek to do justice to the medial specificity of Peale's paintings, I interpret them in much the same way as I interpret early American novels: as reflections on deception in and through art. From this vantage point, Peale emerges as an artist who shares some of the early novelists' anxieties concerning dissimulation but at the same time also embraces the power of art to deceive almost as fully as Brackenridge.

If we consider *The Artist in His Museum* in relation to the much earlier *Staircase Group (Portrait of Raphaelle Peale and Titian Ramsay Peale)* and the somewhat later *Staircase Self-Portrait*, we find that all three paintings not only negotiate fears about deception but also assert the artist's right to deceive his audience. While *The Staircase Self-Portrait* remains unlocated and thus not available for inspection, Peale's own ekphrases provide enough evidence to make the case. Let me further elaborate on some of the connections between these three paintings. All of them are oil portraits in which the life-size figures instantly impose themselves on the viewer: Peale himself in the self-portraits *The Artist in His Museum* and *The Staircase Self-Portrait*; two of his sons in *The Staircase Group*. While the latter two are trompe l'oeil paintings, *The Artist in His Museum* uses more subtle strategies of disclosure and concealment. A similar relation of sameness and difference obtains between the two self-portraits: while both of them show the Long Room of Peale's museum and use illusionist methods to enhance the impact of the artist's presentation of himself and his work, *The Staircase Self-Portrait* takes self-presentation one step further:

the artist now no longer simply occupies the center of the painting; he is walking away from his easel and down a flight of stairs, seemingly stepping right out of the painting and into his viewer's space. In both self-portraits, moreover, Peale displays objects related to his work at his feet—in the later painting, the saddler's tools of his artisan beginnings. But in *The Staircase Self-Portrait,* Peale carries a palette and a maulstick: he has picked up his artist's tools again, which were laid away on a table to his left in *The Artist in His Museum.*

Out of the three portraits, Peale was proudest of *The Staircase Self-Portrait.* Why is that so? Intentional fallacy aside, my supposition is that Peale preferred this painting over the others because in it, he managed to reconcile two major driving forces of his life and art that relate to one another in ways Peale must have found deeply troubling: self-presentation and deception. As a self-styled self-made man, Peale was keenly aware that the acts of self-fashioning that continued to sustain his sense of autonomous selfhood stood on shaky grounds. For him as for other middle-class subjects of the early republic, it was precisely acts of authentication that were subject to charges of inauthenticity. As the son of a forger, and as an artist whom John Adams in a letter to his wife dated August 21, 1776, dismissively characterized as a man who "has Vanity—loves Finery—Wears a sword—gold Lace—speaks French" (*Book* 157), Peale well understood that elites were prone to dismiss socially upward subjects such as himself as treacherous Chesterfieldians. As we have seen, while such an assessment would be harsh, it would not be entirely unfounded in Peale's case. His various artistic and civic activities as well as his successful courtship of three wives bespeak a considerable mastery of the arts of pleasing and self-fashioning. Yet while in life such arts were as widely denounced as they were practiced, painting opened up a realm for Peale in which deception could play a legitimate role.

The favorable reception met by early American trompe l'oeil paintings such as Peale's *The Staircase Group* and *The Staircase Self-Portrait* shows that painting and literature related to deception in very different ways. While a writer like Brackenridge had to assert his right to deception in the face of hostile antifiction opposition, Peale could draw on a well-established tradition in the history of painting that valued that painting most that deceives best. True, a number of powerful contemporaneous detractors including Sir Joshua Reynolds, the first president of the Royal Academy of Arts, and James Barry and John Opie, two other prominent members of the academy, vastly preferred intellectually challenging paintings that required allegorical

forms of interpretation over illusionist paintings, which they considered indicative of minor, mechanical talent. In Reynolds's words, "Leave the meaner artist servilely to suppose that those are the best pictures, which are most likely to deceive the spectator" (47). Yet Peale could rely on a powerful critical tradition that extoled deceptively verisimilar paintings as well as on the fact that trompe l'oeils continued to have great popular appeal (Futral 224–25; Steinberg 30). Thus, Peale, always the professional, painted trompe l'oeils even as he was decidedly ambivalent about the art form's artistic value. Writing to his son-in-law Coleman Sellers in 1819, he maintained that when a painting "is executed so well as to render it a perfect elusion there is no price too high can well be sett on such a picture" (*Selected Papers* 3: 675). Eleven years earlier, though, he disparaged "deceptions" in explaining to his daughter Angelica Robinson why he decided to exhibit portraits of historical figures in his Philadelphia Museum: "I had contemplated painting for the Museum some pieces of deceptions of still life, which [I] know would excite much admiration of the lovers of fine arts, but such works are of less value than Portraits of living characters, well chosen" (ibid. 2: 1087).

As Wendy Bellion has shown, trompe l'oeils of the era were firmly embedded in "a material culture of optical pleasure, play, and deceit" (*Citizen Spectator* 4) that also included optical devices such as cosmoramas (peep shows that generate an illusion of three-dimensional space), magic lanterns, and phantasmagorias as well as public spectacles of deception such as the Invisible Lady, a woman that spectators could hear but not see even though she evidently was in the same room, commenting on what she observed. Together, these objects and techniques were part of "a cultural dialectic of deceit and discernment" that "took shape across the terrain of a broad material landscape" (5) and that could also be witnessed in the Philadelphia Museum. However, whether they functioned, as Bellion adds, "to exercise and hone skills of looking" (5) in order to foster a citizenry that could tell truth from falsehood in an age haunted by sedition, conspiracy, and dissimulation remains to be seen.

The locus classicus for any discussion of trompe l'oeil paintings is the story of the contest between two painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasius, in book 35 of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* ("An Account of Paintings and Colours"):[10]

The contemporaries and rivals of Zeuxis were Timanthes, Androcydes, Eupompus, and Parrhasius. This last, it is said, entered into a pictorial contest with Zeuxis, who represented some grapes, painted so naturally that the birds flew

towards the spot where the picture was exhibited. Parrhasius, on the other hand, exhibited a curtain, drawn with such singular truthfulness, that Zeuxis, elated with the judgment which had been passed upon his work by the birds, haughtily demanded that the curtain should be drawn aside to let the picture be seen. Upon finding his mistake, with a great degree of ingenuous candour he admitted that he had been surpassed, for that whereas he himself had only deceived the birds, Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist. (251)

Peale must have felt himself quite the Parrhasius when reporting this about thirteen fellow Philadelphian artists' apparently unified response to *The Staircase Self-Portrait* at a special showing: "Evry one of them pronounced it to be the best picture which they had seen from my pencil, & what is extraordinary, every one is deceived by some part of the picture, the truth is that I had determined from the commencement of it to make as much as I could in it to deceive the Eye of a critical observer" (*Selected Papers* 4: 330). Allegedly, a fellow portrait painter, Thomas Sully, even exclaimed, "Bless me, I am completely deceived" (ibid. 4: 313). Peale quotes Sully in a letter to his son Rubens Peale, and there is no way of determining whether Sully actually said these words. But even if he did say them, they are, literally speaking, themselves a deception—a conventionalized form of praise for a painting's supreme verisimilitude that works by *feigning* deception. At least this is what Ward (167–68), Bellion (*Citizen Spectator* 330–31), and Frank Futral (224–25) suggest. But can we be so sure? According to Peale, Sully was deceived by one specific element of the painting: the "Carpet being painted on the real steps" (*Selected Papers* 4: 327). As he did with *The Staircase Group,* to enhance the illusionist effect, Peale surrounded the painting with a real doorframe and added real, wooden steps—the "lower steps" he writes about—at the foot of the painting that continued the painted stairs on the canvas. What apparently deceived Sully was the *painted* carpet that Peale had covered the wooden steps with. Given that Peale had used the device of the wooden steps before, and given that his fellow painters were probably busy scrutinizing the trompe l'oeil effects of the painting itself, it may well be that at least one of them mistook the painted carpet on the real steps for the real thing. In exhibiting *The Staircase Self-Portrait* together with wooden steps covered by a fake carpet, Peale engaged in a clever play of materiality and artifice, being and appearance, that may well have duped even as discerning an observer as Sully, one of Philadelphia's most famous portrait painters at the time. Peale's own account of the episode in his letter to his son supports this interpretation: "He said to me that I ought to send you a piece of the same carpeting on the lower steps to supply you

when that shall be spoiled—how can I do that, can I send painted steps, painted steps!" (313). Peale appears genuinely agitated, which would be an embarrassingly naive response if all Sully did was reiterate a conventionalized reaction to trompe l'oeil paintings. To assess the veracity of Peale's account, we need to consider its audience. While it is not inconceivable that Peale wrote his letter to Rubens with posterity in mind, it is hard to imagine a father as stern and self-conscious as Charles Willson Peale giving expression, in a letter to his son, to an almost childish excitement over a fellow artist's polite nod to convention. Perhaps Sully was genuinely deceived by that painted carpet.

Critics tend to discuss Peale's account of Sully's deception by *The Staircase Self-Portrait* alongside his son Rembrandt's account of George Washington's deception by *The Staircase Group* (Futral 223–25; Bellion, *Citizen Spectator* 329–32). In the April 1856 issue of the *Crayon,* one of the nation's major (though short-lived) art journals,[11] Rembrandt published an essay entitled "The Person and Mien of Washington." In it, he recounts the anecdote of Washington being taken in by the earlier painting's supreme verisimilitude:

> My father had invited the General to see some Indian figures [wax sculptures] dressed in their proper habiliments. A painting, which he had just finished, was placed in the room leading to the Indian department. The painting represented my elder brother, with palette in hand, as stepping up a stairway, and a younger brother looking down. I observed that Washington, as he passed it, bowed politely to the painted figures, which he afterwards acknowledged he thought were living persons. If this first homage bestowed on the picture was not indicative of its merit, it was, at least, another instance of habitual politeness. (R. Peale, "Reminiscences" 100)

Though the story of Washington's deception has survived to this day, it is, as Bellion, Futral, Phoebe Lloyd, and other art historians have argued, unlikely that Washington actually fell for the painting's illusionist effects. While we cannot be fully sure, we can assume that the "habitual politeness" Rembrandt Peale speaks of was really meant for the painter rather than his painted sons. The reason why I distrust the son's account of deception by painting more than the father's has everything to do with the two accounts' different implied readers. While Charles Willson Peale's story of Sully's beguilement is addressed to a familial audience of one perfectly familiar with the topos of the deceived spectator and therefore unlikely to be impressed by any feigned deception on Sully's part, Rembrandt Peale's *Crayon* essay addresses a different audience for different purposes. In recounting the story

of the president's deception over half a century after the event (Washington paid his visit to the Philadelphia Museum in the late 1790s) and only four years before his own death at the age of 82, the son seeks to achieve what his father sought to achieve with his late self-portraits: to cement the legacy of the Peale family and its "founding father" Charles Willson Peale. The readers of Rembrandt's *Crayon* essay, which is advertised as "Reminiscences, by Rembrandt Peale," well understood that that legacy was intimately related to Washington. To his father's seventy portraits of Washington, Rembrandt added further portraits of the founder, among them a transparency of the apotheosis of Washington that was displayed in the windows of the Philadelphia Museum[12] and the oil paintings *Washington Before Yorktown* (1824) and *George Washington (Patriae Pater)* (c. 1824). The latter is a bust-length portrait surrounded by a broad trompe l'oeil masonry frame which quickly became known as the "porthole portrait." Rembrandt considered its representation of Washington's head a "standard likeness" and used it as a model for seventy-nine replicas (Bellion, *Citizen Spectator* 296–303, 325), one of which still hangs in the Oval Office today. The Peales consciously related their family history to the life of an exemplary revolutionary hero, and Rembrandt Peale's *Crayon* essay not only reminds its readers of that relationship but, in telling the probably invented story of Washington's deception, also erects a memorial to the artistic achievement of the Peale family's own "founding father." Rembrandt's essay, then, served him to publicly assert, once more, how closely the Peale family history was connected with the nation's history. Thus, while Rembrandt had a vested interest in sharing the story of Washington's deception with the *Crayon*'s readership, it is hard to imagine Charles Willson telling Rubens a similar tall tale about Sully's deception. Whatever the truth value of these accounts (the evidence remains inconclusive), the fact that these stories were told attests to both the father's and the son's valorization of deception.

But let me ask a more precise question: in painting *The Staircase Self-Portrait,* what did Peale find so attractive about creating a work that is not only supremely verisimilar but also combines two genres—the trompe l'oeil picture and the self-portrait? My tentative answer is this: First of all, it allowed him to remind his audience, toward the end of his life, of two of his major paintings: the self-portrait *The Artist in His Museum,* from which he borrows his own imposing life-size figure dressed in black, a detailed reproduction of the Long Room of the Philadelphia Museum including visitors, and the artisans' tools (the taxidermy kit in the earlier painting; the saddler's tools in the later one); and the trompe l'oeil painting *The Staircase Group,*

from which he borrows the artist figure carrying a palette and a maulstick, the painted flight of stairs, and the doorframe and wooden step—objects that he had already used in 1795 to enhance the illusionist effect. Second, Peale's incorporation of elements from the two earlier paintings in *The Staircase Self-Portrait* gave him the opportunity to review, once again, three major stations of his long career: from artisan to artist and museum owner. Third and most importantly, by painting a trompe l'oeil self-portrait, he was able to stage a triumphal self-presentation through an act of deception that testifies to his autonomy and creative powers. For a painter, to recreate the self, in the figure of a painter, in a painting that is so well executed that its likeness is prone to fool even fellow painters, is the ultimate assertion of creative accomplishment, the stuff of dreams. In fact, it is more than that: it is also a supreme expression of the artist's autonomy in life and art, for what we can witness in *The Staircase Self-Portrait* is a creation of the self through the self that has its analogue in the autobiography Peale wrote. And it is precisely by means of that creation of the self through the self that Peale presents himself as a self-made man in the most literal sense. This man, Peale's spectators are invited to conclude, is able to re-create himself in an act of artistic creativity that testifies to a subjectivity that is not God-made but self-made. From this perspective, the deception Peale's trompe l'oeil self-portrait aims at is not treachery; it is creation—and Peale takes the place of God. It is in this sense that *The Staircase Self-Portrait* returns to the trompe l'oeil techniques of *The Staircase Group* to reinforce a point already made via the imposing figure of the artist in the center of *The Artist in His Museum:* artists like Peale create worlds for us.

Of course, this is precisely what novelists do, too: they not only imitate the world; they create new, fictional worlds for us. But there is a difference: while early American fictions were widely denounced as deceptions, Peale's trompe l'oeil paintings were by many lauded precisely for their deceptive powers. Why is that so? The answer seems simple. Two very different kinds of deception are at work in novels and in trompe l'oeil paintings: while the former present worlds whose fictionality readily exposes them to charges of falsehood and dissimulation, the latter aim at re-presenting objects or, in Peale's case, real-world subjects with supreme verisimilitude. In an intellectual climate shaped by Scottish common sense philosophy, novels could easily be dismissed as fabrications and lies while trompe l'oeil paintings could more readily lay claim to truthfulness in their attempts to reproduce the world as it really is. Moreover, due to their visual nature, trompe l'oeils more easily lend themselves to the kind of precautionary honing of

skills of looking that Bellion speaks of whereas novels elicit cognitive processes of identification with characters that invite readers to recognize the contingency of their own ways of being in the world. This effect of novels on readers, which is primarily cognitive in nature rather than visual, cannot easily be channeled into socially useful behavior precisely because it invites readers vicariously to explore ways of living that often do not conform to dominant social norms (the coquette and the picaro are classic figures in that respect). Finally, while, in encouraging spectators to explore how the deception is achieved, trompe l'oeils invite their recipients to "undeceive" themselves in an effort to "retain[ ] agency in a world that seemed to be awash with forgers, counterfeiters, plagiarists, conspirators, impostors, and demagogues" (Bellion, *Citizen Spectator* 15), much of the popular appeal of novels depends on their ability to sustain their readers' willing suspension of disbelief, to keep them in a state of delusion.

This is not to say that the logics of presentation and representation that inform novels and trompe l'oeil paintings are categorically different. Depending on the theorists, art historians, and literary critics we read, we can understand both literary works and paintings as either presentations (or constructions) of new entities or as re-presentations of already existing entities—or as combinations of both. But particularly trompe l'oeil paintings do lay claim to a mimetic fidelity with which no literary work, not even the most verisimilar realist or naturalist text, can compete. Thus, if paintings such as *The Artist in His Museum* or *The Staircase Self-Portrait* succeed in portraying the artist as a creator of worlds, they do so by engaging in different degrees of mimetic reproduction. This doubleness of Peale's self-portraits, their simultaneous adherence to logics of mimesis as well as poiesis, introduces fissures into the artist's proud assertion of autonomy. These fissures are particularly deep in the painting Peale valued most. In a trompe l'oeil self-portrait such as *The Staircase Self-Portrait,* the artist's self-presentation and self-creation relies on a mastery of mimetic skill that paradoxically testifies to the primacy of a world not created by the artist, thus seemingly confirming Opie's harsh verdict that illusionist paintings are products of a "petty kind of imitative, monkey talent" (20). In its mimetic-poietic doubleness, deception through a trompe l'oeil self-portrait is both a supreme expression of artistic self-creation and, in its adherence to an older understanding of art as imitation, a radical negation of the possibility of autonomous self-fashioning. Thus, trompe l'oeil self-portraits sit on the fence between a modern understanding of art as imaginative creation and a premodern understanding of art as imitation of nature.

Moreover, in the case of both *The Staircase Self-Portrait* and *The Staircase Group,* it is not only the artist's autonomy that is at stake but also the autonomy of the work of art itself. As noted above, to enhance the illusionist effect, Peale in both cases decided to exhibit the painting supplemented with a real step and doorframe. While we could, of course, argue that these additional materials are part of the artworks themselves, Peale's decision to use them testifies to a certain insecurity on his part as to whether the paintings' objects and human figures were lifelike enough to make spectators mistake them for the real thing. It is as if Peale did not fully trust his power to deceive. Zeuxis and Parrhasius, after all, had no need for such auxiliaries. Once again, Peale's showmanship threatens to undermine his striving for autonomous selfhood. Finally, Peale's breaking of the proscenium for illusionist effect is subject to yet another limitation. In the theater, an actor who breaks the fourth wall dispels the illusion, creating a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* that jars the audience out of its immersion and complacency. By way of contrast, a painted figure that seems to step out of the canvas adds to the painting's illusionist spell. In media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's terms, breaking the proscenium is one technique for creating "transparent immediacy," a "style of visual representation whose goal is to make the viewer forget the presence of the medium (canvas, photographic film, cinema, and so on) and believe that he is in the presence of the objects of representation" (272–73). However, in the case of supremely verisimilar artworks such as trompe l'oeil paintings, the artist's desire for transparent immediacy is subject to a paradox insofar as it compels the viewer to ponder how the artist achieved such verisimilitude, thus drawing attention to the medium itself and breaking the illusionist spell. What Bolter and Grusin write about photorealism also applies to the trompe l'oeil paintings that photorealism remediates: "[Ralph] Goings and other photorealists seem to be returning to the strategy of transparency in order to achieve immediacy—except that in vigorously reforming earlier painting and photography, these artists make us intensely aware of the medium and ultimately of themselves as mediators. We look not only through the canvas, but very much *at* the canvas in order to discover how the careful effacing is achieved" (121). Like photorealist paintings, Peale's trompe l'oeils invite us to ask, "How did he do it?" And as soon as we ask that question, our attention is drawn to the medium itself and the illusionist spell is broken. In Bolter and Grusin's terms, all striving for ultimate transparent immediacy is in danger of being observed as an exercise in "hypermediacy," a "style of visual representation whose goal is to remind

the viewer of the medium" (272). They call this one of the paradoxes of remediation.

