Colonial Origins

William Hill Brown’s novel, *The Power of Sympathy*, published in Boston in 1789, is often accorded the title of the “first American novel.” The historical coincidence of the publication of *The Power of Sympathy* and the adoption of the US Constitution in 1789 has implicitly given currency to literary-critical understandings of the link between the political form of the nation and the literary genre of the novel. Accounts of the early American novel have taken the nation – novel connection as axiomatic: the tales of sympathy, seduction, incest, and captivity that typify early American novels have been primarily interpreted as allegories of American nationhood – as narratives that thematize the vicissitudes of citizenship and national identity in the new polity. This allegorical view is pithily embodied in John Adams’ 1804 statement: “Democracy is Lovelace and the people are Clarissa.” Adams indicates that the politics of American nationhood play out as a seduction narrative: a virtuous people, like the virtuous woman, must be prepared to rebuff the advances of a libertine or suffer destruction. Adams’ example has been duly followed by literary critics who have elaborated in compelling fashion the connections between particular early American novels and the state of the early republic, yet the proclivity for this model of reading has had the effect of foreclosing a range of alternative readings. In this essay I step away from the neat conjunction of nation and novel that has guided critical work in this field; I do so in order to examine the form and meaning of the novel in relation to a distinctively different frame – a frame better characterized in terms of an eighteenth-century nascent global market shaped by the forces of colonialism, mercantile capitalism, and imperialism.

The developing world market and its cultural relays and divisions informed both the production and the reception of the eighteenth-century novel; as I argue below,
the formal innovation of the realist novel as well as its nationalist associations emerge against the ground of the colonial world market. Indeed, attention to the transatlantic trade in texts, culture, and persons that marked eighteenth-century life in North America has made the title of “first American novel” an increasingly vexed one to assign: *The Power of Sympathy* was certainly not the first novel to be read, printed, or even written in colonial North America. As Cathy Davidson points out, a “convergence” of criteria has seemed to point to Brown’s novel as worthy of such a title: the novel was “written in America, by an author born in America, published first in America, set in America, [and is] concerned with issues that are specifically grounded in the new country and not simply transplanted from England.” The narrative of seduction and unwitting sibling incest that comprises *The Power of Sympathy* is thus one that Davidson takes to be grounded in the newly nationalized soil of the United States rather than England. Yet in this article I suggest that the insistently domestic and familial content of the early novel—in its very emphasis on *formulating* the domestic—speaks to the social, economic, and cultural effects of colonialism rather than the particularity of national identity. More specifically, I turn to scenes of incest and miscegenation that appear in eighteenth-century novels (both “English” and “American”) in conjunction with landscapes and thematics of coloniality.

Christopher Flint argues that the eighteenth-century English novel is marked, above all, by its concern with “narratives dealing with the affective experience of young adults seeking conjugal bliss in a domestic environment”—with, that is, formulating the nuclear family. While the same might be said of the early American novel, literary critics have told quite different stories about the novel in each case. In an English critical tradition, much attention has been paid to the way in which novelistic concerns with “family fictions” involve reshaping the family (together with related discourses of gender) in terms congenial to an ascendant bourgeoisie over and against those of a feudal and status-based society. In American literary criticism, similar fictions concerning courtship and family formation in the novel have been primarily read in terms of American politics: the travails of negotiating consensual marriage have been viewed as allegorical of the politics of consent at stake in the formation of the early Republic. Without collapsing all distinction between English and American novelistic traditions or concerns, I nonetheless aim to indicate the shared interest of British and American eighteenth-century novels with issues of family formation, and, more broadly, to point to the relation between colonialism and domestic fictions. I argue that issues of nationhood and the nuclear family appear against a larger, transatlantic scene of colonialism and market expansion and that this scene is visible in the limits of family formation that appear repeatedly in the novel in the forms of incest (excessive endogamy) and miscegenation (excessive exogamy). Incest and miscegenation are not simply invoked in these texts but are created and given meaning as marking the limits of familial arrangement; the very terms of incest and miscegenation thus emerge in the eighteenth century as indices of concern with the circulation of persons and relationships in the shifting terrain of a globalizing economy.
nation, then, I describe nationalism as more after-effect than origin of the novel and view the inward-turning domestic plot lines of the novel (seduction, marriage, incest) as standing in relation to the expansiveness of eighteenth-century commerce and Anglo-American imperialism.

The conjunction of nation and novel has been succinctly and influentially formulated by Benedict Anderson, in whose felicitous phrasing the nation constitutes an “imagined community” – a community most readily imagined in the print vehicles of newspaper and novel. According to Anderson, the novel and the nation serve as analogues insofar as both operate within an “empty, homogeneous” time – a time in which a variety of persons (citizens of a nation, characters in a novel) pursue their own lives yet understand themselves to stand in relation to others whom they don’t know – other individuals who occupy a narrative/national “meanwhile.” Like the covers of a novel, the borders of the nation hold these discrete individuals – despite their diverse engagements and plot lines – in a bounded relation to one another. The form of the novel is thus the focus of Anderson’s thesis: rather than addressing the content of particular narratives that appear in novels, Anderson is interested in the bounded yet fictive space the novel conjures for its readers. Yet as Jonathan Culler points out, Anderson’s claims concerning the formal analogy between nation and novel have been regularly confused with assertions that the novel is the purveyor of nationalist content:

The power of Anderson’s thesis about the novel is that it makes [the novel] a formal condition of imagining the nation – a structural condition of possibility. Critics, who are interested in the plots, themes, and imaginative worlds of particular novels, have tended to transform that thesis into a claim about the way some novels, by their contents, help to encourage, shape, justify, or legitimate the nation – a different claim, though one of considerable interest.\(^9\)

The novel, one could posit, is a genre conducive to the articulation of nationalism insofar as its structure mirrors the invisibly bounded relation of individuals and events that characterizes the nation. Yet this is a claim distinct from the suggestion that the novel is the product of the nation or nationalism: indeed, the novel may aim to imagine a community (like the nation) precisely because such a community does not exist.

In the larger exploration of the phenomenon of nationhood undertaken by Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, the linkages between and among nation, novel, and newspaper clearly emerge from the historical ground of colonialism and early capitalism. Indeed, Anderson’s specific focus is on post-colonial versions of nationhood – those of Mexico, Peru, the Philippines – rather than European nation-formation. And a closer examination of his claims concerning the novel indicates the importance of this historical ground to the genre. Consider, for instance, his account of the colonial newspaper which, like the novel, links disparately located individuals in a shared imaginary space:
What were the characteristics of the first American newspapers, North or South? They began essentially as appendages of the market. Early gazettes contained... commercial news (when ships would arrive and depart, what prices were current for what commodities in what ports), as well as colonial political appointments, marriages of the wealthy, and so forth. In other words, what brought together, on the same page, *this* marriage with *that* ship, *this* price with *that* bishop, was the very structure of the colonial administration and market-system itself. In this way, the newspaper of Caracas quite naturally, and even apolitically, created an imagined community among a specific assemblage of fellow-readers, to whom *these* ships, brides, bishops and prices belonged. In time, of course, it was only to be expected that political elements would enter in.¹⁰

Anderson thus indicates that the technology of communication that developed in relation to capitalism and the administration of empire (the newspaper, reporting initially on shipping and imperial administration) determined the shape of an imagined community that would eventually assume concrete political dimensions as the post-colonial nation. In broader terms, Anderson argues that vernacular linguistic communities grew up around absolutist imperial states as men who worked as administrators within such states moved from one peripheral location to another: the very *distance* that marked their relation to the metropole shaped their forms of communication and the nature of their imagined rather than proximate community. For Anderson, then, the administrative structure of empire is decisive with regard to the "imagined community" of the nation that will follow colonialism: "why was it precisely creole [colonial] communities that developed so early conceptions of their nation-ness?... The beginnings of an answer lie in the striking fact that each of the new South American republics had been an administrative unit from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century" (50, 52). As Anderson’s more specific historical account of the development of "imagined communities" indicates, the fact of colonial expansion across an increasingly far-flung geographical area was the enabling condition of new forms of communication and newly imagined relations of community that formed the structural possibility of post-colonial nationalism.

