The Romance of Real Life
Watts, Steven

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press


For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/70842
INTRODUCTION


5. For recent provocative assessments of change in the early modern West, par-


11. Several sources have eased the process of research for this book. Over the past decade and a half, the Kent State University Press has issued a bicentennial edition of Brown’s major writings. These beautifully edited volumes, complete with historical and textual essays, have provided authoritative versions of his novels and made them wonderfully accessible. In addition, the bulk of Brown’s other published writings—particularly his shorter fiction, newspaper and magazine essays, and political pamphlets—has become available on microfilm. Several fat caches of private correspondence, which most of Brown’s biographers have overlooked in favor of his novelistic writing, also have proved highly useful. In particular, his mid-1790s letters to close friend Joseph Bringhurst, held at the Longfellow–Hawthorne
Library at Bowdoin College, and his early nineteenth-century missives to fiancée Elizabeth Linn, on file at the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, have shed great light on Brown's developing cultural views.

CHAPTER I. THE NOVEL AND THE MARKET IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC


2. Allen, Charles Brockden Brown, 10–11; the letter from Brown is quoted in David Lee Clark, Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America (Durham, N.C., 1952), 38–39, while the other quote appears on p. 60.


8. For surveys of the vast literature on republicanism, see two articles by Robert Shalhope in the William and Mary Quarterly: “Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography,” 29 (Jan. 1972): 49–80, and “Republicanism and Early American Historiogra-


21. Fine discussions of popular reading habits and the implications for culture

22. See Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, vii, 10; and Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, 26–29, 80, 144, 240.


25. See Davidson, *Revolution and the Word* (the quotation appears on p. 10) for a masterful development of this thesis.


29. Davidson, in *Revolution and the Word*, offers abundant and compelling evidence for the dissenting role of early American novels, but I offer a rather different assessment of the thrust and significance of that dissent in historical and political terms.


39. See Spacks, Imagining a Self, 304–6; and Watts, Republic Reborn, 49–55.
40. The phrase “liberal ego” has been borrowed from two brilliant studies: Schorske, Fin-de-Siecle Vienna, 4–5, 22, 208–9; and Christopher Lasch, The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times (New York, 1984), 205–23.

CHAPTER 2. THE LAWYER AND THE RHAPSODIST

2. Ibid.
6. See Bennett, “Brown Canon,” 1–3, 6–9, 11–12.
7. Ibid., 51–52, 145, 152; and Clark, Pioneer Voice, 17. The quotations are from two letters written by Brown to his close friend Joseph Brinthurst, Jr. A large collection of these letters is held by the Bowdoin College Library in Brunswick, Maine. Charles E. Bennett has provided an annotated census of them in his “The Letters of Charles Brockden Brown: An Annotated Census,” Resources for American Literary Study 6 (Autumn 1976): 164–190, and citations to the Brown–Brinthurst Letters hereafter will also refer to the Bennett census. For the material in this paragraph, see Brown to Brinthurst, July 29, 1793 (Bowdoin MS), Bennett census #48; and ibid., May 20, 1792, Bennett census #21.
10. See Warfel, Gothic Novelist, 29–30; and Allen, Charles Brockden Brown, 12–13, 15–16.
11. See Bennett, “Brown Canon,” 10–11, 24–25; Brown to Debby Ferris, May 28,
1795 (Bowdoin MS), Bennett census #58; Clark, *Pioneer Voice*, 195; Warfel, *Gothic Novelist*, 96.


13. Brown to Bringhurst, Dec. 9, 1792 (Bowdoin MS), Bennett census #35; Clark, *Pioneer Voice*, 84; Brown to Bringhurst, 1793 (Bowdoin MS), Bennett census #45; Allen, *Charles Brockden Brown*, 12–13.


16. See several letters from Brown to Bringhurst (Bowdoin MS): July 29, 1793, Bennett census #48; May 30, 1792, Bennett census #23; and July 20, 1796, Bennett census #77.

17. Ibid.: June 11, 1793, Bennett census #46; May 30, 1792, Bennett census #23; and July 29, 1793, Bennett census #48.

18. See Allen, *Charles Brockden Brown*, 20; several letters from Brown to Bringhurst: Dec. 9, 1792, Bennett census #35; July 29, 1793, Bennett census #48; and May 20, 1792, Bennett census #21; Clark, *Pioneer Voice*, 102.


20. See several letters from Brown to Bringhurst (Bowdoin MS): Dec. 9, 1792, Bennett census #35; May 1792, Bennett census #12; 1793, Bennett census #42; June 11, 1793, Bennett census #46; July 25, 1793, Bennett census #47; n.d., probably 1792, Bennett census #8.