The paradoxical effect of Peale's trompe l'oeils is not, as Bellion suggests, categorically different from that enacted by another trompe l'oeil exhibited in the Peale Museum. In 1806, a writing master named Samuel Lewis donated two frames of checks, cards, and other papers to the museum. One of them, entitled *Originals,* displayed real objects while the other, entitled *Imitations,* presented a seemingly identical trompe l'oeil imitation of the *Originals.*

A drawing now named *A Deception* (fig. 6) is probably the extant illusionist half. Bellion argues that while "illusionist images such as the *Staircase Group* . . . coaxed the spectator to peer *through* material surfaces in search of truths obscured by veils of allegory and Federalist politics of diversion," Lewis's installation of the *Imitations* next to the *Originals* "introduced a novel way of grappling with matters of representation and spectatorship during the early republic. By representing the sorts of materials that enabled imitation to occur . . . and the ease with which it could assume the appearance of originals, the installation modeled the evaluative gaze of judgment as an antidote to deception" (*Citizen Spectator* 215). While Lewis's installation elicits the spectator's discerning gaze more openly and forcefully than any of Peale's trompe l'oeils, they are subject to the very same paradox that Bellion locates at the heart of Lewis's installation:

> Lewis's drawing functions simultaneously to stage and comment upon practices of duplicitous representation. A similar dialectic complicates the installation's cultivation of judgment. Promises of visual disclosure form an essential part of the game of trompe l'oeil. As art historians have observed, trompe l'oeil representation dangles a carrot before the viewers' eyes, seducing them with the notion that there are secrets to discover when in fact there is seldom a riddle to be solved. This equivocation is an important source of trompe l'oeils' ability to ensnare viewers and hold them in a state of fascinated vision. Just when it seems that a trompe l'oeil illusion has exhausted its tricks or laid bare its representational mechanisms, the image may pull spectators back to examine another detail, to puzzle through an apparent riddle, or simply to marvel at the artist's achievement of mimesis. (215–16)

What Bellion calls a "dialectic" is precisely what Bolter and Grusin identify as one of the paradoxes of remediation. What they teach us is that all illusionist art, including Lewis's installation as well as Peale's trompe l'oeils, "coaxe[s] the spectator to peer *through* material surfaces" *and* to scrutinize

those surfaces in the attempt to detect precisely how the deception is achieved. In the case of a trompe l'oeil self-portrait such as Peale's *Staircase Self-Portrait,* this doubleness threatens to undermine the artist's proud self-assertion.

Focusing on these three tensions in Peale's striving for autonomous selfhood through illusionist art—trompe l'oeil paintings' oscillation between

Figure 6. *A Deception,* Samuel Lewis, c. 1805–6. Pen and brush and black and brown inks, watercolor, blue-green matte opaque paint, gold metallic paint, and graphite, with scratching out, on woven paper, 16 × 10¾". (Courtesy of Philadelphia Museum of Art; gift of McNeil Americana Collection, 2012)

transparent immediacy and hypermediacy, their paradoxical mimetic-poietic doubleness, and Peale's dependence on supplementary materials to achieve the desired illusionist effect—gives us a new key to understanding the artistic competition that evolved between Charles Willson Peale and his son Raphaelle Peale, who was arguably the family's most talented painter. Previous discussions of their rivalry have focused on the connections between several of the father's paintings—in particular those I discuss above—and the son's most famous trompe l'oeil, *Venus Rising from the Sea: A Deception (After the Bath)* (c. 1822).

Ward makes much of the chronology of Charles Willson's *The Artist in His Museum* and Raphaelle's *Venus* (fig. 7), noting that the father started working on his painting by August 1822, only three months after the son had first exhibited his trompe l'oeil. And indeed, several correspondences between the two paintings seem to suggest that the father painted his work in direct response to the son's.[13] As Ward notes, both artists use pieces of cloth (a red curtain and a white kerchief, respectively) to control the spectator's gaze,[14] but the father's act of unveiling and self-presentation contrasts sharply with the son's concealment and partial effacement of the painting's subject: "The paintings are dueling images, and Charles Willson Peale was firing back at Raphaelle in an attack on his eldest son's nihilism" (165).[15] Yet these two paintings work very differently: Raphaelle Peale does not paint a curtain but a delicate piece of cloth, whose inscription with the artist's name belies the self-effacement Ward attributes to him. Moreover, the son does not paint a self-portrait, and the father does not strive for the trompe l'oeil illusionism his son achieves. It is for the latter reason, finally, that Ward's claim that father and son reenact the competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius through these two paintings seems rather tenuous. The classical rivalry revolves around two trompe l'oeil paintings that deceive different kinds of spectators through different means. This is only partially the case with *The Artist in His Museum* and *Venus:* while father and son do, as Ward suggests, use different means (unveiling and veiling, respectively), only the son aims straight at spectators' deception. The two paintings, then, have less in common than Ward suggests, and I argue that it makes much more sense to consider the lost *Staircase Self-Portrait,* which Charles Willson completed in 1823, the year following the first exhibition of the *Venus,* the father's principal response to the son's art. While Ward merely hints at this connection, I believe that it holds the key to the two artists' diverging understandings of the nature and function of art.

Figure 7. *Venus Rising from the Sea: A Deception (After the Bath),* Raphaelle Peale, 1822. Oil on canvas, 29⅛ × 24⅛". (Courtesy of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art; purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 34–147; photo: Jamison Miller)

If the father felt himself a Parrhasius when fellow artists such as Thomas Sully fell for his optical illusion, the son seems less focused on his painting's effect on spectators than on its successful reenactment of Parrhasius' artistic feat: the painting of a supremely verisimilar piece of cloth. While the father makes his bid for artistic supremacy with reference to his peers'

reception of his art, the son asserts his creative powers through the artwork itself and its embeddedness in the history of art. In this, the son's art is more modern in the sense that it is more self-sufficient and self-reflexive. The father's sense of elation at Sully's deception—an elation that would have struck his eldest son as embarrassingly immature whether Sully was really deceived or not—likewise testifies to an older understanding of art that does not yet clearly distinguish between the different purposes of art and the public entertainment in which Peale also trafficked. In the eyes of his eldest son, as Charles Willson Peale's showmanship gets the upper hand, it threatens to diminish his art and turn it into sophisticated trickery. To his father's gift for entertainment, Raphaelle opposes a cleverly self-referential art that assumes its meaning exclusively within the system of art itself, with reference to Parrhasius's piece of cloth and Valentine Green's engraving of James Barry's *The Birth of Venus* (1772), from which he borrows, as art historian Dorinda Evans has shown, the hair, left arm, and right foot of the Venus figure as well as the flowers on the ground. Raphaelle Peale's work does not, as both Ward (163–67) and Stein (175) suggest, aim at hermeticism, let alone nihilism. Rather, he strives to create art in its modern, autonomous sense: the artwork as the medium of the functionally differentiated system of art. This striving for autonomy also becomes possible because, unlike *The Staircase Self-Portrait, Venus* is not a self-portrait. As such, the son's painting is not subject to the paradoxical mimetic-poietic doubleness that curbs the autonomy of the father's trompe l'oeil self-portrait.

Raphaelle Peale's striving for artistic autonomy is even more pronounced in a number of the 150 still lifes that he painted against his father's express wish that he and Rembrandt succeed him as portrait painters.[16] Alexander Nemerov has argued that the uncanny nature of many of Raphaelle Peale's still-life paintings derives from their objects' embodiment of human corporeality, their visualization of "the meat of the human body" (122). Drawing on the work of the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Nemerov notes that, more than any other paintings of the period, Peale's still lifes exemplify a general truth about human sense perception: "We project our bodies into a world they make palpable; in this world our bodies 'adhere,' sticking as it were to the surface of things, and thus reversibly give back to us a sense of our own embodiment" (32). These intertwined processes of the projection and reflection of human corporeality through the objects of Peale's still lifes acquire an uncanny quality in paintings such as *Fruit in a Silver Basket* (1814), *Still Life with Celery and Wine* (1816), *Corn and Cantaloupe* (c. 1813), *Melons and Morning Glories* (1813; fig. 8),

Still Life with Watermelon (1822), *Cutlet and Vegetables* (1816), and *Still Life with Steak* (1817; fig. 9).

These paintings' meticulously detailed and sensuous decaying fruits, split-open melons, and raw pieces of meat gaze back at us, evoking starkly visceral and, in the case of the melon paintings and *Still Life with Steak,* also darkly sexualized images of the human body "as *nature morte*" (Nemerov 122). In that, Nemerov argues, they "counter the new models of selfhood" (4) that began to emerge with the rise to dominance of liberal-individualist notions of subjectivity in the early nineteenth century: "In these more 'anatomical' paintings, . . . the embodiedness is colder and more deathly, the imagery more bloody and blank, and the relation to selfhood more a matter of failure than refusal. In the dead and even dissected thing, Raphaelle found and failed to repress a visceral image of his own nonidentity, which returns here, barely displaced, in a series of jagged and ripped red objects" (4). Nemerov may well be right in arguing that in these paintings—whose dark corporeality owes as much to contemporary anatomical discourse and
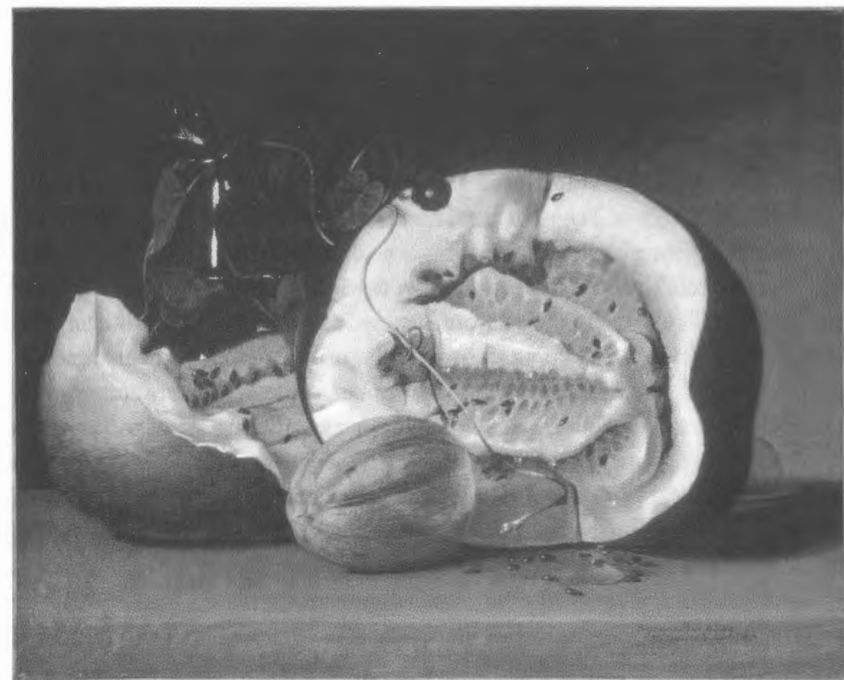
Figure 8. *Melons and Morning Glories,* Raphaelle Peale, 1813. Oil on canvas, 20¾ × 25¾". (Photo credit: Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC/Art Resource, NY)
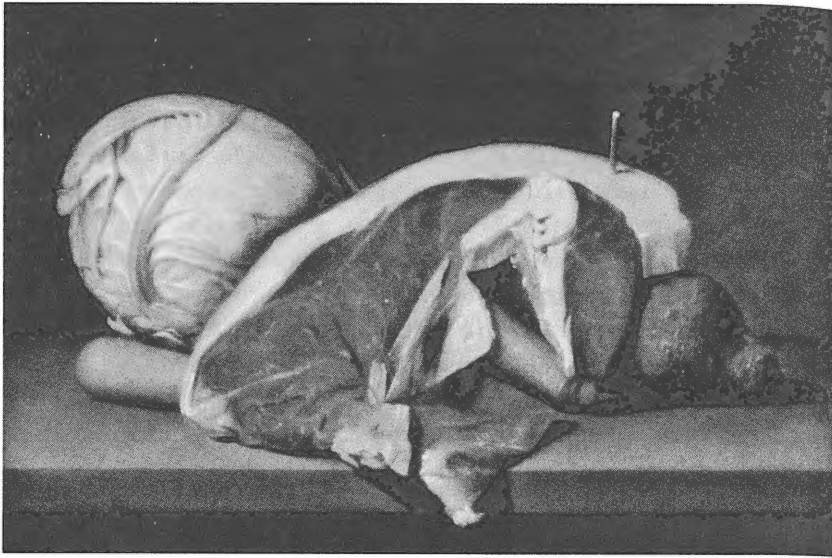
Figure 9. *Still Life with Steak,* Raphaelle Peale, c. 1817. Oil on panel, 13⅜ × 19½". (Photo credit: Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute/Art Resource, NY)

the emerging medical practice of dissection as it does to Peale's very personal struggle with alcoholism and gout—the artist "imagin[ed] his own dead dissected body," thus finding "the ultimate sign of failed selfhood" (143) and countering emergent ideologies of the self-determined, autonomous individual. But if these images deny the possibility of autonomy in the social and economic sense, they also assert autonomy in the aesthetic sense. In fixating their spectators' attention on the luminous materiality and sensuous immediacy of the objects on display rather than any world beyond the artwork, they refuse to yield to the allegorical modes of interpretation that his father's paintings more readily elicit—modes of interpretation that not only threaten to diminish the autonomy of art but also cannot grasp the function of autonomous art, which "turns on creating a difference between two realities or, to put it differently, on providing the world with an opportunity to observe itself" (Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* 146). In their morbidity and negativity, Raphaelle Peale's still lifes reject the world of social utility and mobility that his father represents.

Raphaelle Peale's *Venus* comments on the artist's relation to different types of autonomy in a similarly nuanced way. If this shrouded painting is indeed "the self-portrait of a faceless, voiceless no one" (Nemerov 77) that comments on Raphaelle Peale's own "failure of selfhood" and "social

nonentity" (76) as an alcoholic who frequented brothels, who could not sustain his family with his art, and who eventually drank himself to death (Miller, "Father and Son"), then the painting's self-referentiality and confident self-inscription in the history of art simultaneously asserts autonomy in the aesthetic sense. It does this by remaining at a distance from what the artist's brother Rembrandt Peale in 1820 diagnosed as the "useless excrescences, local expressions, obscure meanings, absurd combinations and unnatural combinations" ("Original Thoughts" 851) of much allegorical art.

Such convergences between the denial of personal autonomy and the assertion of artistic autonomy are only seemingly paradoxical. With the characteristically modern division of Western societies into self-organizing function systems, the fault lines of functional differentiation begin to cut right through subjects with the effect that we "suffer," in Schiller's words, "all the contagions and afflictions of society" (*Aesthetic Education* 27). What political economists, sociologists, and psychologists describe as alienation and fragmented subjectivity is but one of the effects of functional differentiation on subjects. Perhaps no discourse illustrates this better than that revolving around the figure of the "starving artist," epitomized in the popular imagination by Vincent Van Gogh and immortalized in Carl Spitzweg's painting *Der arme Poet* (*The Poor Poet;* 1839), Van Gogh's *La chambre à coucher* (*The Bedroom;* 1888), and Franz Kafka's short story "Ein Hungerkünstler" ("A Hunger Artist"; 1922). In this quintessentially modern figure, symbolic capital (prestige, honor, and social recognition through, in these cases, artistic autonomy) is predicated on the lack of economic capital. As Pierre Bourdieu puts it, "The literary or artistic field is at all times the site of a struggle between two principles of hierarchization: the heteronomous principle, favourable to those who dominate the field economically and politically (e.g. 'bourgeois art') and the autonomous principle (e.g. 'art for art's sake'), which those of its advocates who are least endowed with specific capital tend to identify with a degree of independence from the economy, seeing temporal failure as a sign of election and success as a sign of compromise" (*Field* 40). Unlike his father, whose striving for artistic autonomy was intimately bound up with bourgeois self-making, Raphaelle Peale is a modern artist in the sense that he disavows his father's conflation of the search for artistic and economic autonomy, choosing the lowly and unprofitable art form of the still life, thus "disengag[ing]" himself "from the position he was expected to assume as a professional artist" in "a rejection of the aesthetic and, by extension, the values and world view of his father" (Ward and Hart 108–9). If, partly as a result of this, his subjectivity

is as split as the melons he paints, this is also a marker of his modernity as an artist.

For the father, painting was not the sole artistic medium that served the intertwined purposes of self-portraiture, artistic deception, and self-fashioning. In 1787, Charles Willson Peale sculpted a waxwork self-portrait that apparently deceived the clergyman Manasseh Cutler. Ten years later, he created wax sculptures of Meriwether Lewis as well as of Blue Jacket and Red Pole, the Shawnee war and village chiefs. Moreover, "eight other wax figures were added to make a group of contrasting races of mankind, completed in August 1797: a 'Carib, or Native Indian of Gu[i]ana—South America,' a native of the 'Oonakaska Islands on the north west coast of America,' natives of Kamchatka, of the Sandwich Islands, 'Otaheite,' of the Gold Coast of Africa, a Chinese laborer, and a Chinese mandarin" (Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum* 92). It was these ten wax figures of ethnic others that Washington was on his way to see when he allegedly fell for the illusionism of *The Staircase Group* (Bellion, *Citizen Spectator* 64n1, 219–20).[17] Placing Peale's self-portrait in wax in the context of these other wax sculptures helps us to see that Peale's attempt at self-fashioning by way of wax is riven by tensions, too. No preservation of a man's body by means of wax can ever fully shake off the morbid history of the art form, which "derive[s] from the tradition in antiquity of bearing funeral effigies of deceased leaders" (Harley 3). If Peale's sculptures of Native Americans cater to the topos of the vanishing Indian—a topos that Peale's museum further reinforced through its exhibition of Native American remains such as "a dressed skin of the leg and thigh of an Indian, killed in the march of General Sullivan into the Western country during the late war" (Peale, qtd. in Fernandez-Sacco 591)—they do that also because *all* wax sculptures remind us of the mortality of the body even as they aim at preserving it for posterity.

Wax Sculptures

Perhaps Abigail Adams intuited that nexus between wax sculptures and death when she visited an exhibition by one of the most intriguing early American female artists. Reporting on the experience in a letter to her husband, she writes, "There was an old clergyman sitting reading a paper in the middle of the room; and though I went prepared to see strong representations of real life, I was effectually deceived in this wax figure for ten minutes and was finally told it was only wax" (178). Adams here comments on

the visual art of Patience Lovell Wright, a highly popular early American wax sculptor whose work antedates Marie Tussaud's by about thirty years. Wright, the earliest artist under consideration in the present book, created wax effigies of British and American public figures ranging from King George III to Benjamin Franklin—an interesting combination in itself—and took her traveling waxwork exhibit to Charleston, Philadelphia, New York, London, and Paris. Sadly, her sculpture of William Pitt (fig. 10) is the only surviving specimen of her art.[18]

At 5'1, *William Pitt, Earl of Chatham* (1778) is a life-size wax effigy that is dressed in bright red parliamentary robes with white fur trimmings, a dark purple silk velvet waistcoat and waistcoat sleeves, sleeve ruffles, white silk stockings, (parts of) a white linen shirt, black leather buckle shoes, and a wig made of brown human hair. Wright had completed a first version of the effigy by November 1775. After Pitt's death in 1778, the Gentlemen of the Choir of Westminster commissioned her to form a wax bust and hands of Pitt. From September 29, 1778 onward, the effigy, now robed in clothes made by a Mr. Stone, was exhibited before the public in Westminster Abbey. Together with other wax effigies, it was kept safe in the Piccadilly Circus underground station during World War II and returned to the abbey's Undercroft Museum in 1951, where it is still on exhibition today, sharing a glass case with another effigy by an early nineteenth-century woman sculptor: Catherine Andras's *Horatio, Viscount Nelson* (1806) (Harvey and Mortimer 167–77).