As attentive as Anderson is to the effects of colonial expansion on communicative norms in the creole community, he does not explore how the structure of colonial diaspora served to shape the community of the imperialist national community as well as the post-colonial one. In other words, while Anderson offers a plausible account of the Filipino novel *Noli Me Tangere*, further elaboration of the relation of nationalism to empire would be needed to account for British novels such as *Tom Jones* (1749) or *Pamela* (1741). If the novel is not the effusion of the nation but a form associated with the long-distance communicative norms of creole colonial administration, how, precisely, does the English novel "rise" in the eighteenth century? Using Anderson’s framework, Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse have proposed that creole colonial experience does, indeed, inform the eighteenth-century British novel. Specifically, Armstrong and Tennenhouse suggest that the colonial captivity narrative served as an enabling precursor of the English novel insofar as it presented a
formal innovation in the literary expression of nationalized and individualized subjectivity. English colonials in North America were required to "reinvent" Englishness for themselves in their absence from English ground and they did so through writing. For instance, in its heightened emphasis on the distance between home and foreign ground, the captivity narrative relies upon literary production to preserve attachment to Englishness: "The captivity narrative requires the captive to ward off the threat of another culture by preserving the tie to her mother culture through writing alone."

As a result of this effort, new models of being English and of imagining Englishness appeared before a metropolitan readership: "New World nationalism allows us to imagine how eighteenth-century readers back in England began to reconceive that nation as a readership." For a metropolitan audience, writing becomes a mode of producing English subjectivity that eventuates in the novel. In their bold formulation of the connection between colonial captivity narrative and novel, Armstrong and Tennenhouse argue that the captivity narrative finds its English novelistic incarnation in *Pamela*, a novel in which an individual (bourgeois) subjectivity is paradigmatically produced entirely through literacy – a novel in which the central character produces her freedom from captivity through the act of writing.

Anderson together with Armstrong and Tennenhouse thus point toward the colonial origins of the novel, yet significant questions with respect to this account nonetheless remain. Individuated subjectivity is important to Armstrong and Tennenhouse, as is the imagined or fictive community invoked by the individual who writes to remain part of a national community, but neither Anderson nor Armstrong and Tennenhouse place specific emphasis on what literary critics have defined as the hallmark of the eighteenth-century novel: namely, what Ian Watt has described as the "formal realism" of the genre – an innovation linked by Watt and subsequent critics to fundamental shifts in philosophy and epistemology occurring in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, we might ask what the link is between the imagined community of the novel and the colonial ground that might be seen as giving rise to this fictive entity. Does the tension between empire and nation, or colony and nation, inscribe itself within the novel in formal or thematic terms? More broadly, how might an understanding of the coloniality of the novel change existing understandings of the genre as an expression or allegory of nationhood?

**The Episteme of Contract**

If the novel is not the effusion of national spirit, then the history of the early American novel might be revised considerably. Indeed, as William Spengeman has suggested in his classic essay, the title of "first American novel" might be accorded not to Brown’s *Power of Sympathy*, but to a novel set in the British colonial holding of Surinam: namely, Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* (1688). Spengeman’s analysis of *Oroonoko* dispenses altogether with the equation of nation and novel, suggesting that the American novel might best be defined as a work that takes "literary cognizance of
America, incorporating some idea of that place into its very form of words” (387). The “America” of this sentence (namely, the setting of Oroonoko: Surinam in 1688) is clearly a geographical rather than a political formation. Yet Spengeman indicates that the Americanness of Oroonoko can be located in its linguistic form and not simply its geographical setting. How might a place register as a distinctive linguistic form? Spengeman associates the American continent with the form of writing first generated by Europeans there: specifically, the travelogue or “Brief True Relation” which is characterized by its empiricist and experiential account of the New World. In Oroonoko, he argues, Behn combines the narrative structure of romance with that of the colonial relation, thereby creating a hybrid form that, in its blend of fact and fiction, is recognizably novelistic and distinctively American: in Oroonoko, Behn “employed a narrative form that had been devised specifically to register those changes, in the shape and meaning of the world and in the concepts of human identity and history, that were prompted by the discovery, exploration, and settlement of America” (407–8). Spengeman’s provocative claim for the colonial origin of the novel thus turns in a sharply different direction from that of Anderson or Armstrong and Tennenhouse: rather than linking the form of the novel to the sociological or political conditions of colonialism, Spengeman associates the novel with an epistemic shift that he correlates with the discovery of the New World: namely, the development of a discourse of empiricism entirely absent from the logic of romance. Spengeman’s claims are intriguing insofar as they begin to address the question of the “formal realism” of the novel left aside by the “imagined community” model. Yet he is unable to offer a convincing account of just why Behn might have turned from romance to true relation: did the very facticity of the American continent generate an empiricist mode of writing that somehow elbowed its way into Behn’s romance once she set it in America? Or, as Spengeman also seems to suggest, did Behn attempt to cater to a middle-class audience that had begun to be interested in new forms of narration and “useful information”?

Spengeman is not alone among critics in pointing to the generic instability of Oroonoko or to Behn’s use of the travelogue as a means of sustaining the authority of her own narrative voice. The opening pages of Behn’s text offer a taxonomy of the Surinam flora and fauna, cataloguing “Marmosets,” “Cousheries,” “Parakeetoes,” and “Muckaws.” The narrator reports, moreover, that she has collected the skin of a “prodigious Snake” as well as rare butterflies for display in “His Majesty’s Antiquar-ies,” indicating her participation in the cataloguing aims of the “New Science” promoted by the Royal Society. Indeed, as Michael McKeon indicates, the “naïve empiricism” of Oroonoko partakes of the “epistemology of the travel narrative” promoted by the Royal Society – an epistemology that locates truth in the authority of the observer rather than in the force of tradition. The travelogue thus stands as a precursor of the novel, according to McKeon, insofar as it participates in an epistemological shift away from scholasticism and/or romance toward empiricism. Spengeman’s emphasis on the function of the Brief True Relation as the narrative of “individual contributions to the accumulating store of human knowledge about the world” (393) thus pinpoints one way in which the writing of the New World
intersects with the formal realism of the novel. Yet the colonial context of the Brief True Relation points not simply to empiricism as a new mode of knowledge, but to the function of the travelogue as a discursive tool for appropriating the objects, land, and peoples of the New World. Two genre-founding examples of the Brief True Relation are Sir Walter Raleigh’s 1596 account, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana*, and Thomas Harriot’s 1588 *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*. Both of these texts have been subject to extensive critical attention aimed at demonstrating that the Brief True Relation was far from (simply) empiricist in its aims, but rather served as a crucial means of effecting the project of colonial possession of the New World in tandem with the discourse of the New Science. Gesa Mackenthun thus argues that Harriot’s *Brief and True Report* relies “on a new formal mode for the representation of reality” in which “Harriot . . . throws overboard all scholastic cargo and concentrates on the mercantile aspect of American nature. He emphasizes the various possibilities of its commodification and reveals his own identity as one of the main exponents of the new empirical science.”

