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Betsy Klima
University of Massachusetts Boston, betsy.klima@umb.edu

Len von Morzé
University of Massachusetts Boston, leonard.vonmorze@umb.edu

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From *Monima*, ed. Richard S. Pressman (San Antonio: Early American Imprints, 2025).

Monima: A Novel of the Immigrant Experience in the Multilingual Early Republic

By Betsy Klima and Len von Morzé

First published in 1802, *Monima* offers a unique look at the lives of the poor in Philadelphia. Describing her novel as "a very plain picture of life," a plea on behalf of the "oppressed, and life-worn children of affliction," the author exposes the class fractures within a society we have mythologized as egalitarian (99). Such myths, the novel shows, are based on ignorance; as one character, awakened to the existence of the poor, remarks, "one half of the world don't know how the other half live" (196). Though the identity of *Monima*'s author was not discovered for over 220 years, the novel's focus on the immigrant underclass reflects her lived experience. Mary Endress Ralston was the trilingual child of German and French immigrants whose fortunes rose and fell in the Revolutionary era. But rather than writing a factual record of her life, Mary Ralston created her portrait of Monima and her world through a complex multilingual and multiethnic alchemy. The resulting novel, which highlights language justice through the trials of its beleaguered heroine and her father, is a complex synthesis of literary modes that has been largely overlooked. We are proud to present *Monima*, the first American novel by an English-language learner, and Mary Endress Ralston, an early American novelist who has been hiding in plain sight.

Monima's Origin Story

In 1801, readers of *The Ladies' Monitor* encountered the early chapters of "The Beggar-Girl," projected as a novel depicting the sufferings of a teenaged French immigrant to Philadelphia named Monima, who lives an impoverished existence with her feeble father, Monsieur Fontanbleu. Published by Isaac Newton Ralston, *The Ladies' Monitor* aimed "The Mind to Improve and yet Amuse."[1] Each of the seven surviving issues features an installment of "The Beggar-Girl" on the front page.

For their generous replies to our queries and/or readings of the manuscript, we thank Thomas N. Baker, Bettina Hess, Jerry Klima, Matthew Pethers, Chris Phillips, and Richard S. Pressman.

[2] *The Ladies' Monitor* masthead, 1801. *Ladies' Monitor*. American Antiquarian Society Historical Periodicals. The hyphen in "beggar-girl" would be dropped from the title once it was published as a book.

Among the literary magazines aimed at female readers in New York, *The Ladies' Monitor* stood out. Comprised primarily of original material, the "most notable thing about this *Monitor* was the welcome it accorded to contributions from the 'female pencil.'"[1] Bertha-Monica Stearns identifies "The Beggar-Girl," a lengthy essay entitled "A Second Vindication of the Rights of Woman,"[2] "and innumerable verses" in *The Ladies' Monitor* as originating "from female hands."[3] These pieces had been written expressly for *The Ladies' Monitor*, rather than reprinted from other sources, as most magazine content was at the time. In an earlier magazine called *The Ladies' Museum* (February–June 1800), Isaac Newton Ralston acted as an editorial curator, aiming "to select such pieces" as would improve the minds of women readers.[4] By contrast, *The Ladies' Monitor* featured original material, and, when materials were reprinted, Ralston preferred to publish works by women authors.[5] In fact, most if not all of the fiction in *The Ladies' Monitor*, "Second Vindication," and probably some of its poetry, were written by one woman: the author of "The Beggar-Girl."

Though the first two issues of *The Ladies' Monitor*, presumably containing the beginning of the novel, do not survive, in the extant editions Isaac Ralston juxtaposed each episode of "The Beggar-Girl" with excerpts from "Second Vindication." In the first surviving issue of *The Ladies' Monitor* (22 August 1801), Monima is imprisoned in a city workhouse by her enemy, the evil Madame Sontine. As she is dragged inside, Monima silently cries, "O! My father! My poor old father!" At the end of the installment, Monima's father writes a letter asking for help finding his daughter. Adjacent to the letter is a section of *Vindication* in which "An American Lady" (who is identified later in the periodical as the author of "The Beggar-Girl") reflects upon fathers' obligations to their daughters. In the 29 August issue, an episode in which Madame Sontine kidnaps Monima and her father is followed by a *Vindication* passage focused on parents' responsibilities to instill love in the hearts of their children.

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1 Bertha-Monica Stearns, "Early New York Magazines For Ladies," *New York History* 14, 1 (1933), 38. Stearns counts ten such magazines in publication before 1830.

2 This essay's title nods to Mary Wollstonecraft's pioneering feminist essay, first published in 1792.

3 Stearns, "Early," 38.

4 *The Ladies' Museum* (25 February 1800): 1.