Many of today's visitors to the museum briefly pause to scrutinize Lord Nelson's face and clothes, casting at most a furtive glance at Wright's sculpture before moving on. The earthen tones of Pitt's right hand and head—which are the only waxen parts visible to spectators, the left hand being hidden beneath the parliamentary robe—evoke less morbid an atmosphere than the deathlike paleness of the five royal wax effigies exhibited in an adjacent glass case: King William III; Queen Mary II; Queen Anne; Catherine, Duchess of Buckingham; and Robert, Marquess of Normandy. But the grey tint that has begun to cover Pitt's face since the figure's full conservation in 1992–93 (Harvey and Mortimer 177) shows signs of the material's deterioration that fit in with the solemnity of a dimly lit museum filled with funeral effigies. There is an eerie quality to Wright's only remaining sculpture for yet another reason. While financial and balance considerations dictate that hardly any wax figure is made completely out of wax, *William Pitt, Earl of Chatham* is an extreme case. Here is how it looks from the inside:

Figure 10. *William Pitt, Earl of Chatham*, Patience Wright, 1778. Wax effigy, life-size.
(© Dean and Chapter of Westminster)

The head of wax is attached to the shoulders by cardboard strips. The trunk, of wood, has been made up from a smaller, presumably older one cut through at the hips with a block of wood inserted to increase the height by approximately 11 in. The shoulders are pieced out with cardboard, and the forearms, since 1933, made of wood. The left leg is in one with the trunk, the right leg has been cut and turned outwards, and the thigh made with small pieces of wood held by string. The body is supported at the back by an iron which fastens to a wing screw in a cavity in the trunk. The hands are of wax, veined and tined by coloured underslips, and with hairs on the surface. (Harvey and Mortimer 170)

Anthony Harvey and Richard Mortimer quote Sheila Landi, the textile conservator who conserved the figure in 1992–93, to the effect that Wright's and her carpenters' construction resulted "in very ungainly proportions" (169) that testify to her makeshift reuse of the scaffolding of an older effigy from the sixteenth or seventeenth century. It is not only Wright's recycling of an older effigy that detracts from the re-creation and preservation of a unique body that wax sculptors aim at; a look behind Pitt's clothes also reveals the hollowness of an artifice that is designed to preserve the fullness of a living man's body. *William Pitt, Earl of Chatham* is no vanitas figure, but it is, quite literally, vain, empty.

Wright's popularity in her time owed as much to her artistic skills as to her outspoken personality and modeling technique. To keep the material warm and malleable, Wright shaped her wax busts underneath her apron between her thighs before spectacularly bringing her creations into the world, thus aligning herself with a modern aesthetics of original creation as it was being theorized by contemporaneous European aestheticians. Wright was a controversial figure who claimed she addressed the British king and queen as "George" and "Charlotte" when they sat for her; who entertained pro-American activists and artists in her London workshop; and who allegedly worked as a spy in London during the War of Independence, sending—as one version of the story has it—messages hidden in wax figures back to America (Sellers, "Patience Lovell Wright" 86–87, 90, 113). Wright's life and work highlight a number of important issues in early American society and politics such as the representation of power, the social status of women in general and female artists in particular, and the political relations between Britain and its American colonies.

In revolutionary America, Wright's use of wax sculptures for political ends was no exception. In responding to the Stamp Act of 1765, "protestors . . .

hung and burned effigies, not only of the local tax agents, but also of the British prime minister, George Grenville" (Bjelajac 115). During the War of Independence, "there were mock funeral marches for King George III, theatrical performances, and military reenactments" (Miller et al. 139). In 1780, Charles Willson Peale orchestrated, as we have seen, the public hanging in effigy of General Benedict Arnold. Such political uses of effigies continued well after Wright's death in 1786. One case in point are the fierce debates surrounding the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars: "Republican opposition to the 1795 Jay Treaty between the United States and Britain also alarmed Federalists. During protests, Francophiles burned Fisher Ames in effigy and beheaded and exploded effigies of John Jay" (Cleves 67). Wright's effigies, then, insert themselves into a history of political art in ways that highlight the intimate connection between aesthetics and politics. To date, though, only little has been published on this fascinating figure.[19]

Abigail Adams actively disliked Wright for her "slattern" appearance, overfamiliarity, and generally liberal manners, referring to her as the "queen of sluts" (177–78). Still, Adams's report on her visit to one of Wright's exhibitions testifies to an uneasiness with the artist's work that is not primarily gender-specific and that links up with my discussion of early American novels and paintings. More so than either literary texts or even trompe l'oeils, the medium of wax by virtue of its plasticity and color allowed Wright to create works of art of supreme verisimilitude that deceived their observers into believing they saw flesh-and-blood human beings. An anecdote retold by Wright's biographer Charles Coleman Sellers testifies to the deceptively lifelike nature of her sculptures. Having purchased a bust of Benjamin Franklin from Wright in 1782, her friend Elkanah Watson decided to invite acquaintances to his uncle-in-law's house with a card that suggested they were to meet the American celebrity there. When the visitors, who included a personal friend of Franklin's, were shown to the drawing room, they encountered him sitting at a desk reading a book and dressed in slippers, a morning gown, and a nightcap. Already somewhat irritated at Franklin's inappropriate dress, the visitors grew offended when he completely ignored their repeated attempts to start a conversation. Yet their offense turned to shock when their host decided to teach Franklin manners: "Rapidly approaching him, to our sudden dismay, he seized his nightcap, threw it up to the ceiling, knocked his spectacles from his nose, boxed his ears," and only then "undid his garment, and discovered a '*Man of Wax*'" (Sellers, *Artist and Spy* 170). In discussing this anecdote,

Jay Fliegelman aptly calls "Wright's bustos . . . a kind of confidence game" (*Declaring Independence* 87). Paradoxically, in both Watson's spoof on his guests and Abigail Adams's visit to Wright's waxworks, it is the very truthfulness of Wright's art that renders it deceptive. When the *London Magazine* designated her "the Promethean Modeller" in its November 1775 issue (qtd. in Sellers, *Artist and Spy* 94), it testified precisely to that doubleness: like Ovid's Prometheus, Wright recreates human shapes, and like Hesiod's Prometheus, she is a deceitful trickster.

In their deceptive truthfulness, Wright's wax sculptures function analogously to Charles Willson Peale's trompe l'oeil paintings. But the two artists faced very different responses. While Peale largely received praise for his beautiful deceptions, Wright's work met with troubled responses such as Abigail Adams's, which testify to the power of wax sculptures to unsettle their spectators. Wright's sculptures raised deep concerns about the truth value of art and its ability to deceive. Like novels, wax sculptures trouble cultural authorities because they try to pass themselves off as something they are not: imagined worlds as real worlds; wax as flesh. Thus, Bellion's assertion that the visual culture of the era "was stubbornly grounded in the empirical philosophy of the eighteenth century, which espoused that the sensory organs could be honed to ascertain truth and identify deception" (*Citizen Spectator* 27) needs to be qualified. The literary culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries may indeed have been more pervasively shot through with anxieties concerning the reliability of sensory perception than the visual culture Bellion focuses on. But coming to both Peale's trompe l'oeils and Wright's wax effigies via readings of novels such as Brown's *Wieland,* Tenney's *Female Quixotism,* and Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* predisposes me to emphasize less Peale's and Wright's honing of their spectators' visual skills than their probing of anxieties about the fallibility of sensory perception.

Adams's response to Wright's sculptures also reminds us that, in late eighteenth-century America, reflections on the nature and function of art were by no means confined to artistic practice and theory. The moral status and truth value of art were hotly contested issues that occupied not only artists and aestheticians but also politicians, clergymen, social and political arbiters of various kinds, and the general public. This is most readily apparent in the angry responses fiction called forth, but it is by no means confined to the medium of the book. In their deceptiveness, early American novels, trompe l'oeils, and sculptures speak to anxieties concerning the reliability of perception that are registered not only by eighteenth-century

European aestheticians such as Baumgarten, Schiller, Burke, and Hume but also, and in a much more visceral sense, by contemporaneous observers of and participants in the American Revolution.

Wright's life and work highlight such convergences of aesthetics and politics. If she indeed worked as an American spy, her deceptions were both political and aesthetic in nature. While her biographer's assertion that the legend about Wright hiding secret messages in the wax duplicates she sent back to America for exhibition is "unsubstantiated but credible" (Sellers, "Patience Lovell Wright" 686) hardly bolsters the tale's believability,[20] we can understand how enticing it is to believe in such an act of duplicity in a double sense. So let us, for a moment, imagine that Wright used her artistic medium of deception (wax) as a medium—in the sense of a channel of communication—to conceal, in an act of deception, her transmission of another medium of deception (the secret letter). Irrespective of its truth value, this thought experiment helps us understand the status of deception in the eighteenth century as not only a political and moral but also an aesthetic category. The antifictionists were as aware of this as were contemporary commentators on Wright's sculptures.

Another letter discussing Wright's work brings out this intertwinement of aesthetic and political acts of deception with even greater clarity. That letter was sent to Abigail Adams from Philadelphia on May 10, 1777:

> The Day before Yesterday, I took a Walk, with my Friend Whipple to Mrs. Wells', the Sister of the famous Mrs. Wright, to see her Waxwork. She has two Chambers filled with it. In one, the Parable of the Prodigal Son is represented. The Prodigal is prostrate on his Knees, before his Father whose Joy and Grief, and Compassion all appear in his Eyes and Face, struggling with each other. A servant Maid, at the Fathers command, is pulling down from a Closet Shelf, the choicest Robes, to cloath the Prodigal, who is all in Rags. At an outward Door, in a Corner of the Room stands the elder Brother, chagrined at this Festivity, a Servant coaxing him to come in. A large Number of Guests are placed round the Room. In another Chamber, are the Figures of Chatham, Franklin, Sawbridge, Mrs. Maccaulay, and several others. At a Corner is a Miser, sitting at his Table, weighing his Gold, his Bag upon one Side of the Table, and a Thief behind him, endeavouring to pilfer the Bag.
>
> There is Genius, as well as Taste and Art, discovered in this Exhibition: But I must confess, the whole Scaene was disagreeable to me. The Imitation of Life was too faint, and I seemed to be walking among a Group of Corps's, standing, sitting, and walking, laughing, singing, crying, and weeping. This Art I think will make but little Progress in the World.

> Another Historical Piece I forgot, which is Elisha, restoring to Life the Shunamite's Son. The Joy of the Mother, upon Discerning the first Symptoms of Life in the Child, is pretty strongly expressed.
>
> Dr. Chevots Waxwork, in which all the various Parts of the human Body are represented, for the Benefit of young Students in Anatomy and of which I gave you a particular Description, a Year or two ago, were much more pleasing to me. Wax is much fitter to represent dead Bodies, than living ones. (P. Smith, *Letters* 7: 58–59)

The author of this letter is Abigail Adams's husband. By May 1777, John Adams had emerged as a central figure of the Second Continental Congress, which had approved the Declaration of Independence less than a year ago and was now steering America through the Revolution. This political context is crucial for understanding Adams's letter to his wife. Written as they were during the American Revolution, the letters that delegates to the Second Continental Congress wrote are full of references to acts of deception of various kinds (political, military, personal) and in a variety of media (speech, newspapers, books).[21] In the year John Adams wrote the lines quoted above to his wife, his correspondence and diary entries abounded in such references. Reading some of these documents allows us to situate Abigail and John Adams's different responses to Wright's work in a cultural context in which questions concerning the truthfulness of appearances were of vital importance.

Take Adams's speculations concerning the intentions of General William Howe—the commander in chief of the British Army in North America from 1776 to 1778—as an example. In a letter to his wife written about two months after the letter quoted above and dated July 30, 1777, Adams writes:

> Howes Fleet has been at Sea, these 8 days. We know not where he is gone. We are puzzling ourselves in vain, to conjecture his Intention. Some guess he is gone to Cheasapeak, to land near Susquehanna and cross over Land to Albany to meet Burgoine. But they might as well imagine them gone round Cape horn into the South Seas to land at California, and march across the Continent to attack our back settlements.
>
> Others think them gone to Rhode Island, others think they mean only a Deception and to return to the North River. A few days will reveal their Scheme. (P. Smith, *Letters* 7: 396)

Adams's letter testifies to the atmosphere of rumors, guesswork, and uncertainty that characterizes times of war—and which is so well captured in Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*. Yet unlike Crane's Henry

Fleming—whose various acts of self-fashioning all ultimately collapse under the horror of war—Adams fashions himself as a detached observer of such speculations.[22] For those who possess the necessary mental equilibrium—and, I may add, the necessary physical distance from the battlefield—it is idle to fret over the enemy's intentions since his deceptions will be revealed in time. This is the letter of a statesman assuring his wife that he has everything under control.

But a diary entry of the same year speaks a different language. On September 21, 1777, Adams confides to his private notes his fear that the stratagems of Generals Howe and Burgoyne will be successful and not only put the delegates at Philadelphia in danger but also enable the enemy forces to capture Albany, New York:

> [Howe] will wait for his Fleet in Delaware River. He will keep open his Line of Communication with Brunswick, and at last, by some Deception or other will slip unhurt into the City.
>
> Burgoine has crossed Hudsons River, by which Gen. Gates thinks, he is determined at all Hazards to push for Albany, which G. Gates says he will do all in his Power to prevent him from reaching. But I confess I am anxious for the Event, for I fear he will deceive Gates, who seems to be acting the same timorous, defensive Part, which has involved us in so many Disasters. Oh, Heaven! grant Us one great Soul! (Smith, *Letters* 8: 8–9)

If we compare Adams's two letters to his wife to this diary entry, we find that the self-assured tone of the former differs markedly from the anxious mood of the latter. Even though the letters are concerned with two different social realms—art and politics—they share a similar attitude toward deception. From them, Adams emerges as a savvy and assertive man who cannot be duped easily. Appearances do not deceive an Adams, be it in art or politics.

Yet if we keep the anxious mood of the diary entry in mind, it appears as if the realm of art provided for Adams a safer space than politics, a space within which judgments concerning the truth value of objects could be made with a higher degree of certainty. Rather than letting himself be taken in and troubled by the verisimilitude of Wright's figures, as his wife evidently was, he postures as the distanced observer who sees through it all: "The Imitation of Life was too faint." Moreover, by favorably comparing Dr. Abraham Chovet's anatomical wax models to Wright's creations, he assigns wax figures their proper place in the realm of science, where reason and the acquisition of useful knowledge "for the Benefit of young Students in Anatomy" rather than deception are the order of the day. In praising Chovet—whose wax figures were exhibited in Philadelphia's Anatomical Museum years before the use of human cadavers for dissection by anatomists such as Dr. John Godman and Dr. Joseph Parrish became more widespread (Nemerov 103–40)—Adams privileges the educational use of wax over its aesthetic force, thus pressing art back into the utilitarian straightjacket eighteenth-century aestheticians and artists ever so cautiously and inconsistently sought to emancipate it from. Adams's gesture at the same time seeks to contain the troubling association of artistic and maternal creation Wright's idiosyncratic modeling technique evokes. Finally, Adams deftly aligns himself with the supposedly manlier pursuits of science as opposed to the more feminine pursuits of the arts.[23] Thus, not unlike the antifictionists in their eagerness to expose the falsity of fiction, and not unlike novelists in their insistence on the social utility and truthfulness of their tales, Adams seeks to contain the potentially disturbing effects of deception by art in general and female art in particular.

Yet art cannot be tamed that easily, and the medium of wax still hovers uneasily between the worlds of art and science. This doubleness of wax sculptures bears witness to the process of functional differentiation, which was still in the making in the late eighteenth century. Like fiction, wax sculpture still had to find its place within the emerging system of art, still was not quite ready to "establish[ ] itself on one side of the distinction Being/Appearance or Truth/Beauty and le[ave] the other side to science" (Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* 266). That this is as true for the reception of art as it is for its production comes out clearly if we compare John Adams's attempt to relegate wax sculptures to the scientific realm with the *London Magazine*'s celebration of Wright as the genius through whom nature creates art: "Mrs. Wright . . . has been reserved by the hand of nature to produce a new style of picturing, superior to statuary, and peculiar to herself and the honour of America. For her compositions, in likeness to their originals, surpass paint or any other method of delineation: they live with such perfect animation, that we are more surprised than charmed, for we see art perfect as nature" (qtd. in Sellers, *Artist and Spy* 95). Yet to set up a clear opposition between Adams and the *London Magazine* journalist—to state that the former proclaims the heteronomy of art while the latter insists on its autonomy—would be too facile. A premodern/modern tension already obtains in the magazine article, which merges two different conceptions of art: art as original creation; art as imitation of nature. While the former conception gestures toward Romantic autonomy aesthetics, the

latter is indebted to metaphysical theories of artistic beauty as imitation of the divine order of nature. As do early American novels and trompe l'oeil paintings, Wright's sculptures testify to the liminal status of art in the late eighteenth century.

While the ongoing process of functional differentiation and the American Revolution provide two important historical contexts for making sense of John Adams's response to Wright's work, a second look at that response reveals anxieties that may have been triggered by the medium of wax itself. Indeed, the words Adams uses to describe his experiences in Wright's exhibition do not quite bear out the note of self-assuredness he seeks to strike. For one, the rapid shift from art to science does not erase Adams's disturbing memory of having walked "among a Group of Corps's." In fact, it reinforces it since Adams's praise of Chovet's anatomical models is based on his conviction that "wax is much fitter to represent dead Bodies, than living ones." Ostensibly, of course, Wright's wax effigies are to Adams's mind like dead bodies because they are but imperfect copies of living ones. It is the static nature of wax effigies that makes their representation of life a copy of death. As Elisabeth Bronfen points out in *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (1992), all artistic representations of life entail the transformation of animate into inanimate matter since they arrest life in immutable form. It is in this sense that "a translation of body into image may kill" (117). In the case of wax, this is further underlined by the historical origins of the art form.

In a wide-ranging essay on "collections of frightful objects" (472), Wolfgang Munsky outlines how, since the fourteenth century, wax effigies began to replace the embalmed, cured, boiled out, or mummified bodies of rulers that had been displayed during funeral rites. While the shift from body to wax sanitized a practice that had been accompanied by terrible smells, awful sights, and considerable health risks on the part of physicians and preparators, wax figures retained their association with death. Chambers of horrors began to exhibit wax sculptures of sick, dead, and decaying bodies, hacked-off body parts, and murder and execution scenes (473–83). For Arthur Schopenhauer, *all* wax figures retain this morbid aura:

> If . . . deceptive imitation of the actual thing were the purpose of art, wax figures would necessarily occupy the front rank. Thus they appear to give not merely the form, but also the matter as well; and so they produce the illusion of our having before us the thing itself. Therefore, instead of having the true work of art that leads us away from what exists only once and never again, i.e. the individual, to what always exists, i.e. the mere form or Idea, we have the

wax figure giving us apparently the individual himself and hence that which exists only once and never again, yet without that which lends value to such a fleeting existence, that is, without life. Therefore the wax figure causes us to shudder since its effect is like that of a stiff corpse. (422)

Schopenhauer embeds his reflections on wax figures in an aesthetic discussion that accords only those artifacts the status of artworks that separate form from matter. Written in the mid-nineteenth century, Schopenhauer's essay still remains wedded to a premodern notion of art as mimesis of Platonic ideal forms. For our discussion of Patience Wright's work, Schopenhauer's insight that it is the very materiality of wax figures that makes them morbid resonates. In a sense, then, and with the history of wax effigies and Schopenhauer's reflections in mind, whenever Wright issues forth one of her creations from underneath her apron, she gives birth to a stillborn child. Wright herself suggests a reading along these lines when she contrasts her corporeal performance of artistic birthing with a more morbid, verbal account of the nature of her work: "You have heard of the Witch of Endor. I am a descendant of that old lady's, and can raise the dead as well as she could" (qtd. in Sellers, *Artist and Spy* 204).