While the true report may rely on the category of individual experience to assert its claims to veracity, that experience must be understood as framed by the aims of colonial expansion and developing market relations. I would thus argue that we do, indeed, find an important (and novelistic) shift of epistemes within Behn’s narrative that is related to the discovery of the New World, but this shift is the result of the new norms of a market-oriented colonial growth rather than the geographic fact of the American continent. The episteme of the novel that registers here, then, is less empiricist than contractual – less the effect of the discovery of the New World than of the mercantile logic fueling colonial expansion and imperialism.

Where, then, does contractual logic appear in *Oroonoko*? And what does *Oroonoko* tell us about the contractual episteme of the novel? The generic shift from the logic of romance to that of realism (“naïve empiricism”) clearly occurs when Oroonoko arrives in Surinam, translated from the royal African court of Coramantien to the plantation economy of colonial America: a close look at this shift indicates the role that contractual relations play in establishing the language that replaces romance. When Oroonoko arrives in Surinam, his identity as romance hero remains intact: despite his new status as a slave (dubbed “Caesar” rather than Oronooko by a colonial administrator), his innate royalty is recognized by all those around him – both white and black – and he proceeds to discover Imoinda (now dubbed “Clemene”) and wed her: “From that happy Day *Caesar* took *Clemene* for his Wife, to the general Joy of all People; and there was as much Magnificence as the Country wou’d afford at the Celebration of this Wedding: and in a very short time after she conceiv’d with Child; which made *Caesar* even adore her, knowing he was he last of his Great Race” (93).

While this sentence constitutes closure with respect to romance, Behn’s narrative continues past the end-point which would represent full knowledge – full elaboration of divine principle – in romance. In the sentence following the one above we are thus introduced to a new set of concerns and epistemic norms best characterized as colonial and contractual:
This new Accident [the conception of his child] made [Oroonoko] more Impatient of Liberty, and he was every Day treating...for his and Clemene’s Liberty; and offer’d either Gold, or a vast quantity of Slaves, which shou’d be paid before they let him go, provided he cou’d have any Security that he shou’d go when his Ransom was paid: They fed him from Day to Day with Promises, and delay’d him, till the Lord Governor shou’d come; so that he began to suspect them of falshood, and that they wou’d delay him till the time of his Wives delivery, and make a Slave of that too, For all the Breed is theirs to whom the Parents belong: This Thought made him very uneasy, and his Sullenness gave them some Jealousies of him. (93)

The conception of his child-to-be shifts from serving as a sign of narrative fulfillment (the child as the continuation of Oroonoko’s “Great Race”) in the first sentence cited above to a sign of Oroonoko’s deeply distressing situation as a slave embedded within the colonial economy in the next sentence. While Oroonoko is accustomed to a system of honor (the logic of romance) he finds himself located in a system of contract instead: whereas honor is innate and essential, contract is situational and depends not upon recognition of a god-given interior status but instead upon the accurate prediction of commercial return. Contractual logic is actuarial in both the vernacular and etymological senses of the word — predicated, that is, upon the Latin actum, “things done” in the world, and linked to the capacity to aggregately predict, on the basis of empirical observation of such acts, what may unfold in the future.

In the passage cited above, we see Oroonoko respond to the contractual economy of Surinam with an attempt to construct contracts that are more favorable to him: he thus offers gold and slaves in return for the promise of his manumission. Yet his efforts seem to founder on the breach that divides slave from master within the colonial economy as he is offered apparently empty promises in return rather than a viable contract. His very difficulty in securing a new contract points to another significant aspect of contractual logic in the novel, namely, that the limits of contractual engagement repeatedly appear to be defined as racialized and nationalist within Oroonoko. Thus, for instance, contracts habitually fail or evaporate between Oroonoko and whites, not simply because the whites are untrustworthy but because they do not see Oroonoko as someone who lives within the realm of their contractual world — as someone with whom they must keep promises. Oroonoko, on the other hand, views his honor as innate rather than circumstantial and repeatedly insists upon his honor as the guarantor of his conduct.

Further evidence of the distinction between a system of honor and one of commercial contract is evident in Oroonoko’s own views of slavery — views that initially may seem contradictory. When he foments rebellion among his fellow slaves in Surinam, he argues less that slavery is wrong than that colonial race slavery is wrong:

And why, said he, my dear Friends and Fellow-sufferers, shou’d we be Slaves to an unknown People? Have they Vanquish’d us Nobly in Fight? Have they Won us in Honourable Battel? And are we, by the chance of War, become their Slaves? This wou’d not anger a Noble Heart, this
wou’d not animate a Soldiers Soul; no, but we are Bought and Sold like Apes, or Monkeys, to be the Sport of Women, Fools and Cowards. (105)

Oroonoko here criticizes the slavery of the colonial commercial economy that sells Africans like animals or commodities and does not recognize their diverse human capacities or inner natures; in contrast, he suggests that forms of slavery practiced in Africa, in which individuals become slaves on the basis of having lost battles, are more acceptable – this is so because the outcome of a battle will reflect the innate status of the fighter; one who loses in battle may well be fit to be a slave rather than a warrior. Oroonoko’s views on slavery as a potentially justified status hierarchy appear again when the slaves he has urged to rebel later desert him in battle: he calls these men “Dogs, treacherous and cowardly” (109) and contends that they deserve to be enslaved. Oroonoko suggests then, that the status of slave may be justified if it corresponds to a divinely calibrated truth. As we have seen, this is precisely the logic of romance and is a logic that founders in the face of contractual colonialism.

Michael McKeon argues that the romance often proceeds by way of a succession of acts of naming, each of which is increasingly revelatory of divine truth: “If romance names are the outward embodiment of an inner or essential truth, romance character development tends to proceed by discontinuous leaps between states of being – by ‘rebirths’ – and to be signified by the successive divergence or alteration of name.”

In ironic terms, Behn’s narrative does follow this structure though I would suggest that it finally inverts its meaning, overturning the logic of romance. We have seen that Oroonoko’s name shifts to Caesar when he reaches the New World and becomes the possession of a white master. According to the narrator, this name is appropriate or revealing of Oroonoko’s inner nature, “for ‘tis most evident, [Oroonoko] wanted no part of the Personal Courage of that Caesar, and acted things as memorable, had they been done in some part of the World replenishe’d with People, and Historians, that might have given him his due” (88). She laments, in effect, that only she herself, “a Female Pen,” is able to write his story. Yet while the narrator attempts to lend romance – which is to say, an inner logic – to the name of Caesar, she cannot ultimately do so since this nomination is fundamentally commercial: “the Christians never buy and Slaves but that they give ‘em some Name of their own, their native ones being likely very barbarous, and hard to pronounce . . . For the future, therefore, I must call Oroonoko, Caesar, since by that Name only he was known in our Western World” (88–9). To insert Oroonoko in to the colonial economy – “our Western World” – he must be easily appropriated and rendered exchangeable (commodified) in the word and the flesh, and his renaming enacts this appropriation. While the narrator gestures toward the nobility of Caesar’s name, it is worth noting that Caesar was a name often given to dogs in England. Indeed, Srinivas Aravamudan points to the iconography linking pets and slaves in eighteenth-century England; both were represented as possessions that served to increase their owner’s status. In Oroonoko, Aravamudan argues, the narrator’s friendship with Oroonoko may partake more of her interest in his status as Caesar the dog than as Caesar the Roman leader: the “narrator’s
befriending of Oroonoko could mean establishing his loyalty not only as a vassal or slave, but also as pet. . . [H]er access to Oroonoko increases her prestige and establishes her social superiority through his metonymic proximity to her." 19 The multi-valence of the name "Caesar" thus embodies the split within the narrative itself, and although the narrator seems to endorse the romance account of the name, it is the commercial or contractual valence of the name that she will ultimately turn to her own account.