22. Ibid.: July 25, 1793, Bennett census #47; Dec. 9, 1792, Bennett census #35; May 30, 1792, Bennett census #23.

23. Brown recounted this dream in a long 1793 letter to Bringhurst, Bennett census #42, while the earlier comment appeared in another letter to Bringhurst, May 30, 1792, Bennett census #23.

24. Ibid.: 1793, Bennett census #42.

25. Clark, *Pioneer Voice*, 55, for example, has argued that the “Henrietta Letters” involved a real romantic incident in Brown’s life. This caused Leslie A. Fiedler to comment rather caustically that such an interpretation merely reflects how “con-
fused do sentimental life and sentimental literature become." See his *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York, 1966), 98–99. The manuscripts of the "Henrietta Letters" are now at the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Clark, however, has presented a reasonably complete reprinting of them in his *Pioneer Voice*, 55–107, and all citations to them hereafter will refer to the Clark volume.


28. Ibid., 64–67, 104.

29. Ibid., 87–89, 100, 101.

30. See Bennett, "Brown Canon," 68. The "Rhapsodist" essays have been reprinted in Charles Brockden Brown, *The Rhapsodist and Other Uncollected Writings*, Harry R. Warfel, ed. (New York, 1943), 1–24. Citations from the "Rhapsodist" will refer hereafter to the Warfel edition, and this particular quote appears on p. 5.


32. Ibid., 13–15, 7–8, 12, 6–7.

33. Ibid., 6, 16, 11, 7.

34. See two letters from Brown to Bringham (Bowdoin MS): July 29, 1793, Bennett census #48; and Aug. 16, 1793, Bennett census #49. See also "Henrietta Letters," in Clark, *Pioneer Voice*, 105, 98, 71–72, 56–57.


36. See Bingham, "Identity Crisis."


**Chapter 3: The Young Artist as Social Visionary**


8. Smith’s letters of May 7 and May 27, 1796 are largely extracted in Warfel, *Gothic Novelist*, 56–60, 60–64. These quotes appear on pp. 58 and 62.

9. Ibid., 56–57, 60–61, 60, 63–64, 64.

10. This view of Brown’s nascent “radicalism” runs contrary to the view of scholars like Jane Tompkins and Robert D. Arner, who see the author as more conservative throughout his career. Tompkins, in her *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York, 1985), argues that Brown developed in his writing a Federalist sensibility that insisted on the virtues of social order, commercial growth, and urban life. Arner, in his “Historical Essay” in the Kent State edition of Brown’s *Alcuin: A Dialogue* (Kent, Ohio, 1987), suggests in parallel fashion that Brown’s views on gender relations and women’s rights were quite traditional from the beginning. While it perhaps would be a mistake to overplay the intensity of Brown’s radical impulses, I believe that his fervent attacks on Christianity, his attraction to writers like Godwin and Rousseau, and his recurring critique of commercial values make it impossible to see him as a conservative cultural or political figure at this stage of his life. Later, of course, the story would be different.


12. See several letters from Brown to Joseph Bringhurst, Jr. (Bowdoin MS): Oct. 24, 1795, Bennett census #63; 1795, Bennett census #62; Dec. 21, 1792, Bennett census #36.

13. Ibid.: June 11, 1793, Bennett census #46; 1795, Bennett census #62.


16. See Charles Brockden Brown’s “Ellendale Letters” (Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin), Aug. 29 and 31, 1793; Bennett, “Brown Canon,” 169–70.


21. See Brown’s comments as “The Essayist” in the Philadelphia Ladies Magazine: (Nov. 1792): 255; (July 1792): 60–61; (June 1792) “Address to the Ladies.”


24. All subsequent citations to Brown’s Alcuin will refer to the Kent State University edition (Kent, Ohio, 1987). For “Mrs. Carter’s” views, see pp. 24–33; for “Alcuin,” see pp. 43, 13–14, 17, 37, 41–42, 26, 11–12.

25. “Alcuin’s” views appear on pp. 44–56, while “Mrs. Carter’s” can be found on pp. 66–70.

26. See, for example, Davidson, “Manner and Matter of Brown’s Alcuin,” 82–83.


30. Ibid., 68–70, 71, 75–76, 78, 82.


32. See Dunlap, Life of Brown, 1:57; Brown to Brinckhurst, 1795 (Bowdoin MS) Bennett census #62; Robert Arner, “Historical Essay,” in Alcuin (Kent, Ohio, 1987), 301, ff. #16; Brown, Alcuin, 27–28.