If we return to the materiality of wax once more, an additional layer of complexity is added to the issues at hand since wax is, in a very real, material sense, not immutable. That wax is "solid at room temperatures" but "soften[s] or liquef[ies] at higher temperatures" (Harley 1), Wright had to experience the hardest way when, in June 1771, a fire destroyed many of her waxworks in New York (Sellers, "Patience Lovell Wright" 686). Wax is, moreover, subject to a number of additional processes of deterioration: "A temperature of just 30°C can cause slumping while excessive cold can lead to embrittlement and cracking. Shrinkage and eventual cracking may also occur when important plasticizers are leached out of some waxes as a result of fluctuations in temperature; these plasticizers may be seen as white crystals on the surface. In relative humidities over 65%, wax may grow mould, which also attacks important structural elements. Oxidation, catalyzed by light, causes darkening in wax and can lead to structural changes and hardening" (Harley 6). The grey tint of Wright's sculpture of the Earl of Chatham, the only remaining testimony to her art, bears witness to such corrosive processes. Paradoxically, then, while the initial act of artistic creation already "kills" life into art, the subsequent deterioration of the medium due to environmental factors loosens the deathlike stability of the artwork only to consign it to further decay. In other words, it is the

dialectics of fixity and mutability played out in Wright's wax effigies that makes them doubly uncanny. The Adams's troubled responses to Wright's art may register something of that morbid doubleness, and John Adams's relegation of wax sculpture to the world of science in an ironic twist only increases its uncanniness.

John Adams's preference of Chovet over Wright, of science over art, returns us one final time to the question of the positioning of art within late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century culture. As we have seen, Abigail's and John's divergent responses to Wright's wax effigies testify to the porous boundary between art and science, bearing witness to the fact that art had not emerged as a fully functionally differentiated system yet. In the case of Wright's work, the incompleteness of this process manifests itself in a close intertwinement of deceptions in the realm of art and deceptions in other social realms. John Adams's now anxious, now assertive reflections on both political and aesthetic acts of deception likewise remind us that Wright's and the Adamses' world was a world of transition in art as well as politics. What they also remind us of is that the contradictoriness, instability, and deceptiveness of novels, trompe l'oeil paintings, and wax sculptures generate cultural anxieties that cannot be interpreted within a narrowly political framework alone but also need to be read as signs of a specific moment in the history of art. The wax sculptures of the revolutionary period as well as the trompe l'oeils and novels of the early republic belong to a time of transition in the sociopolitical as well as the aesthetic domains. Few documents of late eighteenth-century America illustrate that as nicely as a letter the future president of the United States wrote to his wife: unsettled by the possibility of deception inherent to Patience Wright's sculptures, John Adams unwittingly balances his fundamentally premodern attempt to restrict art to its educational function with words that testify to the slow emergence of the autonomy aesthetics that was being theorized by thinkers on the other side of the Atlantic: "There is Genius, as well as Taste and Art, discovered in this Exhibition."

Conclusion

THE NOVELS, paintings, and sculptures discussed in this book were created in a time of change, and their uneven, hesitant claims for autonomy testify to the era's transitional state. In my readings, I have focused on early American artists' negotiations of deception and delusion in and through their work because I believe that the forms these negotiations take indicate how American novelists, painters, and sculptors of the era situated their work within the transnational process of functional differentiation. This process was underway in the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Atlantic world but would reach its first apex in the artistic realm only in Romantic celebrations of the socially and politically transformative autonomy of art. In exploring the human propensity for sensory delusion as rigorously as deceivers' visual and acoustic tricks, early American artists probed not only the vicissitudes of an emerging liberal-individualist culture but also the limits of Enlightenment rationality. Yet as a ubiquitous topos of early American art, deception has implications that go beyond politics and epistemology. Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American art is not only "about" collective decision-making processes nor "about" the conditions of knowledge production. Anticipating the Romantic aesthetics and artistic practice that was to follow it, early American art is, in important ways, also about itself.

If the picaresque heroine of Tabitha Gilman Tenney's *Female Quixotism* repeatedly falls prey to sweet-talking seducers, it is because she has too often indulged in the very practice that we are engaged in as we read about her adventures. The didacticism, truth claims, and moralistic narrators of antifiction novels such as *Female Quixotism* and William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* are not readily explainable as either cunning or anxious responses to the era's powerful detractors of the novel; their antifiction stance is woven too deeply into the logic of the narrative to be brushed aside as a mere mask. Even as these texts ultimately do not encourage their

readers to adopt their narrators' or characters' aversions to novel reading, they invite them to ponder the deceptive power of fictions: their creations of worlds of as-if, their coaxing of flesh-and-blood human beings to seal the fictional pact and feel with beings made up of words.

To recognize this self-referential dimension of early American novels is to understand that the title of William Hill Brown's inaugural work of American sentimental fiction warrants a second look. Brown's novel revolves around the power of sympathy not only on a thematic level (where it most directly refers to Thomas and Harriot's near-incestuous desire for one another) but also on a metatextual level. As do all sentimental novels, *The Power of Sympathy* vies for every reader's sympathy with its unhappy heroine. Thus, the title of the novel refers as much to the cultural work the novel performs as it does to the dynamics of compassion and desire that energize its plot. Major theorists of the sentimental novel have rightly insisted on the political dimension of these emotional appeals, largely neglecting, however, the extent to which sentimental novelists' obsession with the faked feelings of characters such as Rowson's Mademoiselle La Rue, Foster's Major Sanford, and Tenney's O'Connor betray their unease about inviting their readers into deceptive worlds of make-believe where their feelings can be manipulated. If we consider this self-reflexive quality of sentimental novels, we realize that their authors share contemporaneous European aestheticians' doubts concerning the reliability and trustworthiness of the kinds of knowledge that either sensuous cognition or art can impart.

This is true a fortiori for the gothic novels of Charles Brockden Brown, some of whose villains upon closer inspection turn out to be practitioners of the very arts of illusion and deception in which novelists also trade. Characters like Carwin and Arthur Mervyn are no artist figures in a strict sense, but they help make clear that deception and delusion are not solely aberrations of the imagination but form the very ground on which novelistic production takes place. Brown's novels explore deception as both a political-epistemological threat and an aesthetic promise, however equivocal. In doing so, they bear witness to an ambivalence toward their own artistic practice that only few novelists—most prominently writers of picaresque fictions such as Hugh Henry Brackenridge and Royall Tyler—dare to resolve as they proclaim their right to deception.

Turning to the visual arts of Charles Willson Peale, Raphaelle Peale, and Patience Wright, we encounter works that thrive on deceiving their recipients as openly as the most playful of novelists do. The Peales' trompe

l'oeil paintings and Wright's wax sculptures are subject to the paradox that they deceive precisely because their imitation of the real is supremely verisimilar. This paradox emerges most forcefully in Charles Willson Peale's lost trompe l'oeil painting *The Staircase Self-Portrait,* whose mimetic fidelity testifies to the precession of a world not created by the artist even as it proudly asserts the artist's self-making. Ultimately, both Peale's trompe l'oeils and Wright's wax effigies remain caught up in premodern/modern tensions as they subscribe to an aesthetics of imitation and betray considerable anxieties concerning dissimulation even as they proclaim the artist's right to deceive, thus joining early European aestheticians such as Charles Batteux, Edmund Burke, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, and Friedrich Schiller in tentatively carving out an autonomous space for art. Ultimately, though, both the visual artists' and the aestheticians' assertions of the right to deception remain tied to a mimetic understanding of art and should therefore be judged as final expressions of a premodern understanding of art before systemic autonomy comes into its own and modern art asserts itself as itself without renouncing the right to cultural critique.

It is Charles Willson Peale's son Raphaelle who takes the visual arts of the era one resolute step further toward a more decisively modern understanding of art. In reenacting Parhassius's original act of deception and in deftly borrowing selected parts of James Barry's earlier painting *The Birth of Venus,* Raphaelle Peale confidently situates his *Venus Rising from the Sea: A Deception (After the Bath)* in the history of art, forestalling allegorical or biographical readings that would curb the self-referential autonomy of his work. It is this self-reflexive moment of his paintings that most forcefully gestures toward a modern understanding of autonomous art. Raphaelle Peale here joins writers such as Brackenridge and Tyler whose picaresque fictions assert the right to deceive, subvert literary didacticism, and stage paeans to originality and innovation. More than any other artifacts discussed in this book, these literary works and paintings announce their autonomy and modernity, not only by insisting on artists' right to deceive their recipients but also by disassociating themselves from utilitarian instrumentalizations of art.

Let me turn to two related instances of dissimulation that recall, once more, the range of meanings deception acquires as both a crucial topos of early American art and one of its chief modi operandi. Raphaelle Peale was, by all accounts, an idiosyncratic kind of man. He drank heavily, was frequently hospitalized due to his ill health, visited brothels, refused to paint the portraits that would have earned him and his family a steady source

of income, and was given to perform "impromptu low-brow hand-puppet shows before astounded Quakers" (Nemerov 6). Raphaelle did not try to hide his otherness. On the contrary, he openly displayed it in public. As Charles Coleman Sellers, the Peales' family historian, recounts, "As a ventriloquist he is said to have had no equal. In preference to his home he often took his meals at the Black Bear Tavern, where the country folk, come in to market, would stare in bewilderment as Raphaelle rose to carve and the turkey, goose, or chicken pled for its life in sepulchral tones, then shrieked with pain as the fork was thrust in. He could turn them cold in their seats by making a fried fish speak out upon some topic of the day" (*Charles Willson Peale* 398). Raphaelle Peale's ventriloquism recalls a related, fictional case of acoustic deception that we have already encountered. In Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland,* the equally idiosyncratic Carwin's biloquism precipitates Theodore Wieland's homicidal rage. And indeed, there is an eerie quality to Peale's noisy performances, too. Yet to claim, as David C. Ward and Sidney Hart do, that, like Carwin's deceptions, Peale's ventriloquism was not only "a subversive action that undermined Enlightenment epistemology concerning the accuracy of the informing senses" but amounted to a veritable "threat to the social order" (106) is to overstate the similarities. Carwin's acoustic deceptions help bring down a family and pose, as Ward and Hart correctly observe, a fundamental challenge to Lockean epistemology. Raphaelle Peale's performances at the Black Bear Tavern and elsewhere are, despite their morbidity, harmless, if uncanny, entertainment. His is a playful deception for the sake of deception that shares none of Carwin's selfish aims. Most significantly, though, while Carwin stages his acoustic deceptions in secret, admitting to them only when prompted by the horrible turn of events, Peale never tries to conceal the artifice of his actions. It is precisely this flaunting of the artifice of deception, this embrace of deception as legitimate performance that recurs in the novels, wax sculptures, and trompe l'oeil paintings of the era as they, sometimes hesitatingly, sometimes forcefully, assert their self-legislation in an age that did not quite accord art autonomous status yet.

My "not yet" raises two questions, though. How did novelists' negotiations of art, sensuous cognition, and deception develop in the decades to come? What can these negotiations tell us about the further autonomization of art in the passage from the early republic to the antebellum period? By way of concluding this book's argument and embedding it in a larger historical frame, let us briefly reconsider from an aesthetic perspective three major novels of the American Renaissance published in or around

1850. The first of these, Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* has been canonized fairly recently thanks to the recovery work of Jane Tompkins and the Feminist Press; the other two have been accepted as key works in American literary history ever since the publication of Matthiessen's *The American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* in 1941: Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick.*

As we turn to *The Wide, Wide World,* a note on the novel's publication history is in order. The 1987 edition published by the Feminist Press contains a final chapter that was not included in the original edition published by Putnam in 1850. As a note on the text tells us, the "lost" chapter was first made available to the public as an appendix to Mabel Baker's 1978 biographical sketch of Warner, *Light in the Morning: Memories of Susan and Anna Warner:* "An unsigned note in the papers of The Constitution Island Association suggests that the manuscript had gone to Putnam without the last chapter and that Putnam urged omitting it since the book had run longer in galleys than he had expected and the last chapter, in his opinion, did not contribute substantially to the novel. No further information has yet come to light regarding this omission" (*Wide, Wide World* 8). Though recent scholarship discusses the omission of the final chapter and speculates on Warner's attitude toward this editorial interference, no new facts concerning it have surfaced (S. Williams; Argersinger). At least at first sight, the novel does not seem unfinished without the final chapter since chapter 52, which concluded the edition known to antebellum readers, ends with a short proleptic account of Ellen Montgomery's reunion with her American friends after her painful sojourn with the less than loving family of her Scottish grandmother, Mrs. Lindsay. This original ending does have a rushed feel to it though, since it narrates the American reunion, which patriotic, forlorn Ellen and her sympathizing readers have longed for so long and so intensely, in a matter-of-fact paragraph of a mere 157 words. In introducing this concluding paragraph, the narrator hints at a rationale for its brevity: "For the gratification of those who are never satisfied, one word shall be added" (569). The narrator here suggests that the book has already found its fitting conclusion with Ellen's acceptance of a life of humility and duty. From this vantage point, the happy ending of the American reunion *should* be narrated in all brevity since it at least partly contravenes the novel's major moral lesson: that true happiness is found in submission to God's grace and one's elders' will. So why did Warner write an additional chapter? In my reading, the new final chapter is not only aesthetically and

emotionally more satisfying (since it is a "proper" ending in the sense that it supplies what readers have been expecting for dozens of pages: that Ellen and her dearest American friend John Humphreys will marry). The originally unpublished chapter is of central importance since it is there that the novel, which so crucially revolves around Ellen's education, reaches its climax. More precisely, what we witness here is what the novel has prepared us for all along: the coming into its own of Ellen's education *as aesthetic education.*

Like the first American sentimental novels discussed in the earlier parts of this book, *The Wide, Wide World* crucially revolves around female education, from the protagonist's thwarted desire to go to school to Alice Humphrey's linguistic education, which aims at teaching Ellen to speak proper (British) English instead of "Yankee" (404). As Ellen is barred from formal training, her education takes on new forms; it becomes an education in religiosity, morality, humility, submission, and abnegation of the self taught by a succession of teacher figures (Ellen's mother, the kind gentleman on the boat who turns out to be George Marshman, Mrs. Vawse, Alice, John). This education runs parallel to and is intertwined with the homeschooling in traditional school subjects first proposed by Alice (170–72) and later continued by John, Alice's brother (302–3, 315–21, for example). It is only at the age of fourteen, in the final pages of this lengthy novel, that Ellen begins to receive formal school education, once she has moved to Edinburgh to stay with her areligious grandmother Mrs. Lindsay three years after her mother's death. In the course of the novel, Ellen herself becomes a teacher figure, for instance when she gives Nancy Vawse a Bible as a New Year's present (333) and when she reads to her friend Mr. Van Brunt from Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (412–13). And her teaching works: the perennially scheming Nancy becomes a better person, and shortly before the narrative ends, Mr. Van Brunt "come[s] out before the world as a Christian man" (565). There is, however, more to this didactic bildungsroman than that.

Much more so than Charlotte Temple's or Eliza Wharton's in *The Coquette,* Ellen's learning process is also an *aesthetic* education, less in the Schillerian sense than in the English and Kantian sense: it is an education in the judgment of taste. This is already made clear early on as Ellen explores the countryside around her aunt's farm with her neighbor Nancy Vawse, a country girl of Swiss-French origin whose family name is an Americanized version of the French Voisier. Ellen is utterly delighted with what she sees: "Oh, how pleasant this is! how lovely this is! Isn't it beautiful?" (120).

Her companion's response is the opposite: "The ground is all covered with stones and rocks—is that what you call beautiful? and the trees are as homely as they can be, with their great brown stems and no leaves. Come! What *are* you staring at?" (120). As they walk on and tread on a patch of moss, Warner makes clear that the differences in the two girls' judgments of taste are class-bound:

> "What is this?" said Ellen.
> "Nothing but moss."
> "Is that moss! How beautiful! how green and soft it is! I declare it's as soft as a carpet."
> "As soft as a carpet!" repeated the other: "I should like to see a carpet as soft as that! you never did, I guess."
> "Indeed I have, though," said Ellen, who was gently jumping up and down on the green moss to try its softness, with a face of great satisfaction.
> "I don't believe it a bit," said the other; "all the carpets I ever saw were as hard as a board, and harder; as soft as that, indeed!"
> "Well," said Ellen, still jumping up and down, with bonnet off, and glowing cheek, and hair dancing about her face, "you may believe what you like; but I've seen a carpet as soft as this, and softer too; only one, though." (121)

What is less clear is how *we* are meant to judge what we read. Whose perception is correct; whose is deceived? Clearly, readers' sympathies lie with the protagonist, especially since Ellen's aunt has already warned her (and us) that Nancy "ain't a good girl" (115). At the same time, Nancy is the expert here in the sense that it is her who has grown up in this place and knows it in and out. While readers sense that Ellen's judgment of taste is ultimately the more accurate one, they are also given to understand that it is still deficient in that it is the product of an overrefined urban taste and of a haughtiness that contradicts Christian humility. In that sense, both Nancy and Ellen are deceived at this point in the narrative.

It is only when the good, the true, and the beautiful come together in Ellen's experience of the world that her aesthetic education moves toward completion. We can see an early sign of this development when she takes to heart Alice's advice to do her duty as a Christian and "cheer" her grandmother's "life in her old age and helplessness" (241). In the very next chapter, Ellen finds an opportunity to act upon that advice: instead of following her immediate impulse to go outdoors, she decides to read to her grandmother from scripture. What follows is a classical sentimental scene in which both women—who until then were kept apart by Ellen's shrinking

away from her grandmother's overbearing caresses—are moved to tears. Ellen's reward for her Christian charity is instantaneous—and aesthetic. As she exits the house after her good deed, she sees the world in a new, more beautiful light:

> Ellen's heart was very light; she had just been fulfilling a duty that cost her a little self-denial, and the reward had already come; and now it seemed to her that she had never seen any thing so perfectly beautiful as the scene before her—the brilliant snow that lay in a thick carpet over all the fields and hills, and the pale streaks of sunlight stretching across it between the long shadows that reached now from the barn to the house. One moment the light tinted the snow-capped fences and whitened barn-roofs; then the lights and the shadows vanished together, and it was all one cold dazzling white. Oh, how glorious!—Ellen almost shouted to herself. (245)

What we get here is a more strictly religious variant of the "landscapes of the soul" that Melville admired so much in Hawthorne's fiction: literary descriptions of landscapes that reflect the workings of the writer's or (in this case) a character's soul ("Hawthorne" 338–39). Warner follows the evangelical English poet and hymnodist William Cowper rather than Melville or Hawthorne, though, quoting from Cowper's "Song": "It is content of heart / Gives nature the power to please" (qtd. in *Wide, Wide World* 280). Though second in importance to the novel's multiple references to and quotes from the Bible, Shakespeare, Longfellow, and Burns, Cowper's writings, in particular his evangelical poems, are important intertexts in *The Wide, Wide World*. Ellen reads his poems, John quotes from them, and two of the novel's epigraphs are by him. What the quote from Cowper's "Song" expresses is a truth that Warner's narrative insists on: that the beautiful and the good, aesthetic education and moral education, cannot be separated. And indeed, Ellen's moral-aesthetic education continues throughout the novel. Just after Alice passes away at peace with God and herself, Ellen seeks consolation in nature, where "the beautiful landscape" appears "never more beautiful than then" (442). Sad as she is, Ellen reaches a new level of understanding of God's grace and goodness, and it is this which allows her to experience the "full beauty" (442) of the natural world.