That Oroonoko himself does not fully accede to his colonial renaming is evident in his later statement that "Oroonoko scorns to live with the Indignity that was put on Caesar" (112). Interestingly, however, one final act of naming occurs in the text to which Oroonoko does accede. A villainous but wealthy Irishman, Banister, renames Oronooko once more at the close of the narrative as he is about to burn Oroonoko at the stake on behalf of the administrators of the colony: "[Banister] told him, he shou’d Dye like Dog, as he was. Caesar replied, this was the first piece of Bravery that ever Banister did; and he never spoke Sense till he pounc’d that Word; and, if he wou’d keep it, he wou’d declare, in the other World, that he was the only Man, of all the Whites, that ever he heard speak Truth" (118). 20 While one might read this to indicate that Oroonoko welcomes his death and that the significant word in Banister’s statement is "Dye," I would suggest that the act of naming Oroonoko a "Dog" is perversely welcomed by Oroonoko as well insofar as it names the very truth of his condition within the world he now inhabits – a world which is not that of romance but of contract. In the world of contract, Oroonoko has no standing as human but is instead reduced to a dog: in his honorable fashion, Oroonoko recognizes that he has been properly "named" by Banister in the new world beyond romance. Like Shakespeare’s Caliban, then, his insertion into the language and economy of the colonial world market is one that has taught him that his status will always be that of the non-human, the dog. Whereas before he believed that dogs were fit to be slaves, he here understands that slavery has dubbed him a dog and that he must die in this state. This is both the fulfillment of McKeon’s logic of romance nomination and its abrogation, since the essential truth revealed in Oroonoko’s death is that his status as an honorable hero of romance has been finally eradicated by the fact of New World slavery.

As we have seen, the contractual relations established in Surinam do not grant Oroonoko a nationalized identity or a new status in the imagined community of the colony: rather, a newly nationalized identity is established for the British female narrator of the novel as her white identity and her narrative voice emerge with increasing authority across the text. As critics have argued, Behn evidently speaks with ambivalence about the role of the slave trade in producing contractual relations and destroying hierarchical ones: one might, for instance, see her deployment of romance as elegiacal and thus as fundamentally critical of a colonialist discourse in which innate honor no longer counts as valuable. On the other hand, the discourse of imperialism enables the narrator, however reluctantly, to establish and consolidate her own power as an author/observer of empirical fact on a distant continent, and as a
white Englishwoman who uses the written word to produce her own identity and her link to an imagined national community as well. While Oroonoko is dubbed “Caesar” and then “Dog” within the colonial economy, the narrator emerges with a new name as well, as a “Female Pen,” writing to an imagined community of white, British readers. The narrator cannot keep her “word” to Oroonoko despite her attempt at honor, but she can produce the authoritative word and verisimilitude of the novel – the authority of the true relation – which relies upon her successful navigation of colonial contractual relations. Oroonoko thus displays not only the dominance of the logic of contract in the colonial setting, but the limits of contract as they appear in explicitly racialized terms: the white, colonial community with whom the narrator keeps her word and the imagined national community to whom she directs the words of her narrative clearly exclude the racialized, dehumanized, and finally dismembered foreign prince, Oroonoko.

What makes Oroonoko a novelistic text, then, is its deployment of the episteme of contract, an episteme that I have defined as actuarial but that might also, in the words of Irene Tucker, be seen as “primarily probabilistic.” According to Tucker, the kind of knowledge that the novel concerns itself with is empiricist but also contingent and deliberative. Linking the novel to political liberalism, Tucker argues that liberal subjectivity (and the novel) concern “one’s capacity to know and predict the contingent particularities of the material world – including the particularities of other people in specific social, political, and economic relations to one.” As recent critical work on the eighteenth century novel has demonstrated, the horizon of probability explored in the novel – namely, the speculative nature of fictional realism – is linked to the development of the world market and new forms of capitalist investment and credit-based finance that evolved during England’s financial revolution. With the advent of credit and paper notes issued by the new Bank of England, financial relations became associated with forms of speculation, probability, and fictionality.

To invest funds in the speculative contracts of this new economy required imagining what the future might hold in the form of a return on investment. The promising, yet uncertain nature of this imaginative calculus caused a great deal of anxiety as well as real financial losses and gains. In 1720, for instance, the “South Sea Bubble” ruined many investors who had placed money in the South Sea Company. The Whig writer “Cato” describes credit as based in “gilded clouds [and] . . . fleeting apparitions” which may well be scuttled by the “story of a Spanish frigate . . . or the sickness of a foreign prince, or the saying of a broker in a coffee-house.” Credit, here clearly linked to the growing global economy, thus involves an explicitly fictive element – stories, sayings, and apparitions are all forms of the imaginative work upon which contract and credit rely. As Catherine Ingrassia argues, the logic of credit thus mirrors the logic of the developing genre of the novel: “Reading a novel, like investing in a speculative financial venture, demanded readers’ imaginative participation in a narrative that could potentially be a vehicle with which early modern subjects could reinvent themselves and envisage their lives differently.” The fictional world of the novel has meaning not insofar as it is actual but insofar as it is realistic or probable, a claim
linking the aesthetic form of the novel with a world in which contractual relations dominate. Contract thus entails an epistemic shift toward a belief in probability – not simply toward empiricism, but toward a kind of deliberative intelligence oriented toward navigating future (and thus fictive) possibilities.

Yet if the task of fictional realism is to create a predictable and knowable world in which ties of understanding create bonds and enable contracts, the global context of contractual relations would seem to introduce a distinct risk of uncertainty and unpredictability. Accounts of both the novel and the contract tend to emphasize the democratizing or destratifying effects of the new commercial world of the eighteenth century, yet the equalizing force of contractual relations brings with it the weakening of certainty grounded in status relations.26 J. G. A. Pocock in particular has described the anxiety that the new world of finance and mobile property generated, especially among a land-holding elite: “the revolution of public credit . . . generated the idea that political relations were becoming relations between debtors and creditors . . . and this was seen as leading not merely to corruption, but to the despotism of speculative fantasy.”27 As both Pocock and Ingrassia emphasize, credit was viewed by its critics as feminizing those who heeded its siren song: “The ‘moneyed’ or economic subjects, in contrast to the paternal, stable, and rational figure of the landed citizen, were perceived as symbolically indulging their desires and displaying their ‘feminized’ tendencies.”28

Efforts were made, writes Pocock, for “the stabilisation of this pathological condition” including those of novelist Daniel Defoe to describe credit as linked to more predictable terms, such as reputation and opinion, rather than unfettered fantasy. Thus the concern with credit that generated charges of feminization also generated other (ultimately successful) strategies to stabilize and masculinize credit. I would suggest that one such strategy of stabilizing credit involved the rhetorical deployment of racialization. For instance, if we return to Cato’s anxieties about overseas trade, we see that he implicitly suggests that the sickness of a foreign prince is far from predictable and thus not solid ground upon which to base contracts; epistemological claims grounded in probability meet their limit in foreign (and hence unpredictable) cultures and persons. Cato’s claims thus echo the logic of Oroonoko in which the foreign prince is excluded from contractual exchange. In Oroonoko, the limits of the known (and knowable) community are redrawn in the colonial American section of the novel in implicitly national and racial terms, thereby containing or warding off the threat posed to contractual relations by the unknown or unpredictable. In related terms, Daniel Defoe outlines a project for world trade, including trade with Africa, that invokes both race and nation as means of stabilizing the speculative nature of such an endeavor. For instance, while promoting trade with Africa, Defoe also argues against relying upon African merchants to engage in this trade: Africans, he argues, are “Wild, Barbarous, Treacherous, and perfectly intractable as to Commerce.” Only by building fortresses and “keeping the Natives at a Distance” can trade be preserved. Defoe concludes, “Experiments have taught us, if we please to learn this Maxim in the African Trade, that it is no way to be carryed on but by Force: for a mere Correspondence with the Natives as Merchants, is as impracticable, as it would be if
they were a Nation of Horses."