5 For example, Ralston reprinted poems by Eleanor Cree Davis, the recently deceased wife of the translator John Davis, which had appeared in New York the previous year in Charles Brockden Brown's *Monthly Magazine and American Review*.

Contributions to the magazine by the author of "The Beggar-Girl" abruptly ceased with the 10 October 1801 issue, in which Isaac Ralston announced that he was turning over editorship of *The Ladies' Monitor* to Phineas Heard (spelled "Phinehas" in later issues). As he did, Ralston informed his readers, "THE BEGGAR-GIRL is too lengthy to be published in the manner it has been heretofore. It will shortly be printed in a neat, duodecimo volume, and furnished to the subscribers of the MONITOR at a liberal discount from its price to the public."

As a free-standing book, the novel, now titled *Monima, or, The Beggar Girl, A Novel, Founded on Fact*, could potentially reach a wider market. U.S. magazines around 1800 did not reach a national audience and achieved only "purely local circulation."[1] Indeed, magazines were so precarious in their operations that Noah Webster lamented that "the expectation of *failure* is connected with the very name of a Magazine."[2]

Published in 1802 in New York by P. R. Johnson, for I. N. Ralston, *Monima* would be printed twice more in 1803—once in Philadelphia and a second time in New York. *Monima* enjoyed more printings in such a brief window than even *Charlotte Temple*, which was on its way to becoming the nation's first best-seller. The three printings, however, correspond to two distinct editions; the unnamed female author asked readers to invest in each edition before its publication.[3] In soliciting subscriptions, the author promised readers who had seen the sample chapters in *The Ladies' Monitor*, "that the errors which have made their appearance in the composition, and which were, in some measure, owing to the haste in which it was written, shall be carefully corrected, and every unimportant article particularly omitted."[4]

After the initial appeals for subscription, *Monima*'s printing was announced in April 1802. Advertisements of its availability for purchase continued until June 1805, appearing in many New York City newspapers. Booksellers in Philadelphia; Northampton, Massachusetts; Wilmington,

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1 Jared Gardner, *The Rise and Fall of Early American Magazine Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 63; Heather Haveman, *Magazines and the Making of America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 37.

2 Haveman, 137.

3 The 1803 New York printing differs from the 1802 printing only in its title page, which identifies a new publisher and printer. Despite the change in printer, the type was evidently left standing, since the texts are identical. Curiously, the 1802 New York edition includes a separate Errata page absent from surviving copies of the 1803 printing, though the printer failed to make the corrections in-line in 1803. Philadelphia printers Eaken & Mecum, however, did make the needed corrections.

4 "Advertisement," *Weekly Museum*, 14.15 (23 Jan. 1802): 3.

Delaware; and Alexandria, Virginia carried it as well. The appearance of over a hundred advertisements for the novel, as recorded in the Early American Newspapers Database, suggests a publicity blitz longer and wider ranging than for Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*, though far smaller than that for *Charlotte Temple*. Several circulating libraries that published their holdings offered *Monima*; these included one in Boston; another in Morristown, New Jersey; and two collections in Rhode Island.

Monima was "pirated, plagiarized, and paraphrased, in condensed forms, in various American magazines and newspapers until the middle of the nineteenth century."[1] In 1847 an "H. Hadyn" claimed authorship on the title page and went so far as to register copyright after changing *Monima*'s subtitle to "The Beautiful French Girl in Philadelphia" and making numerous abridgements to the text.

The New York and Philadelphia editions of *Monima* identified the author differently. The editions printed in New York were "by an American lady," while the Philadelphia edition was "written by a lady of Philadelphia." They also had different prefaces, both of which we include in this edition. The Philadelphia edition bore the initials "M.R." that have guided attempts to identify the unnamed author. In his 1939 bibliography, Lyle Wright identified M.R. as Martha Meredith Read, a member of an elite Federalist family in Philadelphia, but provided no rationale for the attribution.[2] And for decades, scholars who discussed the author's biography when they wrote about *Monima* had to reconcile the wealth, power, and political standing of the Meredith and Read families with the gritty urban realism of *Monima*'s Philadelphia scenes and its sympathetic depiction of the plight of a French immigrant's daughter.