Yet it takes John to explain to Ellen how we come to perceive things in nature as beautiful. As the two look at the moon, John says,

> When two things have been in the mind together, and made any impression, the mind associates them; and you cannot see or think of the one without bringing back the remembrance of the feeling of the other. If we have

> enjoyed the moonlight in pleasant scenes, in happy hours, with friends that we loved,—though the sight of it may not always make us directly remember them, yet it brings with it a waft from the feeling of the old times,—sweet as long as life lasts! . . . This power of association is the cause of half the pleasure we enjoy. (479)

In response, Ellen asks, "And in that way you would heap associations upon associations upon associations?" And John retorts, "Yes; till our storehouse of pleasure was very full" (480). John's discourse on beauty draws implicitly but directly on associationist theories of taste developed by early British aestheticians such as Alexander Gerard and Archibald Alison, whose contributions to the theory of taste I have discussed in previous chapters.[1] In Gerard and Alison's second half of the eighteenth century, the major psychological source of associationist aesthetics was David Hartley's *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations* (1749); in Warner's time, the associationist psychology that John draws on was most influentially codified in James Mill's *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* (1829). As can be expected from Warner by now, she gives Mill's secular account a religious twist, for immediately after ruminating on the beauty of the moon, John turns to flowers to explain to Ellen that reading nature brings us closer to God: "A bunch of flowers seems to bring me very near the hand that made them. They are the work of his fingers; and I cannot consider them without being joyfully assured of the glory and loveliness of their Creator. It is written as plainly to me in their delicate painting and sweet breath and curious structure, as in the very pages of the Bible; though no doubt without the Bible I could not read the flowers" (480). And for Ellen, who learns quickly from her teacher, the nexus between associationist psychology and spiritual truth becomes immediately clear. Once John has read a daphne as being "like the fragrance that Christian society sometimes leaves upon the spirit; when it is just what it ought to be" (481), this reminds Ellen of the selfless benevolence of the good Christian George Marshman, and she replies, "Well, I have got an association now with the daphne!" (481). As the narrative progresses, Ellen comes to realize what the novel postulates as a truth: that the good, the true, and the beautiful cannot, indeed must not be held apart.

But it is in the book's final chapter where Ellen's moral-aesthetic education reaches its apex. This chapter as a whole, and particularly the description of Ellen's private study in her new home, is a veritable compendium of key terms in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetics: "taste," "beauty,"

"luxury," "faculties," "harmony," "perfection," "likenesses," "fancy," "feeling," "pleasure," "judgment," and "art."

Again, it is John who teaches Ellen about beauty and taste when, in a pivotal scene, he invites her to contemplate two paintings that he put up in her study. The first painting is a copy of Correggio's sensuous, book-reading Magdalen of the 1520s, which was on display in Dresden's *Gemäldegalerie* in the mid-nineteenth century but was lost in World War II. Figure 11 is an engraving of the painting produced in Warner's time. The second, unidentified painting shows "the Madonna and child" (578). Ellen is rapt by the gracefulness of the first but as her eyes turn to the second, she immediately senses what John puts into words: "This is moral beauty, that is merely physical; *there* is only the material outside, with indeed the beauty of delineation, *here* is the immaterial soul" (578). This leads Ellen to conclude, "I am apt to think there is an eternity of the beautiful as well as of the true" (579). John finishes the thought: "Well—with all my heart—but they are inseparably wedded together; and in this, and I believe in all worlds, it is the true that makes the beautiful—using true in its largest sense of conformity with the eternal model of right" (579). For John as well as Ellen, the good, the true, and the beautiful—morality, knowledge, and aesthetic pleasure—must not be separated. This gives expression to a premodern, Platonic notion of art that posits a much firmer connection between aesthetics and ethics than Kant did when, sixty years before Warner, he observed that "we call buildings or trees majestic and magnificent, or fields smiling and joyful; even colors are called innocent, modest or tender, because they arouse sensations that contain something analogical to the consciousness of a mental state produced by moral judgments" (*Judgment* §59, 228). What is an analogy for Kant, who assigned questions concerning knowledge, morality, and beauty or taste to his three separate critiques, is for Warner still an indissoluble bond. And yet, *The Wide, Wide World* does gesture toward an understanding of art that is, in one crucial sense, more modern that Kant's.

It is remarkable that this novel, which repeatedly illustrates its protagonist's moral growth with her heightened sense of the beauty of nature, ends with a scene of artistic appreciation. Significantly, Ellen's moral-aesthetic education culminates not in the open air but in her study as she stands before two paintings. In the novel's final, climactic scene, art has taken the place of nature as the privileged space of moral-aesthetic experience. And *this* is a modern understanding of the relations between beauty and morality that follows not Kant but Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's nineteenth-

Figure 11. *La Maddalena*, William Humphrys, 1839. Print of engraving after Correggio, 16½ × 20". (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

century conviction that "a work of art is such only because, originating from the spirit, it now belongs to the territory of the spirit; it has received the baptism of the spiritual and set forth only what has been formed in harmony with the spirit. . . . Therefore the work of art stands higher than any natural product which has not made this journey through the spirit" (29). For Hegel, art is as much divine creation as nature, for the producer of the work of art is a God-made human being. And art "stands higher" than nature because only it has passed through self-conscious life, or spirit: the artist is the medium through which the divine manifests itself.

To be sure, John's understanding of art differs significantly from Hegel's. For him, the artist is no genius; about the painters of Madonnas, he says that, despite their skillfulness, "I am afraid they were not much the better for it themselves" (580). Likewise, John does not follow Hegel in claiming that art has "its end and aim in itself" (55); for him, works of art are transparent windows onto divine truth, serving "but the purpose of a clear glass through which what is behind may be the more easily and perfectly seen" (578). But Warner's decision to have John, the moral center of the narrative at this point—a man who not much earlier sternly advised Ellen to "read

no novels" (564)—take a painting as the basis for his ultimate moral lesson accords at least some forms of art, the figurative paintings of the divine in human form for which Hegel called, a dignity of their own that is quite independent of their power to imitate nature. In fact, Warner's choice of this specific painting accords with Hegel's conviction that, in the religious sphere, "the most accessible topic for art is Mary's love, maternal love, the most successful object of the religious imagination of romantic art. . . . God is present in the most original, real, and living way only in the Madonna's maternal love. This love must enter art necessarily if, in the portrayal of this sphere, the Ideal, the affirmative satisfied reconciliation is not to be lacking" (541–42).[2]

If *The Wide, Wide World* does not completely fall out of its time as an eighteenth-century novel published in the mid-nineteenth century, this is not because of its gender politics (which are ultimately conservative) but because of its reflections on art. Both Warner's novel itself and the works of art that appear in its fictional world serve a didactic function and remain firmly tied to the realms of religion and morality; this constitutes the premodern quality of the novel. Clearly, *The Wide, Wide World* is Romantic art only in Hegel's extremely broad sense of the term as art produced in the Christian world whose "first sphere is formed by religion as such" and whose "centre is supplied by the history of redemption, by the life of Christ, his death and Resurrection" (528). Equally clearly, it does not fit Hegel's observation that the art of his time has reached its end as completely interiorized and secularized art (602–10). Warner's novel is decidedly premodern in this sense. But within the imaginary space of the novel's final chapter, art is, ever so cautiously, freed of its mimetic function and accorded a higher moral and aesthetic value than the natural world. It is in its final, originally unpublished chapter that Warner's novel explores its fledgling modernity most fully, in a self-reflexive interrogation of the nature and function of art that takes place as Ellen Montgomery's moral-aesthetic education in the judgment of taste reaches completion. Granted, such a reading does not recover any ethically or politically emancipatory force of Warner's text. But this is, I believe, justified because *The Wide, Wide World* seems—despite Nina Baym's, Jane Tompkins's, Susan Williams's, Veronica Stewart's, and Jana L. Argersinger's formidable attempts—almost impossible to recover on such terms. This text's gender politics are far more conservative than those of *The Coquette*, which at least features a recalcitrant heroine, and of *Charlotte Temple*, which, like Foster's novel, explores sexual transgression. In this respect at least, *The Wide, Wide World* is as politically tame a novel

as Sukey Vickery's *Emily Hamilton*. My reading of Warner's novel gives the book weight by acknowledging it as a more modern text than is commonly perceived, albeit in aesthetic rather than ethical or political terms.

While the aesthetic subtext of *The Wide, Wide World* revolves around the gradual undeception of the protagonist's sensory perception as her power of judgment is refined, Hawthorne moves dissimulating and deluded characters to the center of the story he tells in *The Scarlet Letter*: from Roger Chillingworth's disguise to Arthur Dimmesdale calling himself a sinner before his congregation as he speaks "the very truth, and transform[s] it into the veriest falsehood" (120), to Hester Prynne lying to Pearl about the meaning of the sign on her breast when she tells her that, "as for the scarlet letter, I wear it for the sake of its gold thread!" (145). When, a few pages later, Hester confesses to Dimmesdale that she "consented to a deception" in not telling him about Chillingworth's identity but that, in all other respects, "truth was the one virtue" she "did hold fast through all extremity" (154), she is telling something less than the truth. In Dimmesdale's case, deception strikes at the core of his existence: the narrator speaks of "the unspeakable misery of a life so false as his" (121) and notes that it is "sad, indeed, that an introspection so profound and acute as this poor minister's should be so miserably deceived!" (169). As Hawthorne makes clear throughout the novel, Dimmesdale's sin is as much a sin of deception as of willful self-delusion. In this "subtle, but remorseful hypocrite" (120), this minister so "false to God and man" (156), other- and self-deception are so pervasive that the distinction between the two becomes blurred: "No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself, and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true" (169).[3] Other characters in this tale of sin and redemption also fall prey to self-delusion. The novel's protagonist is especially prone to this since, the narrator tells us, "women in solitude, and with troubled hearts, are pestered with unaccountable delusions" (87). The Puritan community is even in danger of falling prey to a collective optical delusion as it seeks to judge Chillingworth's character by his appearance: "When an uninstructed multitude attempts to see with its eyes, it is exceedingly apt to be deceived" (108). Hawthorne's repeated insistence that appearances deceive strikes at the heart of the Puritans' obsessive search for signs of salvation in the phenomenal world.[4] This is particularly so because the character who is most consistently deceitful and deluded is a minister, a man charged with the power of interpreting the world on behalf of the community. Thus, Hawthorne's exploration of the fallibility of

sensuous cognition tears an even greater hole into the fabric of Christian hermeneutics than does Charles Brockden Brown's exploration of the same in his gothic tales.

More insistently than Brown, Hawthorne explores deception as a subject matter as well as a modus operandi of his art. *The Scarlet Letter* not only shows deception; it also enacts it with an assertiveness that is reminiscent of Brackenridge and Tyler, though it seems largely devoid of these earlier writers' playfulness and satirical intent. *The Scarlet Letter* is, as the subtitle of the original 1850 edition ("A Romance") affirms and as countless critics have observed, a romance as Hawthorne defines it in his preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851): a work that "aim[s] at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable" and that, while not permitted to "swerve aside from the truth of the human heart," has "fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation" (1).[5] What has been somewhat less commented on is the relish with which Hawthorne unmoors his romance from any grounding in truth. Not unlike Melville, whose cetological and historiographical digressions lend credence to the story he tells in *Moby-Dick* even as they parody scientific truth claims, Hawthorne validates his tale with recourse to autobiographical facts and the topos of the found manuscript even as he pokes fun at such attempts to authenticate fiction. The narrator of "The Custom-House" begins by asserting that it was an "autobiographical impulse" that led him to write the introductory chapter only to compare his account to that of "the famous 'P. P., Clerk of this Parish,'" whose "example . . . was never more faithfully followed" (22). Thus, already in the first paragraph of his introduction to *The Scarlet Letter,* Hawthorne engages in a witty play with the truth claims of fiction. What we have here is a fictional narrator who shares the author's name asserting the autobiographical foundation of his narrative by comparing it with that of "P. P.," the pseudonym—and thus fictitious name—under which John Gay and Alexander Pope published a thirteen-page parody of the first volume of Gilbert Burnet's self-important two-volume memoirs *The History of My Own Time* (1724/1734) (Tew). In a manner that is reminiscent of Tabitha Gilman Tenney's tongue-in-cheek attempt to authenticate the story she tells in *Female Quixotism* by comparing it with Don Quijote's life, Hawthorne here, at the very beginning of *The Scarlet Letter,* confounds the distinction between fact and fiction. Hawthorne's play is more intricate than Tenney's, not only because of the relative obscurity of his intertext and the less obvious thematic connection between the two texts (P. P., like that

other man of God, Dimmesdale, has "a base-born child laid unto [him]" [Gay and Pope 225]) but also because the intertextual reference that is ostensibly meant to substantiate the autobiographically inspired fiction is the *parody* of an autobiographical text. If daring earlier novelists such as Tenney, Brackenridge, and Tyler still fought to wean literature away from its obligation to tell the truth, Hawthorne, it seems, plays fast and loose with the very distinctions that sustain such expectations to assert the novelist's right to deception with full conviction.

When the autobiographical detour reaches its destination—the discovery of the scarlet letter and Surveyor Pue's manuscript—most readers' residual expectation that this novel aims at factual authenticity will have been dispelled. This is so not only because, by the mid-nineteenth century, readers had long learned to read the topos of the found manuscript (and that of the found object) *as a topos* but also for two additional reasons. First, in describing the scarlet letter, Hawthorne insists on the irrecoverability of the past: the fabric is the product "of a now forgotten art, not to be recovered even by the process of picking out the threads," and its use and meaning are "a riddle" which the narrator sees "little hope of solving, . . . so evanescent are the fashions of the world in these particulars" (43). Of course, Hawthorne here puts to use what Roland Barthes calls the "hermeneutic code," meaning "all the units whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer; or even, constitute an enigma and lead to its solution" (17). Yet the enigma remains unsolved: the past, its objects, and their significance remain elusive as the meanings of this Romantic symbol proliferate.

At the very moment that he makes use of the topos of the found manuscript to assert that the narrative told in *The Scarlet Letter* is "based on a true story," Hawthorne embarks on a second strategy for weaning his fiction away from its obligation to tell the truth and nothing but the truth:

> It should be borne carefully in mind that the main facts of that story are authorized and authenticated by the document of Mr. Surveyor Pue. The original papers, together with the scarlet letter itself—a most curious relic—are still in my possession, and shall be freely exhibited to whomsoever, induced by the great interest of the narrative, may desire a sight of them. I must not be understood affirming that, in the dressing up of the tale, and imagining the motives and modes of passion that influenced the characters who figure in it, I have invariably confined myself within the limits of the old Surveyor's half-a-dozen sheets of foolscap. On the contrary, I have allowed myself, as to such

points, nearly, or altogether, as much license as if the facts had been entirely of my own invention. What I contend for is the authenticity of the outline. (44)

Again, we find Hawthorne proclaiming the authenticity of his tale even as he qualifies and undermines that proclamation. What is remarkable about this reiteration of the romance writer's creed is less its qualified yet forceful assertion of the right to poetic license than the self-reflexive nature of the reiteration. What we get here is not the defense of a writer's right to invent (parts of) a particular fiction. Instead, we get a subtle reflection on truth telling and fiction making. While the narrator's facetious offer to show the original document to anyone who wishes to see it mocks the credulity of readers who dote on facticity, Hawthorne neither dismisses nor ridicules readers' demands that the tale be authentic—just as he neither dismisses nor ridicules readers' expectations that fiction, both novels and romances, accord with "the truth of the human heart" in the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables.*

As we know from Alfred S. Reid, Charles Ryskamp, and others, in rec-reating seventeenth-century Boston, Hawthorne drew on a variety of historical sources: from accounts of Sir Thomas Overbury's murder to Caleb H. Snow's *History of Boston* (1825). Today, it is Michael J. Colacurcio who most forcefully affirms that "*The Scarlet Letter* is a serious historical novel" (104). Thus, when Hawthorne's narrator proclaims "the authenticity of the outline," this is both a pretense (because Surveyor Pue, his manuscript, and the story of Hester Prynne that is told therein are the author's invention) and a truthful assertion in the sense that this fiction aims at historical fidelity. Reading *The Scarlet Letter,* we do not have to decide whether we are dealing with a romance or a historical novel. Hawthorne's text is most fascinating when it explores the tensions between the two as they meet in the "neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other" (*Scarlet Letter* 46). When, later in the text, the narrator repeatedly questions the authenticity and probability of the story he tells ("but here the tale has surely lapsed into the improbable" [162]; "his encounter with old Mistress Hibbins, if it were a real incident" [174]), this is not designed to dismiss as naive readers' expectations that the story told be authentic and true. Instead, it reinforces the topos of the found manuscript, proclaims the narrator to be a discerning reader of historical sources, and sustains the tension between facticity and fictionality, the actual and the imaginary, on which this novel is built. The ingenuity and

modernity of *The Scarlet Letter,* then, does not lie in a complete dissociation of fiction from truth claims. Fifty years earlier, Brackenridge asserted the right to deception more radically and more aggressively. With the anti-fiction movement consigned to the past, Hawthorne no longer has to fight this fight. While the novel's moral—"Be true! Be true! Be true!" (199)—may indeed apply, as the narrator suggests, to Dimmesdale, it no longer unequivocally applies to the mid-nineteenth-century novelist's craft.[6] The modernity of *The Scarlet Letter* lies in the extraordinarily high degree of self-reflexivity with which Hawthorne playfully yet seriously interrogates the conditions under which fictional and historical texts, beautiful deceptions and discourses of truth, are written and read.

What is true for *The Scarlet Letter* is also true for Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick:* these texts self-reflexively explore concerns already staged in the early American novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries rather than enacting the radical break with the literary past that both Matthiessen and chief promoters of literary nationalism such as Emerson and Whitman announced. Melville also joins Hawthorne in making deception and delusion central subject matters of his novel. Already the title of the first chapter, "Loomings," is more than a dark premonition; it also thematizes the fallibility of sensuous cognition. As Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford, the editors of the second Norton critical edition of the novel, tell us, one of the nautical senses of "loomings" is "land or ships beyond the horizon, dimly seen by reflection in peculiar weather conditions" (18n1). Thus, the question of the reliability of *aisthēsis* as a path to knowledge and truth is raised even before the narrator announces his name. Moreover, the announcement—"Call me Ishmael" (18)—and the first paragraph of the narrative proper that follows it raise questions concerning the trustworthiness of the teller of the tale as well as of that narrator's younger self, the character Ishmael through whose consciousness much of the narrative is filtered. We do not even know if his real name is Ishmael—all we know is that this is what he invites us to call him—and his "spleen" and "hypos" make him neither a particularly dependable sailor nor a particularly reliable observer. This is, of course, a major double handicap in this sea-centered novel, where each crew member's performance crucially depends on his powers of observation. In "The Quarter-Deck," Ahab, after all, does not promise the doubloon to the sailor who kills Moby Dick but to the one who "raises," or sights him, first—and communicates the sighting. "Skin your eyes for him," Ahab adds, "look sharp for white water; if ye see but a bubble, sing out" (138).