29 Here Defoe echoes the racial and nationalist logic of Behn’s novel, in which Oroonoko became a dog rather than a contractual partner to white colonials: dogs or horses do not register as viable trading partners. As Aparna Dharwadker argues, Defoe “practices an economic nationalism thoroughly qualified by a poetics of race and religion.”

30 The strongly nationalist aims of Defoe’s vision of English global trade delimit risk through a discourse of racialization. Defoe’s strategy of nationalizing (and thus stabilizing) engagements in the world market is one that the novel more generally seems to follow as well. Indeed, one might argue that precisely because the global horizon creates a loss of intelligibility, the novel restores the reader to the limited, comprehensible frame of a national community. In creating a circumscribed national horizon, inside of which equitable and intelligible relations obtain, the novel reconstructs, as it were, a culturally “flat earth” at the very moment when, geopolitically, the earth has become round.

Domestic Drama and Incest

Paradoxically, then, the novel is a genre reflective of a colonial and commercial economy that opens the way to expansive relations of trade and exchange and a nationalism that forecloses the horizon of exchange by way of newly codified social identities and relations. The newly codified relations are particularly pronounced at the domestic level, where they are visible in terms of marked shifts in class structure and kinship systems. As historians have demonstrated, eighteenth-century England saw the waning authority of kinship systems in organizing political, economic, and social power in favor of the authority of the bourgeois family, individualism, and, I would add, nationalism. As Ellen Pollak argues, the increased importance of mobile over landed property was associated with new models of marriage and revisions to the social rules governing the exchange of women: as property became mobile, so too did women as conveyors of property, and women thus began to circulate upon different terms, according to new norms.

31 While Pollak emphasizes that the new rules of social exchange and marriage turn to a large degree upon the increased weight placed upon a binary model of sex and gender, Franco Moretti, in turn, suggests that a geographical set of constraints is also important with respect to the new forms of social identity and exchange that are the focus of the eighteenth-century novel. According to Moretti, marriage plots in the British novel can be mapped primarily in terms of the boundaries of the nation-state: by literally mapping the geographic movement of marriage partners in Jane Austen’s novels, Moretti makes visible a “National Marriage Market,” which “is new... a mechanism that crystallized in the course of the eighteenth century, which demands of human beings (and especially of women) a new mobility.”

32 The novel, for Moretti, is the “symbolic form” which enables this imagined community of potential marriage partners to exist. For Moretti, then, the boundaries of the nation-state enable mobility – they open up possibilities for the exchange of women between men at disparate locations that were previously
not possible. Yet we might also see the horizon of the nation-state as delimiting the borders of this exchange – as closing off some forms of mobility as well as opening others. For example, Moretti argues that colonialism is not an essential component of the national marriage market, yet in novels from Maria Edgeworth’s Belinda (1801) to Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre (1847), characters who are born beyond the boundaries of the nation-state but very much within the commercial system of the British empire – creole characters such as Mr. Vincent or Bertha Rochester – are entertained and rejected as suitable marriage partners for English-born men and women. Read as a boundary that renders plausible certain forms of mobility (around class and gender) but that renders implausible other forms of mobility (particularly with respect to race) the nationalized horizon of the novel can be viewed within the context of empire and broader forms of market expansion than solely British national ones.

If a concern with policing the boundaries of the nation-state – a concern with the limits of exogamy that typically appears in the guise of miscegenation and a refusal to contract across racial lines – appears in the eighteenth-century novel as evidence of the novel’s relation to the commercial effects of empire, I would argue that representations of incest – of the internal limits of kinship defined in terms of endogamy – are also very much related to the expansive horizon of the global market. In other words, while the rules governing the marriage market shifted away from lineage and an evident system of kinship, rules of kinship or the exchange of women in marriage were reinscribed in two new locations: at the horizon of the nation (often marked as racial), and in the very internal location of the nuclear family (marked in terms of gender). Just as the borders of the nation become an invisible horizon of intelligibility for the novel and the marriage market, so too does the nuclear family and the heterosexual couple of man and wife become an increasingly important unit of structural meaning with respect to kinship rules. Specters of miscegenation and incest thus haunt the national boundaries of the novel, bringing into occasional focus the boundary-drawing acts needed to sustain the coherence of the nation.

Eighteenth-century novels seem to be concerned in particular with one specific form of incest: namely, unwitting sibling incest. As Ellen Pollak remarks: “incest is possibly always present in not knowing where one belongs”; in other words, the violation of the basic rules of kinship might be seen as a result of dislocation and loss of structure, an effect of the loss of a kinship system and an increase in social mobility. Daniel Defoe’s Moll Flanders (1722) begins with the condition of not knowing that Pollak links with incest: Moll is born to a mother who is imprisoned in Newgate for theft and who is transported to Virginia shortly after Moll’s birth, thus leaving her daughter with no visible support system or social affiliations. Significantly, Moll’s first memory is of living with a band of gypsies in a heightened state of mobility that bespeaks the complete rupture of social ties and a resultant lack of place and position. The mobility of colonialism (the deportation of her mother) thus immediately stands as destructive rather than enabling of sustaining forms of social identity – her mother’s mobility robs her of any place in the world. Yet the novel as a whole is about nothing so much as the success of social mobility figured as primarily commer-
cial; Moll moves from her unpromising start in Newgate, through a series of marriages and a criminal career, eventually attaining a repentant and wealthy state: in the narrative of her rise to respectable and propertied English citizenship, however, both incest and coloniality are key elements.

The shift away from kinship or lineage to a social space defined by commercial contract is thus writ large in Moll's narrative, and Moll is typically seen as exemplary of the self-made individual who flourishes in such a world. Indeed, in the opening sentence of the novel, Moll begins her narration by stating that she will not set down her "True Name" (her patronym), thereby implying that the truth of her identity lies in the story and name that she constructs for herself rather than that which was given her at birth. Commercial contract and profit thus appear to be the guiding forces within the novel and behind Moll's actions, particularly with respect to marriage, and are, moreover, crucial to establishing her individualism and subjectivity. As Amit Yahav-Brown contends, "Moll's ingenuity lies in her deliberative capacities" which are an expression of her agency and will; indeed, according to Yahav-Brown, the novel as a whole seeks to emphasize the deliberative (or contractual) capacities of Moll as the grounds of her English citizenship and subjectivity. In her deliberative capacity, Moll demonstrates her right to the political freedom and identity of liberal citizenship. Yahav-Brown's claims accord well with a model of the novel as both national and contractual: those who engage in contracts within the novel (who master its contractual episteme) also properly inhabit a national space and thus attain citizenship in the nation. And indeed, Moll's ability to assess the probable relations among individuals and events – her predictive and deliberative capacity to shape these events to her will – is nowhere more evident than in the marriage contract she secures with her third husband, the Virginia planter. Posing as a woman of fortune (despite her lack of one), she aims and succeeds at marrying a propertied man. Moreover, when she reveals her lack of financial estate to him, she nonetheless also evinces the more important bourgeois capacity to labor and circulate geographically with her husband in order to increase their estate: she readily agrees to move to Virginia with him in order to extract more money from his property there. Yet her deliberative (as well as contractual and capitalist) capacities meet their limit in the "most unexpected and surprizing thing that perhaps ever befel any Family in the World," namely, the discovery that her Virginia husband is her half-brother. Incest as the result of excessive circulation in the colonial economy – the effect of her mother's transportation to Virginia – has resulted in the ruin of her deliberative efforts to lay up an estate with her husband. As such, incest would seem to mark the failure of deliberative citizenship and commercial circulation.