But in 2024, Thomas N. Baker demonstrated that the M.R. who wrote *Monima* (and a second novel also originally attributed to Read, *Margaretta*, as well as "Second Vindication") was in fact Isaac Ralston's wife, Maria Endress Ralston (1772–1849). Maria Endress was the third child of German immigrant Zacharias Endres (the name appears to have been spelled with one "s" in Europe) and Anna Maria Sänsfelt, a Huguenot refugee. Zacharias, having benefited from a university education, the financial support of aristo-

[1] Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*, expanded ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 361.
[2] Lyle Wright, *American Fiction 1774–1850: A Contribution Towards a Bibliography* (San Marino Huntington Library, 1939), 159. The apparent basis for the attribution was the dedicatory epistle to the physician Hugh Meredith that precedes the New York editions. There is no evidence that Hugh Meredith and Martha Meredith Read were related.

cratic sponsors, and the tutelage of Voltaire, was a highly unusual German immigrant among an ethnic group broadly characterized as servants and poor farmers.[1]

Zachariah Endress arrived in America in 1766 and founded a brewery in Philadelphia. After fleeing the city during its years of occupation by British troops (1777–78), Endress returned to Philadelphia to find his family's brewery and orchards destroyed, in apparent retribution for his part in the Patriot cause, leading the Endresses to fall on hard times. Indeed, as Baker's research shows, the family suffered poverty so severe that Maria began to venture beyond German Lutheran networks to help herself and her family. As a teenager, Maria—signing herself Mary—wrote to President George Washington in 1791 to ask him to lend her the five dollars she needed to buy a lottery ticket: "The little my Mother and I earned by Spinning was not sufficient to keep us in bread my Father is too aged to labour, and so I utterly despair of their ever being able to maintain themselves, it sets my heart bleeding to see my Parents whom I love as I love myself in this condition without being able to Support them in their Necessities in the least."[2] Washington sent the money, which Mary repaid in 1793.[3] Then, in 1799, Mary married Scots-Irish printer Isaac Ralston and the two partnered in producing *The Ladies Monitor.*[4]

Though the first two installments of *The Ladies' Monitor* do not survive, a survey of the last seven issues Isaac Ralston edited suggests that Mary Ralston wrote the preponderance of its content. Even on a conservative assessment, about 40 of the 56 surviving pages of *The Ladies' Monitor*, or 70%, point to Mary Ralston's hand.[5] And while it was not unusual for one writer to

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[1] "The Zacharias Endres Papers," *Pennsylvania German Immigrants, 1709–1786: Lists Consolidated from Yearbooks of the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society,* ed. Don Yoder (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1980), 276–87. On the typical occupations and social class of German immigrants, see Farley Grubb, "German Immigrants to Pennsylvania, 1709–1820," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* 20 (1990), 417–436.

[2] "To George Washington from Mary Endress, 27 December 1791," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-09-02-0208.

[3] "To George Washington from Mary Endress, 27 March 1793," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-12-02-0308.

[4] Thomas N. Baker, "'Founded on Facts': Correcting Misattribution of the Novels *Monima* (1802) and *Margaretta* (1807)," *Early American Literature* 59, no. 2 (2024): 354.

[5] A column entitled "The Monitor" was the periodical's other regular original content (bits and pieces were reprinted in other regional newspapers over the next few years) but its advisory moral tone may point to Isaac Ralston.

contribute the bulk of a magazine issue, it was very rare for that dominant contributor to be a woman.

Women writers faced even greater pressures than men to write anonymously, but the titles of Mary Ralston's contributions provide a trail of breadcrumbs to her other works. Just as the title page of Hannah Webster Foster's *The Boarding School* (1798) identified the author as "A LADY OF MASSACHUSETTS, AUTHOR OF THE COQUETTE," Ralston began serializing *Margaretta* as "by the authoress of the SECOND VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN, BEGGAR GIRL, &C. &C."[1] The "&c. &c." is significant here, as it hints at Mary Ralston's authorship of other pieces in the magazine, such as the story "A Tale of Truth" and the original poem "By a Lady, Whose Infant Lay Sleeping in the Cradle,"[2] signed "Maria," which have biographical connections to Mary Ralston's life. As we know from the case of Charles Brockden Brown's *Monthly Magazine*, also published in New York, it was difficult to find enough original content to fill a magazine in the Early Republic.[3] So it is hardly surprising that Isaac Ralston published work by his gifted wife. Indeed, when Isaac Ralston turned over his magazine to Phineas Heard, Mary's contributions also ceased, which led Heard to take all of his serialized content right from the *Monthly Magazine*, content that Brown had himself written to fill the pages of his own magazine.

The first edition of *Monima* (1802) bears Isaac Ralston's name as publisher. By 1803 the title page listed a new publisher, Ralston having "passed completely out of sight, as much so as if the earth had opened and swallowed him," as a local historian describes the mystery of his disappearance: "His advent was comet-like, quick to appear and quick to disappear."[4] Because there is no record of him after April of that year, Baker concludes that Ralston died around that time. But since there is no record of Isaac Ralston's death, it also seems possible that he abandoned his pregnant wife and their

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1 *The Ladies' Monitor* 1.6 (12 September 1801): 41. On this form of title-based attribution, and female anonymity generally, see Joanne Dobson and Sandra A. Zagarell, "Women Writing in the Early Republic," in *A History of the Book in America: Volume 2: An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790–1840*, eds. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley (UNC Press, 2010), 364–81.