Ishmael's powers of visual perception are, of course, legendarily limited, not because he shares Melville's own bad eyesight but because of his distracted mind.[7] In aesthetic terms, it is his sensuous cognition that is impaired. Ishmael freely admits this in "The Mast-Head," the chapter that immediately precedes Ahab's wager: "Let me make a clean breast of it here, and frankly admit that I kept but sorry guard. With the problem of the universe revolving in me, how could I—being left completely to myself at such a thought-engendering altitude—how could I but lightly hold my obligations to observe all whale-ships' standing orders, 'Keep your weather eye open, and sing out every time'" (135). In Kantian terms, Ishmael's imagination does not serve a primarily "reproductive" function— it does not serve him well to order the manifold of sense perceptions into a unity that the understanding can then operate upon conceptually.[8] Instead, Ishmael's imagination is first and foremost "productive": it is both a source of creativity (and in this sense, Ishmael is both a philosopher and an artist figure) and of distractedness. In the four final paragraphs of "The Mast-Head," Ishmael further details the causes of his and other young men's absent-mindedness:

> And let me in this place movingly admonish you, ye ship-owners of Nantucket! Beware of enlisting in your vigilant fisheries any lad with lean brow and hollow eye; given to unseasonable meditativeness; and who offers to ship with the Phaedon instead of Bowditch in his head. Beware of such an one, I say; your whales must be seen before they can be killed; and this sunken-eyed young Platonist will tow you ten wakes round the world, and never make you one pint of sperm the richer. . . . Nowadays, the whale-fishery furnishes an asylum for many romantic, melancholy, and absent-minded young men, disgusted with the carking cares of earth, and seeking sentiment in tar and blubber. . . . Those young Platonists have a notion that their vision is imperfect; they are short-sighted; what use, then, to strain the visual nerve? They have left their opera-glasses at home. . . . Lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie is this absent-minded youth by the blending cadence of waves with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half-seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him . . . . But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Descartian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever. Heed it well, ye Pantheists! (135–36)

A great number of readings of this famous passage have focused on its critical bent. Already Matthiessen spoke of its "instinctive critique of transcendentalism," which is in line with Melville's "concentrat[ion] on the obverse side of the transcendental dream" (406). Brian Saunders notes that Melville "align[s] Emerson . . . with those 'Pantheists' he apostrophizes in *Moby-Dick*" (383), and most recently Richard Hardack interprets this passage as "a pastiche and recalibration of Emersonian transcendentalism" that transforms "the transcendentalist ecstatically invisible in the woods" into "the invisible sailor who loses his identity altogether" (113–14). Indeed, the kind of fusion between man and nature that Ishmael envisages is a dark version of Emerson's transcendentalist quest.

What I would like to add to such readings is a sharper awareness of just how strongly this passage focuses on vision. Nantucket's ship-owners are warned of any men "with lean brow and hollow eye," of those "sunken-eyed young Platonist[s]" that "have a notion that their vision is imperfect" but have "left their opera-glasses at home." Such men all too often fail to keep their "weather eye" open and forget that "whales must be seen before they can be killed." Worse, they mistake the ocean for the "visible image" of the Oversoul and plunge into its depths. These Platonists, Melville suggests, are indeed in danger of becoming "nothing" as they "see all" (Emerson 10). Fueled by the desire to erase the boundary between subject and object, the imagination of these Emersonian idealists gains such force that it interferes with and impedes sensuous cognition, putting them at personal risk. Though himself given to reveries and metaphysical speculation, Ishmael remains pragmatist enough to warn ship-owners of young men like himself— men subject to the pathologies of the imagination. And this allows him to serve as Melville's mouthpiece for his conviction that Emerson's much-cited and equally often ridiculed "transparent eye-ball" metaphor marks not only a metaphysical but also an aesthetic, that is, perceptual and cognitive impasse.

In *Moby-Dick,* perception is not only a thematic focus that takes us to the heart of the novel's philosophical concerns but also a crucial matter of form. In this multivoiced, multiperspectival novel, who speaks and who perceives is often difficult to determine. While we are introduced into the story by a homodiegetic narrator who asks us to call him Ishmael, and while we remain firmly within the consciousness of his younger self for the first two chapters, already the third chapter ("The Spouter-Inn") begins with two paragraphs of second-person narration ("Entering that gable-ended Spouter-Inn, you found yourself in a wide, low, straggling entry with old-fashioned wainscots" [26]) before we hear Ishmael saying *I* again. From

then on, we are largely back in Ishmael's hands—until the first cetological chapter (ch. 32), whose taxonomy of whales is given to us by a heterodiegetic narrator who sounds like Melville at his playful best. The situation is less clear in the following chapter, where the narrator for the most part appears too knowledgeable of the history of whale-fishing and too erudite about the etymological origins of "specksynder [*sic*]" to be Ishmael. We may, however, be mistaken in this since the chapter's final paragraph does start with words that are Ishmael's: "But Ahab, my Captain, still moves before me in all his Nantucket grimness and shagginess" (127). As we enter Ahab's cabin in chapter 34 to witness the captain dining first with his mates, then with his harpooners, we leave Ishmael on deck once more, though—only to witness his prominent return in "The Mast-Head" (ch. 35), a chapter that is clearly told by a homodiegetic narrator and perceived through internal focalization. After this, the situation changes significantly. As we turn from "The Mast-Head" to "The Quarter-Deck," Ahab moves center stage and Ishmael recedes into the background, both as narrator and even more so as character. As if to highlight that shift toward heterodiegetic narration, the following chapters explore a variety of focalizations: zero focalization in "The Quarter Deck" (ch. 36); a succession of internal focalizations on Ahab (ch. 37), Starbuck (ch. 38), and Stubb (ch. 39); and external focalization in the play-like "Midnight, Forecastle" (ch. 40), which consists of dialogue and song. The shift toward heterodiegetic narration and away from internal focalization is by no means complete: chapter 41 begins with the words "I, Ishmael, was one of that crew" (152) and Ishmael resurfaces frequently, both as focalizer and narrative voice. But it is a marked shift nonetheless. After "The Mast-Head," *Moby-Dick* is no longer exclusively, perhaps not even primarily Ishmael's tale. Why is that so, and why does the shift occur after this chapter?

Let us first note how appropriate it is to have the narrative of this transitional chapter filtered through the consciousness of a mast-head stander. On a whaling ship, the mast-head is the place that allows for a vision that comes close to omniscience. From that position, an internal focalizer such as Ishmael can adopt what is well-nigh a God's eye point of view: seeing everyone, he remains (largely) invisible to all. In this chapter, then, the novel's dominant perspectival choice so far has reached its pinnacle: Ishmael sees as much as an internal focalizer can see. Yet Ishmael does not make use of the powers that his elevated position gives him: he neither does what he is supposed to do (look out for whales) nor what he could do (observe the movements on deck). Instead, he stares vacantly into the sea and retreats

into himself. Worse, Ishmael admits that his vision is, like that of other "romantic, melancholy, and absent-minded" young men, "imperfect" and "short-sighted," precisely because of his excessive introspection. Ishmael, then, not only neglects to use the mast-head stander's supreme powers of perception; his powers also turn out to be significantly impaired. Thus, when "The Mast-Head" comes to an end, it is almost an act of poetic or, better, narrative justice to shift the center of gravity away from his voice and perspective. Then again, this move away from Ishmael means a move toward Ahab, from one elevated space (the mast-head) to another (the quarter-deck), from the distracted, benevolent transcendentalist to his sharply focused yet obsessive and malevolent foil. And so the story takes its course.

In joining early European aestheticians' probing of the fallibility of sensuous cognition, Melville always also explores the work of interpretation, thus reinforcing the self-reflexive quality of his text. This becomes clear early on when, upon entering the Spouter-Inn, Ishmael spots "a very large oil-painting so thoroughly besmoked, and every way defaced, that in the unequal crosslights by which you viewed it, it was only by diligent study and a series of systematic visits to it, and careful inquiry of the neighbors, that you could any way arrive at an understanding of its purpose" (26). As Robert K. Wallace has pointed out, the Spouter-Inn painting is characterized by the aesthetics of indistinctness of a contemporaneous English painter that Melville admired. Calling the painting "Turneresque" (73), Wallace adduces J. M. W. Turner's *The Whale Ship* (1845; fig. 12) and *Snow Storm—Steam Boat* (1842) as possible sources.[9]

Melville may indeed have borrowed the Spouter-Inn painting's "long, limber, portentous, black mass of something hovering in the centre of the picture" (26) from Turner's painting. Likewise, Melville's ekphrasis may well have been inspired by Turner's famous explorations of the sublimity and indomitable force of the sea. Yet the first three paragraphs of "The Spouter-Inn" ultimately focus less on the properties of the painting itself than on the observer's process of perception and interpretation. I am writing "the observer's" rather than "Ishmael's" since Ishmael speaks in the second person for the first two paragraphs, thus implicating us, Melville's readers. Ishmael highlights the many steps that are necessary to make sense of this "thoroughly besmoked" and "every way defaced" painting: "diligent study," "systematic visits," "careful inquiry of the neighbors," "much and earnest contemplation," and "oft repeated ponderings" (ibid.). Despite these considerable efforts, the observer is still bound to remain "puzzled and confounded" while "ever and anon a bright, but, alas, deceptive idea
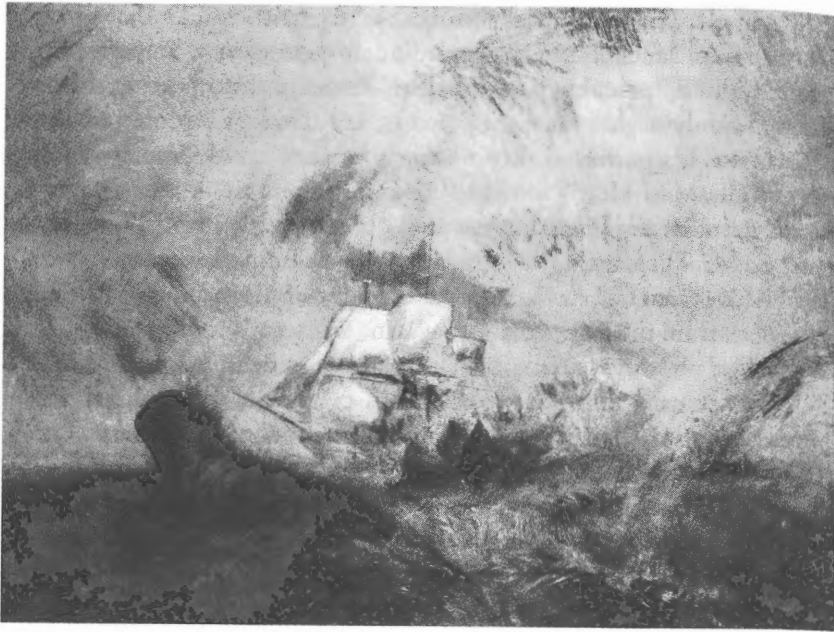
Figure 12. *The Whale Ship*, J. M. W. Turner, 1845. Oil on canvas, 36⅛ × 48¼". (Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY)

would dart you through" (ibid.). As we switch from "you" to "I" in the third paragraph, a tentative description of the painting is given, yet not before Ishmael consults third parties: "In fact, the artist's design seemed this: a final theory of my own, partly based upon the aggregated opinions of many aged persons with whom I conversed upon the subject. The picture represents a Cape-Horner in a great hurricane; the half-foundered ship weltering there with its three dismantled masts alone visible; and an exasperated whale, purposing to spring clean over the craft, is in the enormous act of impaling himself upon the three mast-heads" (ibid.) With this, we have definitely moved away from *The Whale Ship* or any other known painting by Turner. On the most obvious thematic level, Ishmael's description is of course significant as a dark foreboding of events to come. Note, though, that what we get here is by no means presented as a definitive description of the painting. After much straining of the eyes, reflection, and inquiries, Ishmael—and we with him—arrive at a description that remains tentative ("the artist's design seemed this"), a mere "theory." Ultimately, then, the beginning of "The Spouter-Inn" emphasizes less the painting's Turneresque indistinct aesthetics than the difficulty and openness of interpretation.

Compare this with Ahab's self-assured, monomaniacal interpretation of the doubloon: "The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab" (332). As the novel as a whole makes clear, Ahab's over-confident interpretations of the phenomenal world spring from the major source of his delusion: hubris. What the novel sets against this, against the death-dealing fierceness of Ahab's resolve, is the contingency and plurality of interpretation, which Ishmael performs for us in "The Spouter-Inn" and no one expresses better than Pip, when, toward the end of "The Doubloon," he says: "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look" (335). In commenting on the parade of various crew members' perceptions and interpretations of the doubloon that make up this chapter, Pip emerges as one of the novel's crucial figures. In this most lucid moment, Pip's perception is crystal clear, clouded by neither Ahab's flaw (hubris) nor Ishmael's (Romantic introversion). In this decisively self-reflexive novel, Pip is the quintessentially self-reflexive figure who makes the most incisive comment on Melville's exploration of sense perception as a path to knowledge. Pip here is, finally, also a second-order observer who observes other men observing the doubloon. In this, he does what artworks do, too: observe human beings observing the world, for "to create a work of art under these sociohistorical conditions," the conditions of a functionally differentiated modernity, under which art assumes autonomy, "amounts to creating specific forms for an observation of observations" (Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* 69).

In its self-reflexive inquiries into art and sensuous cognition, *Moby-Dick* takes its place beside *The Scarlet Letter* as one of two major novels of the American Renaissance that carve out an autonomous space for literature. This self-reflexivity is first and foremost what makes these texts modern novels, novels whose probings of the contingency of perception and interpretation are far removed from earlier writers' fretting over the fallibility of sensuous cognition. Yet in their forages into the nation's past, their probings of the pathology of the unchecked imagination, and the anxiety they display over the possibility of social actors' dissimulations and deceptions, they are not so far removed from a moralistic, didactic novel such as *The Wide, Wide World*. All these mid-nineteenth-century novels have their deepest roots in the work of the first American novelists. Out of the three, it is clearly Warner who retains the strongest ties with the preceding cohort of writers while Hawthorne and Melville aspire to write a new, more modern kind of fiction. From a literary-historical perspective, though, these differences are gradual since none of these writers stages a radical break

with the literary past. Both in their most premodern and their most modern moments, they build on the groundbreaking cultural and aesthetic work done by the earlier, much lesser-read authors that are at the heart of this book—writers like Susanna Rowson, Charles Brockden Brown, and Tabitha Gilman Tenney, whose inquiries into deception as a subject matter and a modus operandi of their art paved the way for a younger generation of writers.

NOTES

Introduction

1. Gregory's own practice differs markedly from that of the "several correspondents who desire their names to be concealed." On the title page of *A Dictionary of Arts and Science,* we find the following description of the author: "By G. Gregory, D.D. Doctor in Philosophy and the Arts, and Honorary Member of the Imperial University of Wilna; Member of the Manchester and Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Societies; Honorary Member of the Boad [*sic*] of Agriculture; Domestic Chaplain to the Lord Bishop of Landaff; Author of Essays Historical and Moral, The Economy of Nature, &c. &c."

2. Reviewing scholarship on the emergence of the term *literature* in the modern sense of "creative" or "imaginative writing," Richard Terry concludes, "In suggesting that the semantic shift from the inclusive to the exclusive sense of 'literature' occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century, I am arguing for a date slightly earlier than is usually supposed; but my arguments are not in a material way at variance with the established consensus. It can still be said that the lexical shift that introduces our modern sense of 'literature' occurred at a historically specific moment, a moment moreover occurring not earlier than the middle of the eighteenth century" (83). But, he adds, the emergence of a modern *concept* of literature is not dependent on the emergence of the word *literature* in its modern, restricted sense, since "even by the late sixteenth century, a canon exclusive to creative texts had already grown up" (98).

3. The *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* are often wrongly referred to as Baumgarten's "doctoral dissertation." The mistake is understandable since he acquired his *venia docendi,* the right to give lectures, with this *Magisterarbeit* (M.A. Thesis) (Mirbach xvii). Much has changed since then.

4. For major outlines of Niklas Luhmann's systems-theoretic account of modernization as a process of functional differentiation, see his *Social Systems, Art as a Social System,* and his opus magnum *Theory of Society.*

5. Already in February 1692, the editor of the British *Gentleman's Journal* felt called upon to apologize for his inclusion of short fictional pieces: "As for the Novels, I need not Apologize for them otherwise than by saying that the Ladies desire them; besides they are short, and, as often as possible, not only true but Moral" (qtd. in Novak 55). For good accounts of the U.S. antifiction movement, see Orians, H. R. Brown, Charvat, T. Martin, Gutjahr ("Religion"), and Davidson (*Revolution*). Alison Conway links the critique of the novel to that of portraiture. See my chapter 3 for an extended discussion of the American antifiction movement and its links with British precursors.

6. For good accounts of these shifts, see Beardsley (140–208); Werber (30, 50–55, 61–101); Townsend (15–24); Luhmann (*Art as a Social System* 162, 178–79, 262–63, 271–72, 311); Barck, Kliche, and Heininger; Schneider (7, 25–26); and Iser ("Toward a Literary Anthropology" 273–76).

7. The original letters were destroyed in a fire in 1794 only to be rediscovered in 1876, in the form of copies prepared for circulation among the Duke's friends. But Schiller's writings on the aesthetic education of "man" were well known among late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German intellectuals, for during 1795 he published revised and extended versions of the original letters in his newly founded journal *Die Horen* and added new ones that were published in the same venue. By June 1795, all twenty-seven installments of what would come to be known as *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (*On the Aesthetic Education of Man*) were publicly available. For a concise account of the publication history of *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, see Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby's introduction to their bilingual edition of the work. All further references to the text are to this edition.

1. Aesthetics, Politics, and the Early American Novel

1. Republicanism and liberalism are modern in the sense that they recognize that the world is made by human beings rather than God, affirm industry, acknowledge self-interest as a driving social force, and oppose personalized power structures (Wood, *Radicalism;* Kelleter 392–93). For seminal discussions of the value system of republicanism, see Bailyn (*The Ideological Origins*), Wood (*Creation*), Pocock (*Machiavellian Moment,* "Classical Theory"), Shalhope, and Schloss. For major accounts of liberalism in the early republic, see Hartz, Huyler, Dworetz, and G. Brown. For important comparative work on republicanism and liberalism, see Appleby and Kelleter.

2. As Kelleter notes, Trenchard and Gordon's *Cato's Letters* was read more widely in colonial America than Locke's *Two Treatises* (412).

3. For more on "the age of passion" and the country's prevalent paranoid mood in the 1790s, see also Howe, Hofstadter (*Idea*), and Ketcham.

4. See also Kelleter's observations concerning the "proceduralist" logic of the Constitution (474–500).

5. For discussions of "popular republicanism," see Wilentz ("Whigs and Bankers"; "Artisan Origins"; *Chants Democratic*), Frisch and Walkowitz, and Rodgers.

6. On slave conspiracies, see Frey and Egerton.

7. For more on Kimber and on other eighteenth-century British antifictionists, see J. T. Taylor.

8. For a further discussion of the complex issue of voice in *Modern Chivalry,* see P. Gilmore, including his concise survey of major contributions to the debate (317n1).