Far from dismissing kinship entirely in favor of autonomous individualism, then, Defoe at this point indicates a concern for displaced forms of kinship – specifically, as I argue below, for kinship forms embodied in the relation of the marital couple to the nation. Whereas Moll has been independent of parentage previously in the novel, her successful, independent circulation is brought up short by the revelation of her patronym on the lips of her husband's (and her own) mother. Moll realizes she is
wed to her half-brother when her mother relates her history and arrives at “one Particular that requ’rd telling her Name” (88). Though no specific mention of Moll’s biological father is made, the name that Moll and her mother share functions structurally as the patronym that locates Moll within a kinship system. While Moll’s mother subsequently seeks to collaborate with Moll in forgetting and amending the personal history that has revealed the incestuous nature of her relation with her husband, Moll herself is unwilling to ignore the “real” of this patronym despite her pronounced capacity for self-fashioning and speculation. The revelation of incest and of Moll’s patronym shifts the action in the novel decisively and in a direction that moves away from the autonomous and deliberative commercial circulation Moll has thus far pursued. Moll chooses to leave her husband and return to England to look for another husband, yet the “choice” of exogamy seems rather to be a concession to the rules of kinship than a considered selection between two possibilities. Moreover, Defoe represents her decisions regarding incest as driven less by judgment than by gut instinct. Her response to the incest taboo is thus portrayed as less rational than innate, a move by which Defoe naturalizes the “real” of the patronym and erases the cultural contingency of Moll’s location with kinship structures. Thus while Moll does not object to incest “in point of Conscience” she finds the thought of sex with her husband “the most nauseous thing . . . in the World” (98). Moreover, when she finally does devise a plan for her future, she concedes that “I might perhaps have Marry’d again there [in Virginia], very much to my Advantage, it had been certainly my Business to have staid in the Country [Virginia], but my Mind was restless too, and uneasie; I hanker’d after coming to England, and nothing would satisfy me without it” (104). In short, her innate rather than rational desires lead her away from incest as well as away from marriage with another creole; her innate desires lead her, instead, to return to England and to the national (and seemingly more natural) marriage market there. While it would benefit her, in financial terms, to remain in Virginia and find a husband there, she inexplicably hankers after returning to England. Insofar as Moll accepts (in her gut) the prohibition on incest, she retains her commitment to kinship rules that require her own circulation, as a woman, for the sake of fraternal ties between men. The traditional authority of patriarchy and kinship is certainly attenuated in the novel, yet it does not simply disappear: rather, Defoe reinscribes kinship rules within the heterosexual couple and the nation. At the moment when Moll’s patronym is spoken by her mother, she is propelled away from her creole husband, back toward a specifically English marriage market that will ultimately enable her to re-establish her social identity and ownership of property (including the property she will finally accrue in Virginia).

The incest taboo, as many have argued, concerns primarily the circulation and exchange of women between men. Prohibiting excessive degrees of endogamy promotes forms of exogamy that establish ties between men of different familial groups. As Talcott Parsons argues, the incest taboo involves “the positive obligation to perform functions for the subunit and the larger society by marrying out. Incest is a withdrawal from this obligation to contribute to the formation and maintenance of
The supra-familial bonds on which major economic, political and religious functions of the society are dependent.\textsuperscript{36} The supra-familial bonds at stake in \textit{Moll Flanders} and the novel are clearly \textit{national} ones. The move from kinship systems to the national marriage market requires a good deal of exogamy – indeed, marriage in this market seemingly occurs with little regard for kinship alliances. Yet if kinship is erased from the political horizon of the nation, the novel nonetheless underwrites national boundaries in terms of its concerns with miscegenation and incest taboos. While the novel opens with Moll’s absolute lack of position as a foundling of empire, it nonetheless ends with a firm sense of her national identity: the novel closes not simply with her successful accumulation of property and social relations (husband, mother, son), but with her return to \textit{England} and thus to the national space that property and social relations entitle her to comfortably inhabit. I mean to emphasize, then, the extent to which Moll’s circulation among marriage partners and through colonial geographic spaces is ultimately recuperated to a stabilizing national narrative that enables a return on investment: Moll’s investment in commercial and autonomous adventure is finally secured when she is located as married (and thus gendered) to an English man (and thus nationalized/racialized).

We might also note that unwitting sibling incest seems to mark a failure of or divergence from the novelistic form itself. While the novel aims to make the world probable, unwitting sibling incest seems a highly improbable event, particularly in the colonial context. What are the chances of marrying a colonial (indeed, a creole) who turns out to be one’s brother? With the appearance of this improbable event in the midst of the novel, the logic of romance (divine truth revealed in events of mythic dimension) seems to reassert itself. Incest and miscegenation might, then, be seen to represent the return of romance within the novel: these violations of national space make evident the structural (and seemingly divine or mythic) limits of the probable and serve as the enabling exceptions of the imagined community of the nation-state. Moreover, these enabling exceptions institute kinship laws defined less as kinship than as the naturalized divisions of race and gender. Consider, for instance, Moll’s language and treatment of her husband once she has discovered that he is her brother: she concurs that she “Treated him rather like a Dog than a Man, and rather like the most contemptible Stranger than a Husband” (93). Just as Oroonoko became a dog in the contractual economy of slavery, Moll’s incestuous partner becomes a dog as well – an inhuman species with whom one cannot engage in contracts.

If unwitting sibling incest is the improbable consequence of commerce, colonialism, and circulation, it is nonetheless common in eighteenth-century novels on both sides of the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{37} The centrality of incest to the “first” American novel, \textit{The Power of Sympathy}, has led some critics to view it as representative of a particularly American set of concerns regarding nation-formation. Yet as I have suggested above, the literary genre of the novel and the political form of the nation remain in tension and dialogue with colonialism, the global market, and imperialism even as the nation gains political authority in England and the United States. Placed next to \textit{Moll Flanders’} tale of unwitting incest, it becomes clear that \textit{The Power of Sympathy} exhibits...
similar concerns about kinship that emerge in relation to post-colonial nationality and market relations that govern the exchange of women. Unlike Defoe’s novel, however, Brown’s *Power of Sympathy* exhibits little interest in commerce or property acquisition. Rather, the novel as a whole reads as a disquisition upon the education of women. Although the plot follows the incestuous relations between a young man named Harrington and his half-sister Harriot, the epistolary novel consists, in the main, of letters exchanged among a circle of friends, many of which are highly didactic in nature and focus in particular on the topic of female education and reading. The purpose of reading books, we are told, is not simply to gain knowledge about the world (books may, after all, misrepresent the world), but to learn to exercise judgment. As one Mister Holmes opines:

> There is a medium to be observed in a lady’s reading; she is not to receive everything she finds, even in the best books, as invariable lessons of conduct; in books written in an easy, flowing style, which excel in description and the luxuriance of fancy, the imagination is apt to get heated – she ought, therefore, to discern with an eye of judgment, between the superficial and the penetrating – the elegant and the tawdry – what may be merely amusing, and what may be useful.  