34. “The Man at Home” series has been reprinted in Warfel, ed., Rhapsodist, 27–98.


40. Charles Brockden Brown, Letter to Susan Goldolphin, July 2–3, 1793 (Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin), 2–3.

41. Ibid., 4.


**Chapter 4. The Major Novels (1)**


2. See Charles E. Bennett, “The Charles Brockden Brown Canon” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1974), 195–208, for a clear and convincing analysis of the chronology of composition and publication for these four novels. *Carwin* and *Stephen Calvert* will be discussed in Chapter 7 of this book.

3. For a discussion of Brown's influence on nineteenth-century authors, see Alexander Cowie, “Historical Essay,” in Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland; or, the Transformation, An American Tale* and *Memoirs of Carwin, the Biloquist* (Kent, Ohio, 1977), 341–45. All subsequent citations for *Wieland* in this chapter will refer to this Kent State University Press bicentennial edition of Brown's novel. Michael Warner, in his recent book *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), has suggested that Brown's novels were not “novels” at all in the modern sense, but transitional texts lying halfway between a republican, public “print discourse” of the eighteenth century and a modern, privatized “literary textuality” of the nineteenth. While there is a germ of truth here, I believe that Warner exaggerates the republican qualities of this author's fictional texts. Brown's Gothic sensibility did not lend itself easily to the traditional gentleman's ethos of civic virtue, nor did his inclination from his earliest days as a writer to insist on the absolute integrity and self-reliance of the individual writer. In my view, Brown's books, although crudely structured and often bitterly critical of liberalizing society, were clearly early versions of the modern novel.


5. Brown's letter to Susan Godolphin, July 2–3, 1793 (Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin), 5–6.


9. Brown, “Walstein’s School,” 147, 150, 146–47, 152. This connection between capitalist development and sexual regulation would reach its high point in the ideology of nineteenth-century Victorian America, where market growth and erotic repression became flip sides of the same developmental coin. See, for instance, the essays in Daniel Walker Howe, ed., Victorian America (Philadelphia, 1976). This connection also has deep roots in theoretical interpretations of the development of Western capitalism, particularly among the Frankfurt School. For a good example, see Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud (New York, 1955).


11. Ibid., 153, 150, 151–52. Brown’s expressed view in “Walstein’s School” lends credence to a view of him as an Enlightenment reformer of radical sympathies, at least early in his career.


15. See Brown, Wieland.

16. Ibid., 3, 114. For discussions of Brown and sensationalist psychology, see Donald A. Ringe, Charles Brockden Brown (New York, 1966), 27, 31–34; Larzer Ziff, “A Reading of Wieland,” Publications of the Modern Language Association of America 77 (1962): 51–57; and Arthur Kimball, Rational Fictions: A Study of Charles Brockden Brown (McKinnville, Oreg., 1968). For a treatment of Lockean psychology and its general cultural impact, see Henry F. May, The Enlightenment in America (New York, 1976), 7–10. While such works correctly point out Brown’s dark critique of the psychology of sensation, they also tend to overplay his skepticism about reason. Not only did Brown attempt to salvage reason by placing it on a more realistic foundation, but he also probed beyond the mere philosophical dimension of this issue. His novels like Wieland also contained a powerful critique of liberal individualism. For an insightful discussion of this text that parallels mine in certain ways,


21. Brown, *Wieland*, 14–19, describes the shocking death of Clara and Theodore’s father. I would note that this focus on internal privations and pressures is not just a question of Enlightenment epistemology and sensationalist psychology, as many literary treatments of the novel have implied. It also has social, political, and material roots in the liberation of the individual in post-Revolutionary America. These issues also preoccupied Brown throughout his life.


23. Ibid., 147, 83, 233.

24. On the chronology of the composition and publication of *Carwin, the Biloquist*, see Alexander Cowie’s “Historical Essay” in *Wieland*, 335, 361. This text, which is crucial for understanding Brown, will be treated in Chapter 6 of this book.


27. Ibid., 198, 199.

28. Ibid., 224–25, 190, 211, 90–91.

29. Ibid., 3; Dunlap, *Life of Brown*, 2:93. See also Russell B. Nye’s discussion in his “Historical Essay,” in Charles Brockden Brown, *Ormond; or, the Secret Witness* (Kent, Ohio, 1982), 307–09. All subsequent citations for *Ormond* will refer to this bicentennial edition from the Kent State University Press.