9. Davidson describes Brackenridge's own multiple political shifts thus: "A Federalist during the Confederation period, a Jeffersonian and Anti-Federalist in the subsequent time, a sympathizer with the French, and then, after 1797 (and what he saw as the failure of republicanism in France), an enemy of the ongoing French Revolution, Brackenridge never felt bound by any party loyalty to maintain one position" (*Revolution* 263–64).

10. Note, however, that, like *Don Quijote, Modern Chivalry* is a picaresque novel and a satire that leaves open the question of whether Farrago or Teague is the primary object of censure and ridicule. Critics of the novel differ widely on its politics and on who the target of Brackenridge's satire actually is. Wondering how anyone could think that Teague is the butt of Brackenridge's satire, Christopher Looby argues that "the Captain represents an outmoded pretense of rationality and a reactionary attachment to a deferential social protocol, while Teague represents emergent democracy" (243). Winfried Fluck argues exactly the opposite. In his reading of the novel, Brackenridge "wants to protect [democracy] from itself by insisting that democracy must not be confused with the dismantling of rationally grounded hierarchies" and to that end stages an "inversion of the Don Quijote formula" in which "it is the servant, not the master, who misrecognizes reality" (*Das kulturelle Imaginäre* 52–53; my translation). My own take on *Modern Chivalry* sides with neither of these readings but agrees with Ulla Haselstein's assertion that Brackenridge's critique cuts both ways. Reviewing Fluck's and Looby's contributions to the debate, she concludes, "The didactic purpose of satire in *Modern Chivalry* is . . . twofold, as it attacks the class-bound presumptions of both the underclass and the genteel class. While Teague is a caricature and his behavior subject to open ridicule, the satirical attack on Farrago rests on the more subtle contradiction between his ideas, his words and his actions. . . . *Modern Chivalry* denounces egotism and civic irresponsibility as widespread behavior among the uneducated population, but this verdict affects the gentleman class no less profoundly. Brackenridge uses a mode of stereotyping the lower classes in order to turn the table at an elite who jealously guard their class privilege while expounding on the common good and human rights" (320–22).

11. Of course, all of these disavowals of sense-making could be read as the defensive gestures of a satirist who feared censorship and political persecution. After all, Brackenridge attacks notable public figures and institutions during the "age of passion," asserts that his "business is to speak nonsense; this being the only way to keep out of the reach of criticism" (*Modern Chivalry* 23), and expresses his concerns "lest the publication should *do myself harm*" (325). However, to those (implied) readers who see in themselves the targets of Brackenridge's satire, his protestations that he speaks but nonsense would ring so false as to be either ineffective or counterproductive.

12. In this context, see also Winfried Fluck's reflections on the ambivalent status of the imagination in *Modern Chivalry.* While Fluck considers Teague the principal target of Brackenridge's satire, he notes that the author also critiques "something that only becomes possible through democracy: in the fictional mode, he attacks elements of self-staging for which democracy provides cultural role models and modes of adaptation" (*Das kulturelle Imaginäre* 52; my translation). Fluck notes the similarity of democracy and fiction in this respect, arguing that self-staging is inherent not only to democracy understood as a "formalized process of the mediation of interests" (53; my translation) but also to fiction.

From this vantage-point, Brackenridge's critique of Teague's wild fancy emphasizes this: those who give free rein to their imagination (Teague) must be checked by the voice of reason (Farrago). Fluck points out that such attempts to curb the imagination in a fictional narrative are, however, haunted by a paradox: fiction must imagine that which it censures first. Thus, there is always the danger that the unruly imagination and its

practitioners—in our case, Teague—are unwittingly affirmed (53–54). See also my chapter 2 for a discussion of contemporary debates on the "pathology of the imagination."

13. About Ceracchi (whom Brackenridge names "Caruchi") and David, Brackenridge adds that "there is a delicacy, and fineness of mind, so to speak, in such kinds of intellects, that it astonishes me, how cruelty can find its way to mix with it" (*Modern Chivalry* 476). Brackenridge here refers to the two artists' involvement in the French revolutionary upheavals: Ceracchi, who executed heroic neoclassical busts of most major American revolutionary leaders, participated in revolutionary French attempts to establish an Italian Republic and was guillotined for an attempt on Napoleon Bonaparte's life; David, the painter of the famous *The Death of Marat* (1793), joined the Jacobin cause in revolutionary France, became a member of the Committee of General Security, and narrowly escaped being guillotined along with Robespierre.

14. For a trenchant critique of celebratory uses of "hybridity," see Isernhagen.

15. From a purely historical point of view, this increase in didacticism must be understood not so much in the context of the antifiction movement—which I discuss at greater length in chapter 3—as in the context of the Sedition Act, which was passed on July 14, 1798, to prohibit the publication of false or malicious writings against the federal government as well as agitation for opposition to any act of the president or Congress. The passing of this act and the repressive measures it enabled at least partly account for Brackenridge's turn in his later volumes, when he moves from the dangerous political critiques of satire to the safer ground of literary didacticism. Brackenridge himself thematizes the reigning culture of fear in his conclusion to the fifth volume (1804).

16. Winfried Fluck's survey and critique of scholarship up to 1997 in "From Aesthetics to Political Criticism: Theories of the Early American Novel" has helped me greatly in identifying the major positions in debates on these texts of the 1980s and 1990s.

17. For explorations of the relative importance of speech and writing for the constitution of early American public spheres, see Fliegelman (*Declaring Independence*), Looby, D. S. Shields (*Civil Tongues*), S. Gustafson, and Loughran.

18. For studies that focus on the gendered nature of these processes and the roles sympathy and sentiment played in them, see Tompkins (*Sensational Designs*), Harris, Samuels (*Romances of the Republic*), Dillon (*Gender of Freedom*), Barnes, Stern, Burnham, and Schweitzer. See also Dena Goodman's review of some of the critiques made of Habermas's conceptualization of the public sphere: "During the last six years there has been substantial debate about the validity of Habermas's theory: about the importance and significance of his Marxism, for example, and about the existence or sociological meaning of such central features of his theory as public opinion and even the public sphere itself. Questions have been raised about the possibility of multiple publics beyond the literate, 'bourgeois' one privileged by Habermas, about women's role in the public sphere, and about the way in which the national cultures of England, France, and Germany figure in Habermas's basically Marxist chronology, which sees England as in the lead and Germany pulling up the rear" (1–2).

19. For a programmatic set of essays in the "post-nationalist" vein, see Rowe (*Post-Nationalist*). For two succinct accounts of the "transnational turn" in American studies, see Fishkin and Rowe ("Transnationalism"). For developments in American studies more generally, see Saldívar, Spillers, Kaplan and Pease, and Streeby.

20. A selective list of influential titles includes Spengemann (*A Mirror for Americanists; A New World of Words*); D. S. Shields (*Oracles of Empire*); Armstrong and Tennenhouse; and Gilroy, Roach, and Bauer (*Cultural Geography*).

21. See, for instance, Carretta and Gould; Gruesz; Shoemaker; Brickhouse; Goudie; Olwell and Tully; the 43.1 (2008) issue of *Early American Literature*, in particular Slauter; and Bauer and Mazzotti.

22. Gura's comments reflect the prevailing consensus in early American studies today, and they need to be qualified. His complaint about the ahistorical textualism of poststructuralist theory and criticism is familiar but ignores that what is new about new historicism is mainly its poststructuralist awareness of what Louis A. Montrose has called "the historicity of texts" and "the textuality of history" (20).

23. For good discussions of the British opposition to the novel, see J. T. Taylor and Bartolomeo. See chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the U.S. antifiction movement.

24. Anthony Galluzzo provides a related diagnosis (256–66).

25. Herfried Münkler explains that "the term 'reason of the state' originated in the language of professionalized political personnel, in particular that of the secretaries and diplomats administering the Italian territorial states of the sixteenth century." In this modern usage, the term describes an "autonomous political rationality of action" that was first theorized in Giovanni Botero's *Della ragion di stata* (1589) (66; my translation). *Sovereignty* is an older term whose origins date back to the monarchical contexts of thirteenth-century France and fourteenth-century England. As Helmut Quaritsch points out, the term was first theorized in its modern meaning of "the absolute and perpetual power of a republic" in the French lawyer Jean Bodin's treatise *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (1566) (1103).

26. This crucial passage occurs in the second section of "Das Kunstwerk und die Selbstreproduktion der Kunst," which, strangely, is not included in Stephen Holmes and Charles Larmore's translation of the essay, "The Work of Art and the Self-Reproduction of Art." All other references are to this English translation. Kneer and Nassehi define polycontexturality thus: "Polycontexturality means that a plurality of differentiations and different contexts exist that cannot be compared or translated into one another from an Archimedean vantage point" (103; my translation).

27. For a concise outline of Werber's position, see "Literatur ist codierbar: Aspekte einer systemtheoretischen Literaturwissenschaft," an article he coauthored with Gerhard Plumpe.

28. See Davidson (*Revolution*), Drexler and White, and M. T. Gilmore for pertinent discussions of the generic instability of these texts.

29. This does not exclude earlier, more cursory references to "aesthetics" in Anglophone writing. Edward Cahill suggests that an essay titled "The Fine Arts" published "in the New York *Halcyon Luminary* (1812–1813)" may contain "the earliest definition of 'Esthetics' in American print" (*Liberty* 33).

30. Based on his readings in the American Periodical Series archives, Cahill estimates that, from 1783 to 1790, "approximately 60 significant periodical essays" on aesthetics appeared; "by 1825, there were at least 600 more" (*Liberty* 30). The sixth chapter of his *Liberty of the Imagination* focuses on Federalist criticism. Michael T. Gilmore's contribution to the first volume of *The Cambridge History of American Literature* provides a concise overview of magazines, criticism, and essay-writing in the early republic.

31. See, for instance, Socrates' speech and his replies to other speakers in Plato's *Symposion* (199C–212C, 551–63).

32. I am drawing on Bernstein's account of the disjunctions between Kant's three critiques: "If my argument is correct, then what issues from the experience of beauty is not the recognition of a possible reconciliation of morality and nature in a transcendent beyond, but rather a recognition of their present intractable but contingent separation" (17–18). In Bernstein's reading, Kant's references to the supersensible in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* are "not a bridge to span the 'great gulf' . . . separating the realms of freedom and nature, but rather a sepulchre to stand over their lost unity" (18).

33. Note that the drifting apart of truth, morality, and beauty that Kant's third critique registers also shaped the modern separation of academic philosophy into (among other branches) epistemology, moral and political philosophy, and aesthetics.

34. For further discussions of Kant's notion of genius, see Bruno, J. Schmidt, Gethmann-Siefert (79, 96–99), and Beardsley (222–23).

35. Shaftesbury puts it thus: "Imagine then, good Philocles, if being taken with the beauty of the ocean, which you see yonder at a distance, it should come into your head to seek how to command it, and, like some mighty admiral, ride master of the seas. Would not the fancy be a little absurd? . . . Let who will call it theirs, . . . you will own the enjoyment of this kind to be very different from that which should naturally follow from the contemplation of the ocean's beauty" (Shaftesbury 318–19).

36. Eagleton, the most influential and also most subtle theorist in this camp, does acknowledge that the "Olympian disinterestedness" of Kant's aesthetics is "at odds with what Kant calls 'truculent egotism,' the routine selfish interests of social life" as well as "the political, where individuals are bound together in purely external fashion for the instrumental pursuit of ends" (97). Ultimately, though, it "reproduces something of the very social logic it is out to resist. Kant's selfless aesthetic judge, absolved from all sensual motivation, is among other things a spiritualized version of the abstract, serialized subject of the market place, who cancels the concrete differences between himself and others as thoroughly as does the levelling, homogenizing commodity" (97–98). Eagleton's critique of Kant is nuanced because it does acknowledge that there are moments in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that can be read as suggesting that his notion of disinterested pleasure has been formulated in opposition to the pursuit of luxury and the lure of the commodities that vie for our attention (see also Schneider 53). But just how Eagleton arrives at linking Kant's reflections on the universal validity of judgments of taste to the reification of human relations under capitalism is beyond me. The relation between the two types of subjects that Eagleton intimates here—the art connoisseur and the consumer—is no more than a tenuous analogy.

37. *Disinterestedness,* then, means that no desire for the real existence of the object intervenes between its representation in our minds (*Vorstellung*) and our pleasurable response. By this, Kant means that the beautiful object evokes in us not only no desire for sensual gratification (as would Swiss chocolate, which is not beautiful but agreeable) but also no desire to grasp it conceptually (as would a well-designed tool, which is not beautiful but good, i.e., useful). Paul Guyer explains the relation between interest and conceptual thought in admirably clear ways: "The key to Kant's theory is that aesthetic

response is free of the constraint of any determinate concept. Thus, it is not produced by the subsumption of the manifold under any determinate concept. Moreover, aesthetic judgment does not produce any determinate concepts to which pleasure can be linked, or which can be used to promise pleasure. . . . The judgment of taste must be disinterested, because it is free of any dependence on concepts, and an interest is nothing but a certain kind of concept of objects—which is to say, of a class of objects. This follows from coupling the second Critique's definition of interest with Kant's explanation of aesthetic response. Alternatively, we might now revise the third Critique's definition of interest as a kind of pleasure, classifying as an interest any pleasure in an object dependent on the subsumption of that object under a determinate concept" ("Disinterestedness and Desire" 457–58).

38. True, aesthetic pleasure is noninstrumental and nonutilitarian, and Kant does distinguish the pleasure evoked by true beauty from that which some may experience in the presence of a "palace" that "is merely made to be gaped at" and to satisfy "the vanity of the great who waste the sweat of the people on such superfluous things." But he immediately adds that "that is not what is at issue here" (*Judgment* §2, 90–91). What is at issue for him is, as he puts it in the very next sentence, "whether the mere representation of the object is accompanied with satisfaction in me, however indifferent I might be with regard to the existence of the object of this representation" (§2, 90–91).

39. Nicholas Shrimpton traces the emergence of the term *new aestheticism* to Rei Terada's enthusiastic review of Jonathan Loesberg's *Aestheticism and Deconstruction: Pater, Derrida and de Man* (1991) in the fall 1993 issue of *diacritics* (8).

2. Political Deceptions and Sensory Delusions

1. For good accounts of the Boston patriots' Indian disguise, see Labaree (95, 141, 143) and Hoerder (257–64).

2. For a spirited rebuttal of attempts to pathologize the Founders as paranoiacs by way of a psychologizing interpretation of Richard Hofstadter's "paranoid style," see Wood ("Conspiracy").

3. While the term *confidence man* itself was probably first used in 1849, in reference to the arrest of a New York swindler named William Thompson (Halttunen 6–7), late eighteenth-century novels already abound in the type.

4. For a frontal attack on Franklin, see chapter 2 in the final (1923) version of D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* (20–31). In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber takes Franklin to be the prototype of modern man driven by the Protestant work ethic. For classic critiques of instrumental reason, see Max Horkheimer's *Eclipse of Reason* and Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

5. The first American edition was published in New York by Rivington and Gaine under the title *Letters Written by the Late Right Honourable Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, to His Son, Philip Stanhope, Esq.* (1775). I am quoting from the 1781 Philadelphia edition.

6. Later in the novel, we learn that while Farrago, who decides to groom Teague for public office, "had some common ideas of decency, and delicacy in habits, and behaviour,"

he "had not read Chesterfield" (*Modern Chivalry* 149). This does not contradict his earlier assertion concerning Chesterfield's sapience but testifies to the fact that Chesterfield was a household name in the early republic.

7. For more on the role that paper money played in early American debates about deception, see Waldstreicher (60–64).

8. The era's laws of coverture are explained and codified in William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–69): "By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and *cover*, she performs every thing; and is therefore called in our law-French a *feme-covert, foemina viro co-operta*; is said to be *covert-baron*, or under the protection and influence of her husband, her *baron*, or lord; and her condition during her marriage is called her *coverture*" (Langley and Fox 7–9).

9. Bache's attacks on the Federalists were known for their vitriol and, in 1794, he printed an English translation of the most famous defense of revolutionary terror: Robespierre's *Report Upon the Principles of Political Morality Which Are to Form the Basis of the Administration of the Interior Concerns of the Republic*. For a brief account of this pamphlet's history in the United States, see my essay "'Terror has exterminated all the sentiments of nature': American Terror, the French Revolution, and Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn*" (52–53).

10. See also Plumpe (50–54).

11. In "Ist Kunst codierbar?" Luhmann himself suggests that the code of the system of art is beautiful versus ugly (247, 252). This is hardly convincing given that one of the most obvious characteristics of modern—and especially modernist—art is its turn toward the "ugly": negativity, alienation, abjection.

12. This is especially true for Irish Americans, who, as Noel Ignatiev has shown in *How the Irish Became White*, only really "became white" when they aggressively defined themselves against African Americans during the second half of the nineteenth century.

13. It is no coincidence that Tenney and Brackenridge raise doubts about the reliability of the senses in novels whose titles allude to *Don Quijote*, for along with the imagination, sense perception is a principal source of deception in Miguel de Cervantes's narrative. This is one reason why Sancho's naming of Don Quijote as "el Caballero de la Triste Figura" should not be translated as "Knight of the Sorrowful Figure" but as "Knight of the Sad Countenance" or "Knight of the Ill-Favored Face"—for the face is the center of sensory perception. For a good, concise discussion of various English translations of the phrase, see Lo Ré.

14. The crucial passage occurs in §116, where Baumgarten writes, "Sunt ergo νοητά cognoscenda facultate superiore objectum logices; αισθητά, 'επιστήης. αισθητικης sive AESTHETICAE." (*Reflections* §116, 39). Aschenbrenner and Holther translate this passage as, "Therefore, *things known* are to be known by the superior faculty as the object of logic; *things perceived* [are to be known by the inferior faculty, as the object] of the science of perception, or *aesthetic*" (§116, 78).

15. In Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby's words, "If [Baumgarten] terms this mode of perception 'confused,' it is not because objects thus contemplated do not stand as clearly before our eyes as the 'clear ideas' of everyday life; on the contrary,

they stand there in all that radiant *claritas* traditionally attributed to art. It is because in this mode of knowledge the object remains unanalysed" (Introduction xxi). See also Beardsley (157–58) and Guyer ("Beauty" 445).

16. Note that Baumgarten presents more than one definition here, and that the definitions are not equivalent. It may safely be assumed that he used several of these more traditional descriptions only to gently introduce his readers to a new science. Once one strips the definition of these, a two-part core remains: aesthetics is the science of sensuous cognition and the art of thinking finely (Barck, Kliche, and Heininger 326).

17. For a pithy discussion of the rationalist heritage Baumgarten and his followers contend with, see Barck, Kliche, and Heininger (321–22).

18. Beardsley well captures Schiller's ambivalence toward the status of aesthetic experience within the development of individual subjects as well as the species as a whole: "We can now see very clearly a deep ambivalence in Schiller's aesthetic theory, which he never resolved: whether the aesthetic condition, as he calls it (Letter 20), is merely transitional or truly final. The cultural question with which he began was: How can man pass from the sensuous to the rational (moral) condition? And one of his main arguments is that art makes this possible. . . . But, as the argument has developed, and the play impulse become more concrete, the aesthetic condition has emerged, not just as a step toward the highest state of man, but as a *constituent* of it. Only in this condition are both the sensuous and the intellectual sides of man kept in free harmonious relationship, and only through a continuous experience of beauty is the political system able to combine order with freedom" (229–30).

19. Kant based his lectures on metaphysics on Baumgarten's *Metaphysica* (1739), which contains his earlier definition of aesthetics (Barck, Kliche, and Heininger 324), draws on Baumgarten's theory of sensuous cognition in the "transcendental aesthetic" of the *Critique of Pure Reason,* and critically engages with him in his third critique.

