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Dittman Research Competition

My line of inquiry had its origin in a short research assignment done prior to my submission paper. The assignment consisted of looking at three primary sources which in some way talked about the English novel, *Pamela*. The three sources were from different time periods. I drew on knowledge from a contemporaneous British literature class I was taking at the time in which we studied *Pamela*. My analysis of these three sources suggested a hypothesis for my larger research paper, namely, that the culpability of the novel shifted over time from the author to the reader. I applied this hypothesis of *Pamela* to the reception of Charles Brockden Brown's novels on the other side of the Atlantic, specifically *Ormond*. Thus my new exploration required me to look into a variety of reactions to Brown's novels variously supporting or discrediting the idea formed from my earlier inquiry. I looked for direct responses to Brown's fiction as well as any general musings on taste or theories of fiction.

I found my primary sources through a "Research Guide" that librarian Susan Hopwood set up for my class that grouped the relevant databases like American Periodicals Series, ECCO, Sabin Americana, and Early American Imprints (Evans Bib). The "Research Guide" was invaluable to finding as many primary sources as I did. For my secondary scholarship, however, I looked into several print books containing recent scholarship on Charles Brockden Brown. Some of these I did not use because I wanted to keep my own analysis of Brown's *Ormond* central. Also, because my inquiry focused on how people responded to and talked about responding to fiction, the secondary sources I found were primarily valuable as aids to discussing how one ought to regard historical documents.

I selected the primary sources that gave an identifiable position relevant to my hypothesis, reading each source for the author's stance on the culpability of fiction. If I could not find it ex-

plicitly, I was forced to try to derive a position from the author's rhetoric. Sometimes rhetorical analysis resulted in an inconsistent stance. In such cases, I was forced to either forgo including the article, or to acknowledge the inconsistency in my paper. I chose these sources to show a progression over time that would be consistent with and add depth to my argument.

There were many sources I consulted but did not use. These were sources which either repeated what was said in other articles or just did not go into deep analysis of Brown or fiction. As I stated above, I wanted to include a perspective or two from significantly different periods of time –roughly 25 years apart. The valuable articles had authors with notable personalities and discernible audiences. I chose not to use many primary and secondary articles because I did not have enough room to include them without losing the depth of my analysis or the strength of my argument. It would have simply been too long and probably too redundant to give each source its fair due seeing as many sources from the same periods held the same opinions on the culpability of fiction. For these reasons, I chose not to include thirteen periodicals. However, I did cite these in the “Works Consulted” section of my MLA Bibliography, as they were still an important part of my research and thought process whether or not they made it into the final draft.

Doing an extensive reading of possible sources allowed me to distill the best articles from unnecessary or lackluster ones. Being widely read in primary periodicals allowed me to grasp of the conventions of this type of literary writing. This, in turn, allowed for a more comfortable writing process as I was familiar with the type of writing I was attempting to analyze. Once I chose for certain which articles I was going to include, it was easier to create a conversation between them. Since my thesis is based on a progression over time, I chose to structure my paper chronologically as well. In this way, the insights gleaned from my research process directly influenced the structure and type of argument I pursued, and, ultimately, the strength of my analysis.