1. Charles Brockden Brown, Preface, in *Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793* (Kent, Ohio, 1980). All subsequent citations to this novel will refer to this bicentennial edition from the Kent State University Press.


4. Ibid., 154, 46, 11, 341–42, 434, 293. Jane Tompkins, in her *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York, 1985), sees *Arthur Mervyn* as a Federalist political plea in behalf of “civic virtue” and an urban commercial order. This reveals only half of the picture in the novel. While Brown certainly unfolds a virtuous critique of rampant individualism, he also bitterly attacks a “diseased” urban and commercial life as part of that very problem. His alienation and uncertainty are more pervasive than Tompkins admits, and in total they do not really comprise a Federalist political agenda.


7. Ibid., 308, 322, 323.

8. Cathy Davidson’s treatment of *Arthur Mervyn* in her *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York, 1986), 236–53, discusses with great insight the connection between public and private decay in this novel. Arthur, in her words, strains to probe “the limits of individualism” and posits “an intriguingly modern concept of personality.” While this strikes me as accurate, I disagree with her further assertion that the novel represents a Bakhtinian “carnivalesque performance” that invites an undermining of traditional proprieties and constraints. Brown’s self-consciously tragic, alienated, and intellectualist sensibility, it seems to me, do not quite fit the “carnivalesque” mode of playful, ritualistic subversion.
10. Ibid., 125, 237, 119, 332, 330.
12. Emory Elliott, in his *Revolutionary Writers: Literature and Authority in the New Republic, 1725–1810* (New York, 1982), 234–65, provides a succinct and shrewd portrait of social and cultural disarray in the post-Revolutionary period. He correctly notes, in my opinion, that Brown's novels, particularly *Arthur Mervyn*, offer "explorations of the impact of the social and economic order on the lives of individuals."
17. Ibid., 432, 429–30, 428.
19. Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* (Kent, Ohio, 1984), 3. All citations for this text will refer to this bicentennial edition from the Kent State University Press. Sydney J. Krause's "Historical Essay" in this volume shows how Brown gathered together many sources on irrational, abnormal human behavior and funneled them into this tale.
20. Ibid., 154, 155.
21. Ibid., 156, 279, 259, 292. Once again, see Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims,*


25. Ibid., 192, 185, 197, 212. Slotkin, in his Regeneration through Violence, has made the most compelling argument for a persistent violence in American culture, a trait that is reflected in its literary expression. He has linked violence to a desire within the American individual to purge his darker instincts and get on with the business of mastering the New World. According to Slotkin, this cultural process of objectifying libidinous urges in images of Nature, particularly Indians and animals, and then eliminating them has constituted “the myth of regeneration through the violence of the bout” (p. 557).


27. Ibid., 35–36, 290, 110, 278. See Grabo, Coincidental Art of Charles Brockden Brown, 160–85, for a sophisticated analysis of Brown’s deployment of “doubling” in his fiction writing.


Chapter 6. The Writer as Bourgeois Moralist


ed endeavors during this period, a process that was fed by these two domestic novels. Overall, I have tried to examine these themes and resituate them as parts of a broader process in Brown's life and, indeed, in American culture as a whole: the solidification of a bourgeois sensibility with its moral code based on restraint, gentility, and self-control. This process, I maintain, was part of a response to the dislocations accompanying rapid market growth in the post-Revolutionary decades.

3. See Donald A. Ringe, "Historical Essay," in Brown, Clara Howard, in a Series of Letters and Jane Talbot, a Novel (Kent, Ohio, 1986), 441. All subsequent references to these two novels will refer to this bicentennial edition from the Kent State University Press.

4. Brown, Clara Howard, 3, 38, 40, 64, 89.

5. For a persuasive account of Jane Talbot's publishing history, see Ringe, "Historical Essay," 443-52.


13. See Bingham, "Identity Crisis," 144-47; Brown's letters to Elizabeth Linn (Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin): Mar. 30, 1801; May 25, 1804; and Dec. 2, 1802.


15. Ibid., 20, 24, 27–28.


19. See Brown’s letters to Elizabeth Linn (MS, University of Texas): Apr. 4, 1801; Mar. 17, 1801; Apr. 29, 1801; undated letter; Apr. 13, 1801; Mar. 30, 1801.


23. Brown’s letters to Elizabeth Linn (MS, University of Texas): Apr. 29, 1801; Apr. 10, 1801; Mar. 31, 1801; Apr. 1, 1801.