While books may provide a variety of acceptable and unacceptable models for behavior, the correct way to read books is with a discerning eye: moreover, experience alone will not teach one discernment; rather, books themselves facilitate this capacity for deliberation. Reading, then, develops one’s sense of what is probable in the world, and hence one’s capacity to form sound judgments and, we might say, to deliberately enter into contracts.

The most crucial contract into which young, novel-reading women must enter in the early American novel is the marriage contract. The well-read woman might thus be expected to exercise informed judgment in attracting and selecting a marriage partner, avoiding, in particular, the pitfalls of seduction and coquetry. And indeed, when Harriot and Harrington first meet, Harriot’s virtuous demeanor derails Harrington’s initial intentions of seducing her and keeping her as a mistress rather than marrying her. In a letter to his friend Worthy, Harrington at first contends that he is “not so much of a republican as formally to wed any person of [Harriot’s] class.” An orphan working as a lady’s maid, Harriot, as Harrington complains, “has no father – no mother – neither is there aunt, cousin, or kindred of any degree who claim any kind of relationship to her” (11). Yet Harrington’s republican stripes soon emerge as he becomes a believer in the value of Harriot’s intrinsic virtue rather than a seeker after her extrinsic familial relations; he quickly proposes marriage to her despite her lack of status and patronym. In identifying republican values with the rejection of status-based marriage (in favor of marriage based on individual internal worth), the novel thus seems to endorse social mobility, liberal models of political and marital consent, and the dissolution of kinship and patriarchal authority. Yet despite the relentless promotion of deliberative action and republican virtue in *The Power of*
Sympathy, the central trauma of the novel – unwitting sibling incest – is one that could not have been avoided with increased deliberation, increased virtue, or increased reading of novels. Harriot and Harrington act with virtue and sound judgment, yet only shortly before they are married do they discover that they have the same father. At a basic level, the novel seems deeply contradictory insofar as it promotes a solution (deliberative judgment and republican virtue) that will not address the problem at hand (unwitting incest).

Yet if neither Harriot nor Harrington, nor any lack of deliberative capacities on their part is to blame for the incestuous relation they enter into, the text does offer something of a villain in the figure of Harrington’s father. Having seduced Harriot’s mother, Maura Fawcett, while he was married to another woman, the senior Harrington’s act of adultery – and his abdication of paternal connection with respect to Harriot – may be taken as the effective cause of the incestuous relation formed between Harrington and Harriot. Seduction rather than incest may thus be seen as the trauma the reader is asked to guard against by way of arming herself with sound judgment and deliberative capacities. As I argued at the outset of this article, the seduction narrative in early American fiction has served as the basis for a critical account of the allegorical relation between the US nation and the early novel. Specifically, the oft-repeated caution against seduction in novels of the period is read as evidence that the nation needed to protect itself against vice and immorality in order to survive as a political entity. Yet in a novel such as Brown’s, the displacement of the act of seduction into a tale of incest raises some questions about the force of this particular message. Indeed, as Leonard Tennenhouse has argued, the nation-seduction allegory raises questions specifically concerning gender. Why is the victim of seduction always a woman and what does this mean with respect to national identity? Tennenhouse’s own answer to this question marks a surprising reversal in the standard account of the seduction plot, particularly with respect to the libertine. According to Tennenhouse, the libertine is enabling of new forms of American identity rather than destructive of American virtue: specifically, the libertine disrupts patriarchal authority and, as such, attenuates kinship models for the exchange of women and property in favor of increased exogamy and new forms of social mobility. Tennenhouse writes: “Seduction is first and foremost a disruption of established relations between men . . . The seduction plot of the elder Harrington in The Power of Sympathy suggests that the older, more traditional British notion of kinship as defined by established rank was far too limited for the new United States.”

Tennenhouse thus argues that the libertine undermines the law of the father, and that this disruption of patriarchy and kinship is necessary in America in order to establish new models of familial and national identity. Like Moll Flanders, Harriot is a woman without patronym and without a fixed social status: this enables her to stand as an idealized autonomous agent. She is a woman who generates republican
behavior in the man who loves her because of her very fitness for marriage based on virtue and labor rather than status. Yet the incest narrative in *The Power of Sympathy* points not only to the positive disruption of patriarchy and kinship systems, but also to the negative effects of this disruption and the need to reinscribe kinship forms in new locations. Where is kinship reinscribed in *The Power of Sympathy* if it is dislocated from older, patriarchal models? While the villainy of seduction is laid at the feet of the elder Harrington, a more specific account of his moral failing is offered in the text that offers some answers to this question. While long since reformed when the action of the novel occurs, Harrington senior explains that his early sexually licentious behavior was a result of a maxim he had adopted in his youth: "that the most necessary learning was a knowledge of the world" (69). This maxim, he explains, "hurried [him] down the stream of dissipation" where he "saw mankind in every point of view – from the acme of the most consummate refinement, to the most abject state of degradation" (70). Harrington senior's republican disregard for status evinced here, both in the act of mixing with men of all classes and in his cosmopolitan maxim, is clearly of a more dangerous variety than his son's republican courtship of Harriot. The association of knowledge of the world with forms of lawlessness points to an anxiety over cosmopolitanism or extra-national space and allegiances that appears in numerous texts of the 1790s in the United States. As the creole colonials of North America transformed themselves into the citizens of the United States, concerns over global trade and the limits of republican sympathy (particularly in relation to the French Revolution) erupted into arguments over national identity. Vitriolic debate over trade negotiations with England and France spilled into political squalls over immigration and naturalization policy, expatriation laws, shifts in franchise eligibility, and the controversial Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. Indeed, according to historian Chandos Michael Brown, the word "cosmopolitan" was a key term of opprobrium in anti-republican propaganda that circulated theories of a worldwide conspiracy linked to the French Revolution and the so-called "Bavarian Illuminati" – a conspiracy aimed at undermining national order, morality, and Christianity in the United States.

Whereas a virtuous republicanism is associated with consensual marriage in the figures of Harriot and Harrington, a more dangerous *non-national* version of republicanism lies at the root of Harrington senior's immorality and ultimately causes the ruin of his children in their incestuous connection. The connection of cosmopolitanism with moral ruin and non-nationalized republicanism is perhaps more evident in a second novel by an American author that centers on unwitting sibling incest, Sally Sayward Wood's *Julia and the Illuminated Baron* (1800). Set in Europe rather than America, Wood centers her novel on a virtuous, unpropertied young woman (lacking in family position and patronym) and an evil Baron who is a member of the "Illuminati" conspiracy. The Illuminati, while embracing Enlightenment philosophy (the fraternity and equality of republicanism) are immoral insofar as their embrace knows no bounds, enabling them to overstep the moral limits prescribed by religion,
nation, and family. Thus the Baron reports to the virtuous Julia that the Illuminati have welcomed into their ranks "women... whose minds are too capacious, to be bound within the narrow and confined limits that the sex have been obliged to walk by." Yet because the Illuminati reject all forms of limit, "they suppose," as one of their critics in the novel reports, "all relationship is dissolved; it is lawful and honorable in their opinion to form connections that we should think criminal with mothers or sisters." Respecting neither national nor familial borders, the Illuminati endorse incest as enlightened behavior. Julia escapes the incestuous embrace of the Baron (who is, unbeknown to her, her half-brother) because she has chosen the unpropertied Francis Colwert for a future husband. Her partner of choice is also a man without a father, but he proves himself worthy of Julia's love by his labor and virtue, evidenced in a voyage to the United States, where he develops a friendship with George Washington after being shipwrecked on the Virginia coast. While the friendship with Washington is something of an aside in the novel, I would nonetheless suggest that it offers a model for nationalizing kinship relations: Colwert's absence of patronym – his lack of identity and property – is stabilized by his election of Washington as a substitute father. He writes to Julia that he is "fostered in the bosom of this virtuous and noble family, whose revered chief [Washington], is my protector, friend, and benefactor; he has put it in my power, to prosecute my voyage." Electing Washington as a father enables him to prosecute the voyage that will return him to Julia as a suitable husband and enable him to rescue her from the incestuous embrace of the Baron. As a whole, Julia's rejection of the Illuminati and their incestuous aims is linked to a reformation of the aristocratic family into a bourgeois model in which virtue and labor, rather than status and kinship, determine consensual affiliation. This reformation, the novel suggests, is linked to understanding the value not only of proper marriage partners, but also of elective nationalism – of adopting fathers such as George Washington. While the failure of the patronym results in catastrophic boundary failure in the form of incest, the function of the patronym is here recuperated in the heterosexual couple who come together within a nationalized horizon of family formation.