20. Kant not only declares that "the modification of our sensibility is the only way in which objects are given to us" (*Pure Reason* 272–73) but also calls sensibility "the capacity for representation" (256)—by which he means that it is that faculty which gives us "intuitions" (*Anschauungen*) of objects.

21. For Kant, the term "faculty" (*Vermögen*) refers to either the different relationships of a representation—in which case he distinguishes between the faculty of knowledge (*Erkenntnisvermögen*), the faculty of desire (*Begehrungsvermögen*), and the faculty of the feeling of pleasure or pain (*Vermögen von Lust und Unlust*)—or to different *sources* of representations. In the latter sense, Kant distinguishes between the three active faculties (reason [*Vernunft*], understanding [*Verstand*], imagination [*Einbildungskraft*]) and the largely receiving faculty of sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*). For a good, concise discussion of the wide variety of cognitive powers Kant called "faculties," see Deleuze (17–21) and Sachs-Hombach.

22. For further discussion of the relation between genius and aesthetic ideas, see also §57 in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (219).

23. It is indeed Kant's discussion of the sublime that most clearly reveals that he values reason above not only the imagination but also above sensibility and understanding.

24. For a succinct discussion of Locke's theory of the imagination, see Alan R. White (25–29).

25. In *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism,* William Keach aptly summarizes Hume's stance on the imagination: "Humean imagination is at once indispensable and unpredictable, constantly vulnerable to and often in conflict with the 'passions,' which the imagination is responsible for provoking but only in part capable of controlling or direct-ing. It is as powerful and necessary to human life as it is deceptive and endangering" (156).

26. Pamela Clemit adduces Benjamin Rush's essay "The Influence of Physical Causes Upon the Moral Faculty" (1786) and Erasmus Darwin's classification of mental disorders in *Zoonomia* (1794–96) as sources for Brown's portrayal of the male Wielands' bouts of insanity (129). Brown himself refers to *Zoonomia* in a footnote added to Clara's uncle's explanations concerning her grandfather's "mania mutabilis" and suicide (*Wieland* 204).

27. See Kelleter's nuanced discussion of Chauncy's relation to Jonathan Edwards's "revivalist Puritanism" on the one hand and George Whitefield's and James Davenport's much more radical evangelism on the other (311–77).

28. For excellent discussions of critical responses to enthusiasm in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Weckermann and Heyd.

29. Note that the critique of enthusiasm Brown stages is much more forceful than Kant's, whose pietistic upbringing gave him a good understanding of the need for subjec-tive religious experience and may help explain the comparative moderation of his assess-ment of enthusiasm as "a passing accident, which occasionally affects the most healthy understanding" rather than "a disease that destroys it." For a comprehensive account of the influence of pietism on Kant's thought, see Yamashita.

30. For an intelligent divergent reading of Brown's challenge to Enlightenment ratio-nality, see Glasenapp. Concurring with other critics' reading of *Wieland* as a critique of Enlightenment epistemology, he considers not Locke's trust in sense perception but Hume's associationist psychology as the major target of Brown's novels.

31. Even though it is clear that Arthur subscribes to the empiricist creed in these passages, it still comes as a surprise for twenty-first-century readers to learn the extent to which Arthur's language is suffused with an empiricist vocabulary. Surmising that the Italian-speaking Clemenza Lodi has acquired some English since she came to the United States half a year ago, Arthur acknowledges that "this conclusion is somewhat dubious, but experiment will give it certainty" (314). Likewise, when Arthur is locked into a room at the beginning of the narrative, he describes his thoughts on how to get out in Lockean terms: "The doors of the closet and the chamber did not creak upon their hinges. The latter might be locked. This I was able to ascertain only by experiment" (41). In these and other passages, "experiment" does not mean "an action or operation undertaken in order to discover something unknown, to test a hypothesis, or establish or illustrate some known truth" (*OED*) but "the action of trying anything, or putting it to proof; a test, trial" (ibid.)—a sense the *Oxford English Dictionary* qualifies as "now somewhat *arch[aic]*" and "conveying some notion" of the former sense. At the end of the eighteenth century, then, "experiment" did not necessarily refer to scientific testing, but that more recent meaning of the term has been around since the mid-fourteenth century and was very probably activated by Brown's contemporaneous readers, for whom experimental scientific methods were nothing new, and for whom Bacon—who already in 1623 had authored a book entitled *Historia Naturalis et Experimentalis*—Locke, and Newton were household names.

32. Consider, for instance, *The Power of Sympathy.* For Harriot, the novel's female protagonist, experience can be a safeguard against treacherous seduction: "We behold the gilded temptation and know not until taught by experience, that the admission of one error is but the introduction of calamity" (64). At the same time, the novel's seducer—who turns out to be the father of both Harriott and her beloved Harrington—identifies precisely worldly experience as the source of his corruption: "At an early period of my life, I adopted a maxim that *the most necessary learning was a knowledge of the world. . . .* Experience hath been my tutor" (94, 96).

33. Frank Kelleter concisely explains that Bacon's major early contributions to the empiricist turn were his description of "the inductive method as the royal road to sci-entific understanding" and his contention that human beings' cognitive appropriation of the world "should move from the immediate experience of phenomena *to* abstract knowledge rather than vice versa" (30; my translation).

34. Michael McKeon is right in pointing out that "like Renaissance historicism, the Baconian scientific program contains two contrary movements. An optimistic faith in the power of empirical method to discover natural essences points in one direction; a wary skepticism of the evidence of the senses and its mediating capacity points in quite another" (68).

35. Bill Christopherson also reads Carwin as a sort of artist figure (52–54).

3. The Right to Deception

1. In fact, the topos of art as deception reaches back to a generation before Plato. For the sophist philosopher Gorgias, poetry is the best example of the power of language to deceive since it can evoke readers' "fearful fright and tearful pity and mournful long-ing" about matters that are of no real concern to them. For him, this constitutes decep-tive "sorcery and magic" (25). For a good discussion of Gorgias's take on poetry in his *Encomium of Helen,* see Pratt (75–79).

2. Note that 1780 and 1820 are of course, approximate dates. The year 1780, more-over, precedes the publication of William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy,* which is generally considered the first American novel (Davidson, *Revolution* 154–55), by nine years. American antifictionists also directed their attacks against British novels imported to and read in North America.

3. The "authentic case" Brown refers to is probably the much-publicized story of James Yates, a farmer from upstate New York, who in 1781 slaughtered his family in a bout of religious frenzy (D. E. Williams).

4. For a good discussion of the vicissitudes of truth-telling in autobiographical trauma narratives, see L. Gilmore.

5. Note, however, that Rowson was the daughter of a loyalist whose family was pun-ished for his political allegiance in revolutionary times. Not surprisingly, Rowson's own loyalties were torn between Britain and America (Davidson, Introduction xix–xxii).

6. Baumgarten follows Leibniz in defining as "possible" that which is without con-tradiction and possesses sufficient reason (*Metaphysica* §§7–15).

7. In Pietro Pimpinella's words, "By creating, through their work, a possible world analogous to the real world on the basis of their inner and outer experience, artists open

up a new perspective on reality that allows their fellow human beings to gain new insights into the shared experiential world. . . . Poetic fictions can lay claim to truth in so far as their possible worlds and the real world share the same transcendental truth" (53–54; my translation).

8. For good discussions of Baumgarten's notion of fictionality, see also Ferry (66–76) and Dagmar Mirbach's excellent introduction to her German translation of the *Aesthetica*.

9. For a good, concise discussion of Weimar classicism, see Stephan.

10. See Hammermeister for a discussion of the links between Schiller's notion of the play drive and Kant's reflections on the free play of the faculties in aesthetic experience (53).

11. See also Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert's discussion of the links between Schiller's *Aesthetic Education of Man* and Kant's third critique (149–50).

12. My understanding of Schiller's anthropology and aesthetics is indebted to Antje Büssgen's admirably clear exposition of Schiller's reflections on human and artistic beauty (54–135).

13. Admittedly, as are so many of the moral judgments Brown's novels elicit, this is a precarious one. Just as we cannot be entirely sure about the moral makeup of Arthur Mervyn, we are left to wonder whether Achsa Fielding, whom Arthur first encounters as a visitor to a brothel, can serve as a role model to Brown's implied readers. In the passage quoted, "personal defects" refers to her physical appearance, though, not to any moral shortcomings.

14. As Rowson puts it elsewhere, "[Mrs. Beauchamp] loved not the hurry and bustle of a city, and had prevailed on her husband to take a house a few miles from New-York" (73).

15. The Society of the Cincinnati was an elite group of war officers and their eldest male descendants. For many Americans, the group raised the specter of military despotism (Brooke 296–309; Myers).

16. Note that Batteux' claim that imitation is the shared principle of all the arts is no exception. As Tom Huhn demonstrates in *Imitation and Society: The Persistence of Mimesis in the Aesthetics of Burke, Hogarth, and Kant* (2004), the aesthetics of imitation continued to exert great influence throughout the eighteenth century even as genius, originality, and invention began to replace it. The strains of such attempts to reduce all arts to one shared principle—that of imitation—become most obvious in discussions of music, whose mimetic character seems particularly difficult to demonstrate.

17. My translation diverges from Edward Allen McCormick's, which I rely on elsewhere. In the German original, Lessing writes, "Beide, empfand er, stellen uns abwesende Dinge als gegenwärtig, den Schein als Wirklichkeit vor; beide täuschen, und beider Täuschung gefällt" (*Laokoon* 3). McCormick translates this as "Both, he felt, represent absent things as being present and appearance as reality. Both create an illusion, and in both cases the illusion is pleasing" (*Laocoön* 3). Translating "täuschen" as "create an illusion" and "Täuschung" as "illusion" robs Lessing's text of its original force.

18. Thus, Baumgarten also speaks of "the bad rules of a deceptive art" (*Aesthetica* §110, 89; my translation) and warns of the dangers of "deceptive guiding principles for the aesthetic arts, e.g., rhetoric and poetry" (§713, 709; my translation).

19. Edward Watts attributes this statement not to Brackenridge but to the narrator-author and takes it to reflect "the innate power of established language to create a false reality, removed from truth and the real problems of the new nation" (*Writing* 44). Contrary to Watts, I read this passage as a challenge to, not an affirmation of, the Scottish common sense proscription that language must always speak the truth.

4. Visual Artifice

1. Peale fathered no less than seventeen children, four of whom died in infancy, with three wives. There are two Titian Ramsay Peales: the son who succumbed to yellow fever was born in 1780 and died in 1798; the second Titian Ramsay was born a year later and would become a noted painter, naturalist, entomologist, and photographer (Murphy). The father portrayed Titian Ramsay I in the upper half of his *The Staircase Group*.

2. Edited by Sidney Hart and Ward, Peale's autobiography was published by Yale University Press under the title *The Autobiography of Charles Willson Peale* as volume 5 of *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family* (2000). Appropriately, Ward labels the final chapter of his magisterial *Charles Willson Peale: Art and Selfhood in the Early Republic*, which deals with Peale's last years, "'I Bring Forth into Public View': Peale's Secular Apotheosis in *The Artist in His Museum*" (155–92).

3. See Wendy Bellion's account of what she calls "one of the tallest tales in American art history" (*Citizen Spectator* 63).

4. Peale's son Titian Ramsay II had brought the turkey to the museum from his 1819 naturalist excursion to Missouri with Stephen P. Long (Stein 171).

5. Much excellent work has been done on the connections between these three paintings as well as those between them and Raphaelle Peale's trompe l'oeil painting *Venus Rising from the Sea: A Deception (After the Bath)*, which I will turn to below. My following account is especially indebted to Stein, Ward and Hart, Futral, and Bellion ("Illusion"; *Citizen Spectator*).

6. Rembrandt Peale measured the mastodon skeleton exhibited in his father's museum at a height of eleven feet, a length of thirty-one feet, and a weight of a thousand pounds (C. W. Peale, *Selected Papers*, 2: 567).

7. My descriptions of a number of details of both paintings rely on Stein's meticulously researched emblematic reading.

8. For a splendid account of Peale's multiple public roles after the 1780s, see Ward (81–192).

9. Note that Ward himself is far too subtle a biographer and art historian to make such a case.

10. In late eighteenth-century America, the contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasius was a familiar reference point for discussions of the imitative nature of painting. See, for instance, John Wheelock's version of the story in *An Essay on the Beauties and Excellencies of Painting, Music and Poetry* (1774) (9).

11. The *Crayon* was founded in 1855 by W. J. Stillman and John Durand and issued its final number in 1861 (Mott 193n29).

12. The transparency remains unlocated and is known to us only via an engraved reproduction by David Edwin entitled *Apotheosis of Washington* (c. 1800).

13. A scientific study of the *Venus* further supports scholars' claim that the son's and the father's paintings are situated in a dynamic of familial competition. An earlier version of the painting featured not James Barry's *The Birth of Venus* but Raphaelle's partial copy of *Portrait of Raphaelle Peale* (1817)—his father's portrait of him—covered by the piece of cloth: "Peale's initial trompe l'oeil featured a white cloth seemingly covering his father's portrait. . . . He rendered the central cloth first before adding elements of his father's earlier painting to its outer edges, a progression that might explain slight discrepancies in proportion between the actual and the copied portraits. The washlike quality of the perimeter shapes indicates that Peale never completed his initial composition. Instead, he reworked the painting, covering the perimeter elements with thin brown paint. In the final composition, Peale retained the general concept of his joke— the illusion of a cloth covering a known artwork—by turning to James Barry's painting *The Birth of Venus*. With the addition of Venus's arm and foot to the top and bottom of the cloth, Peale reused the central cloth, and the transition from one composition to another is simple and seemingly effortless" (Lessing and Schafer 241). Raphaelle's visual joke is at his father's expense as it assigns him the diminished role of Zeuxis. In Wendy Bellion's words, "The scenario has a predictable ending. Like Zeuxis deceived by Parrhasius, Charles Willson Peale would have tried to remove the curtain; humbled by his mistake, he would have been obliged to acknowledge his son's superior talents of illusion" (*Citizen Spectator* 318).

14. Lauren Lessing and Margaret Stenz identify Raphaelle's trompe l'oeil cloth as a kerchief (Conrads 1: 436).

15. For a splendid earlier reading along similar lines, see Stein (174–75). Stein, however, seems to get the chronology of the two paintings wrong when he labels the *Venus* "a mordantly witty parody of *The Artist in His Museum*" (175). As Ward notes, "Raphaelle exhibited the *Venus* at the annual exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA) held in May 1822. . . . Charles Willson was working on *The Artist in His Museum* by August 1822" (164).

16. As Ward and Hart note, "When Peale formally retired as a portrait painter in 1794, he announced that his two oldest sons Raphaelle and Rembrandt would be his successors" (102).

17. Apart from the wax sculptures and preserved remains of Native Americans, the museum also held an "Indian collection," much of whose contents were collected by Lewis and Clark during their first exploration and donated to the museum by President Thomas Jefferson starting in 1804. The collection included Cree women's dresses; a painted buffalo robe; a stuffed bighorn sheep, horned lizard, prairie dog, and pronghorned antelope; stuffed birds; a hunting shirt; a peace pipe; an Indian police officer's badge; an Omaha tobacco pouch; a Crow cradle; a flute; and a war whistle (Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum* 171–88). In later years, numerous additional Native American exhibits from various sources were added to the museum.

18. Breaking ranks with his fellow Whigs in the House of Lords, William Pitt, 1st Earl of Chatham, became an advocate of the rights of the colonies during the War of Independence. This made him a favorite subject among American portrait painters. While Charles Willson Peale's sculpturesque Romanization of the politician in his early *William Pitt* (1768) failed to produce a convincing likeness, John Singleton Copley's *The*

Death of the Earl of Chatham (1779) famously memorializes Pitt's 1778 collapse during a parliamentary debate about the American revolutionaries.

19. Notable exceptions are Charles Colman Sellers's biography *Patience Wright: American Artist and Spy in George III's London* (1976), Gordon, Rubenstein, Fliegelman (*Declaring Independence* 84–88), and Bellion ("Patience Wright's Transatlantic Bodies").

20. Not surprisingly, Sellers's tendency to exaggerate Wright's role in revolutionary affairs is the main target of J. L. Bullion's critique in his otherwise sympathetic review of *Patience Wright: American Artist and Spy in George III's London.*

21. Adams's letter is collected in Paul H. Smith's twenty-six-volume *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774–1789,* available online via the American Memory site of the Library of Congress (http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwdg.html). Most of the collection consists of letters sent by delegates, but it also includes diary entries, essays, and other writings.

22. For a discussion of *The Red Badge of Courage* that relates the breakdown of strategies of sense-making to the Civil War's acoustic turmoil, see my *The Noises of American Literature, 1890–1985: Toward a History of Literary Acoustics* (51–61).

23. In this, he taps into a binary gender discourse that is also evoked by the man who prompted Charles Willson Peale to supplement his exhibitions of paintings with natural history objects—advice Peale followed in the creation of his Philadelphia Museum, which he designed primarily for educational purposes. In a letter dating from 1784, Nathaniel Ramsay wrote to his brother-in-law, "Doubtless there are many men like myself who would prefer seeing such articles of curiosity than any paintings whatever" (qtd. in Ward 98).

Conclusion

1. The key texts are Gerard's *An Essay on Taste* and Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste.*

2. Stephen Houlgate notes that, for Hegel, "the most profound spiritual beauty in the visual arts is found . . . in painted images of the Madonna and Child, for in these what is expressed is the feeling of boundless *love.*" This seems to me to provide a more fitting key to the role that the painting of the Madonna and child plays in the novel's final scene than Jana L. Argersinger's suggestion that the mother's and the child's yearning for a kiss is "unholy" in its link to the voluptuousness of Correggio's Magdalen.

3. See also Michael Davitt Bell's assessment of the character: "From beginning to end, then, it would seem that Dimmesdale's deception remains self-deception" ("Arts of Deception" 49).

4. See also Evan Carton's poststructuralist reading of *The Scarlet Letter,* which shows how Hawthorne's text erodes fixed reference points from which to make secure moral and social judgments and challenges the very binary distinctions that sustain the Puritan worldview (200–202).

5. For early discussions of *The Scarlet Letter* as a romance, see Bier, Stubbs, and Porte.

6. Here I part company with Bell's otherwise splendid argument: Hawthorne indeed stages ingenious plays of deception and truth-telling, of concealment and revelation in "The Custom-House" and the *Seven Gables* preface and is in this sense truly, as

Melville said of Hawthorne, out "to deceive—egregiously deceive—the superficial skimmer of pages" (qtd. in Bell, "Arts of Deception" 29). But this is not an anxious response to the antifiction movement. Significantly, the only antifiction voice Bell quotes is Thomas Jefferson's, who railed against fiction in 1818, thirty-two years before *The Scarlet Letter* was published. See my discussion of the antifiction movement in chapter 3.

7. Joseph Adamson notes that Melville "suffered from great eye strain throughout his life" (234).

8. Note that Kant is mentioned in *Moby-Dick,* though only to be dismissed by the narrator, along with Locke: "When on one side [of a ship] you hoist in Locke's head, you go over that way; but now, on the other side, hoist in Kant's and you come back again; but in very poor plight. Thus, some minds for ever keep trimming boat. Oh, ye foolish! throw all these thunder-heads overboard, and then you will float light and right" (261).

9. Wallace draws on previous research by Harold R. Beaver and Richard S. Moore as well as his own inquiry into which paintings by J. M. W. Turner Melville actually saw during his stay in London in 1849.

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INDEX