24. Ibid., undated (probably Mar. or Apr. 1801); Apr. 1, 1801; Apr. 9, 1801.


26. Brown’s letters to Elizabeth Linn (MS, University of Texas): Feb. 20, 1801; Mar. 10, 1801; Feb. 17, 1801; Mar. 2, 1801; Apr. 9, 1801.

27. Ibid., Mar. 23, 1801; Apr. 27, 1801; Apr. 9, 1801; Apr. 11, 1801; Apr. 29, 1801; Mar. 18, 1801.


30. See Brown’s letters in William Dunlap, Life of Brown, 2:111–12, 113; and his letter in Clark, Pioneer Voice, 213. Elizabeth Brown’s obituary can be found in ibid., 292–94.


definition of modern “culture” is rooted in the social relationships of market capitalism.


CHAPTER 7. THE WRITER AND THE LIBERAL EGO


5. On Victorian culture, see the essays in Daniel Walker Howe, ed., Victorian America (Philadelphia, 1976).


8. Ibid., nn. on pp. 194–95, 331, 259, 442.


Brockden Brown's Historical 'Sketches': A Consideration," American Literature 28 (1956): 147–54. Bennett and Berthoff provide the fullest analysis of this fictional project.


18. Ibid., 120–22.


20. Brown, "Agricultural Improvement," 91; "Political Improvement," 126–28. The unbounded power of Sir Arthur Carril, with its authoritarian thrust, might suggest that Brown was indeed a conservative Federalist, a reactionary republican as portrayed by scholars like Jane Tompkins. This text, however, seems to suggest a more complex situation. It helps reveal, I believe, the ambiguity of Brown's engagement with a liberalizing society, where he accepted a market society of competition, merit, and productivity while simultaneously seeking to restrain its anarchic excesses. Moreover, it is perhaps easier to see Carril as an individualist superman rather than as a premodern authority figure.


25. Brown, Cession of Louisiana, 49; Monroe's Embassy, 36, 27.


Notes to Pages 179–194


28. Brown, Cession of Louisiana, 88, 92, 80–81, 77–78; Monroe’s Embassy, 27–28. See also his Restrictions upon Foreign Commerce, 74–75. Drew R. McCoy, in his The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1980), cogently analyzes the late eighteenth-century urge for “expansion across space” as an antidote to traditional fears of “decay over time” in republican ideology. This revitalized republicanism provided an ideological accommodation to the growth of a market society in post-Revolutionary America.

29. Brown, Restrictions upon Foreign Commerce, 73–74, 81, 83, 84.

30. Ibid., 89–90, 85–88. For more examples of Brown’s perception of American national interest and destiny, see also pp. 36, 77–78.

31. See the account in Dunlap, Life of Brown, 2:87–89.

32. See the discussion in Chapter 1, pp. 20–25, for a theoretical analysis of capitalist culture and psychological fragmentation.


34. On the writing and publishing of this protonovel, see Alexander Cowie, “Historical Essay,” in Wieland; or, the Transformation, an American Tale and Memoirs of Carwin, the Biloquist (Kent, Ohio, 1977), 334–37. All future references to Carwin are from this authoritative edition of the text.


36. On the background and writing of this text, see Robert D. Arner, “Historical Essay,” in Alcuin and Memoirs of Stephen Calvert (Kent, Ohio, 1987), 298–301; and Bennett, “Brown Canon,” 198–99. All future references to this novel will be from this authoritative Kent State University Press edition.


38. Ibid., 138, 141, 140. See also pp. 247–48 for another example of Carlton’s demands.


41. See Watts, Republic Reborn, 42–58, for a more extensive treatment of Brackenridge.


296–99; and Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Balti-

44. See the discussions of Rousseau in Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*,
23–25.

45. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), 33, 35, 31–33, 17,
35, 45.

46. The quote appears in Charles Brockden Brown, *Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793* (Kent, Ohio, 1980), 414.

47. See Gordon Wood, “The Democratization of Mind in the American Revo-
lution,” in Robert H. Horowitz, ed., *The Moral Foundations of the American Repub-
lic* (Charlottesville, Va., 1979), 102–28, for an insightful analysis of this process of


51. See Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar,” in Stephen E. Whicher, ed., *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston, 1960), 64; Karen Halt-
tunen, “Gothic Mystery and the Birth of the Asylum,” American Studies Association,
session paper, Oct. 1990, 12–15; and Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (New York,
1972) and *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade* (New York, 1964).

52. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York, 1969), 536–38,
488–89; Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York,
1958), 119, 181–82; Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844: Se-