The limits of nationhood that the Illuminati conspiracy evoked were associated with both incest and miscegenation in 1790s. As Jared Gardner has argued, Illuminati conspiracy theories in the United States were linked to anxieties about Jacobin revolution, but these concerns manifested themselves in relation to emerging ideas of the relation between race and nation. Thus, for instance, one Federalist writer describes republican conspiracy as a league of blacks and Irishmen that will pollute American racial purity: "Remove your wives far from the Infernal Fraternal embrace, or you may prove witness of their violation and expiring agonies, or if reserved for future infamy, may increase your families not only with a spurious, but a colored breed. Remove your daughters... unless you would be silent spectators of their being deflowered by the lusty Othellos." Race becomes visible here as a term through which a consolidated (white) American national identity is created. Further, the threat
to national identity described is also associated with the destruction of heterosexual, monogamous marriage. The “Infernal Fraternal embrace” refers to the secret brotherhood of Illuminati within the United States, but the imagery of the “fraternal embrace” suggests a clandestine, homosexual, physical contact that is also equated with an adulterous heterosexual embrace. Lawless sexuality is associated with promiscuous bodies and cosmopolitan (unbounded, interracial, incestuous) bodily identifications: in contrast, heterosexual marriage bespeaks proper boundaries and properly structured familial and national identifications.

The incest taboo, as Gayle Rubin has argued, serves to make sexual difference stand as an organizing social opposition. Thus, Rubin suggests, the incest taboo also enjoins against homosexual partnering: “the incest taboo presupposes a prior, less articulate taboo on homosexuality. A prohibition against some heterosexual unions assumes a taboo against non-heterosexual unions. Gender is not only an identification with one sex; it also entails that sexual desire be directed toward the other sex.” The dangerous cosmopolitanism of the “Infernal Fraternal embrace” may thus be referenced in both Harrington senior’s adultery and Harrington junior’s incest. Heterosexual marriage between exogamous partners, in contrast, secures fraternal relations among men through the exchange of women that is more carefully delimited, more clearly nationalized. As such, I would suggest that the patriarchal relations that the libertine disrupts find their new location in displaced kinship rules that appear as rules governing race (miscegenation), gender (incest and exogamous marriage), and national identity.

The British and American novels discussed in this essay – Oroonoko, Moll Flanders, The Power of Sympathy, and Julia and the Illuminated Baron – all include varied scenes of racialization, miscegenation, and incest. While miscegenation and incest are infractions of kinship rules that operate in opposite directions (exogamy versus endogamy), they are often paired within the novel and assume particular importance there insofar as they demarcate the possibility of a national, contractual space. In linking novels such as Oroonoko and The Power of Sympathy I mean to demonstrate that both texts – one set in colonial America and another in early national America – address the conditions of the expanding world market, early capitalism, and imperialism out of which discourses of nationalism developed. As a genre, the novel participates in articulating the contractual episteme of a world market – both in terms of its possibilities and its limits. While the novel is certainly linked to the development of national horizons and communities, the need to define the new rules of these communities occurs in the broader context of colonial expansion and early capitalism that links disparate sites such as London, Surinam, Virginia, and Boston. In its contractual concerns, the novel thus addresses the possibility and impossibility of the circulation of property and persons within this increasingly large world.

See also: chapter 6, Seduction Stories; chapter 15, Eighteenth-Century Novel and Print Culture; chapter 22, Novel Body Politic.
Notes


2. John Adams to William Cunningham, 15 March 1804, *Correspondence between the Hon. John Adams, Late President of the United States, and the Late William Cunningham, Esq.* (Boston: E. M. Cunningham, 1823), 19.


8. Although defined by Claude Lévi-Strauss as the founding taboo of civilization, incest is nonetheless culturally specific: relationships that might be considered incestuous in one culture are not considered so in another, such as sexual relations between individuals related through marriage (affinity) rather than by blood (consanguinity). Definitions of incest were shifting in Anglo-American culture in the eighteenth century, as were cultural norms and beliefs regarding marriage across racial lines: indeed, “miscegenation” is a term that did not exist in this period (originating later in the nineteenth century). Hence the particular forms of endogamy and exogamy at stake in the eighteenth-century novel warrant attention as historically determined formations. In this essay, I focus specifically on scenes of unwriting incest between biologically related siblings as well as representations of marriage across national/racial lines, both of which, I argue, are discursive constructions of endogamy and exogamy related to the economic and social effects of coloniality. For a useful history of debates over the definition of incest in England, see Ellen Pollak, *Incest and the English Novel, 1684–1814* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).


12. Ibid., 213.


20. My thanks to Robert Devlin for pointing out to me Banister’s act of “dubbing” in this scene.


22. Ibid., 25.


26. With regard to the contract, for instance, Brook Thomas writes, “If status-based societies are held together mostly by commitments that precede promises, promising has the potential to open these relatively closed communities to transactions with strangers by providing a mechanism for the ritual creation of new commitments,” American Literary Realism and the Failed Promise of Contract (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 34.


28. Ingrassia, Authorship, Commerce, and Gender, 3.

the sake of English colonial interests in North America. Thus he advocates trade in Africa but not contractual relations with Africans.


37. Examples of the plot of unwitting sibling incest in American novels include Brown’s *Power of Sympathy* as well as his later novel, *Iva and Isabella* (1807); three novels by Susanna Rowson including *Mentoria* (1795), *Trials of the Human Heart* (1795), and *Lucy Temple* (1828); Sally Sayward Wood’s *Julia and the Illuminated Baron* (1800); and several tales by anonymous authors including “The School for Libertines” (1789); *The History of Albert and Eliza* (1812); and *Margaretta* (1807). For further discussion of these novels see Anne Dalke, “Original Vice: The Political Implications of Incest in the Early American Novel,” *Early American Literature* 23 (1988), 188–201.


43. Ibid., 243.

44. Ibid., 136.

45. The successful couplings and revelations of identity at the close of *Julia and the Illuminated Baron* result in the relocation of the extended family of French and Italian nobility (of whom both Julia and Francis turn out to be the heirs) in England. The novel thus points to an Anglo-American resolution of republican crisis insofar as it posits a reconstructed English identity for those who share in what are portrayed as essentially American values.