2 These works are included beginning on pages 258 and 256, respectively.

3 See Matthew Pethers and Len von Morzé, "Periodical Queries: Early American Magazine Writing in and out of the Charles Brockden Brown Canon," *Early American Literature* 57.2 (2022): 555–62.

4 W. W. H. Davis, *History of Doylestown, Old and New: From Its Settlement to the Close of the Nineteenth Century, 1745–1900* (Doylestown, PA: Intelligencer Print, [1904]), 58.

child. In any event, Isaac left Mary with one "sickly" daughter who died shortly afterward, and another child on the way.

Alone with an infant daughter, Mary Ralston published the 1803 Philadelphia edition of *Monima* by subscription. But she could not earn enough from her writing to support herself. When she published *Margaretta* in 1807, Ralston dedicated the novel to the Female Association of Philadelphia for the Relief of Women and Children in Reduced Circumstances, a group that likely housed Mary and her surviving daughter, Mary Ann, during this difficult period.[1]

That year, Mary joined her brother and father in Easton, Pennsylvania,[2] where she and Mary Ann achieved the financial stability that had eluded them in Philadelphia. Like Susanna Rowson, Mary Ralston opened a school for young women. Like Rowson, she taught a variety of academic subjects as well as complex embroidery.[3] Eventually, she bought the townhouse in which she had been renting space for her school.[4] She never remarried. One of the three female founding shareholders of Easton's circulating library, Mary Ralston was an avid reader; her library records show her interest in fellow novelist Charles Brockden Brown. Caring for her widowed father until his death in 1810, and then advocating for charitable relief for others, Mary Ralston was a real-life Constantia Dudley, the protagonist of Charles Brockden Brown's novel *Ormond* (1799)—a novel that *Monima* often closely echoes.[5]

The discovery that Mary Ralston wrote *Monima* opens new avenues for scholarship. Taking Ralston's life experience into account shows that the subtitle's declaration, "founded on fact," is truer than has been previously thought. We summarize the novel below and suggest directions for further study. Highlighting language justice as a central theme of the text, we argue

1 Baker, "Correcting," 363.

2 About 50 miles due north of Philadelphia.

3 Easton Library Company Database Project. For a list of the books Ralston borrowed, see pp. 128–29 at https://elc.lafayette.edu/files/original/512b1493b72fb8afae43c286ea043929b6a44c81.pdf and page 39 at https://elc.lafayette.edu/files/original/c9bb011ab5f1ab1ec7f6d45dfc6f24546e0cabe5.pdf.

4 Baker, "Correcting," 368.

5 Given that *The Ladies' Monitor* would come to rely on reprints of Brown's fiction toward the end of its run, Ralston certainly knew of his work. Twenty years later, Ralston was still interested in Brown. The Easton Library Company did not carry *Ormond*, but Ralston or her daughter checked out both *Arthur Mervyn* and *Edgar Huntly* in 1821–22.

that attending to Ralston's ethnic background brings *Monima*'s attention to issues of language and citizenship into focus—a fitting theme for the first novel to be published by a non-native speaker of English in the United States.

Summary of *Monima*

Set in Philadelphia and France, with two briefly described years in St. Domingo (as Ralston, like many English writers, refers to the French colony of Saint-Domingue that after 1804 would be known as Haiti), *Monima* depicts an immigrant experience shaped by poverty and discrimination. In the preface to the New York edition, Ralston emphasizes her desire to "exhibit mankind in their true colours, to display characters *as they are*," and the resulting novel integrates urban realism into its gothic plot.[1] *Monima*'s American, European, and Caribbean settings; its blend of wild plot twists and gritty detail; and its focus on the immigrant experience in early America coalesce in a text invested in the question of how the least powerful urban dwellers survive. With disdain for the rich and criticism of institutions, Mary Ralston's novel demonstrates the power of individual people, from lowly servants to the city's mayor, either to undermine or to ameliorate living and working conditions for their fellow city dwellers.

Monima opens in a Philadelphia neighborhood where the wealthy elite rub elbows with the very poor in scenes of cross-class urbanity that echo the city's historical demographics. The story begins with its beautiful sixteen-year-old heroine helping her father, Monsieur Fontanbleu, an immigrant from France (by way of St. Domingo) who speaks no English, to eke out a livelihood in Philadelphia. Their circumstances are dire. Earlier that year, they had survived the summer yellow fever epidemic (most likely of 1798) that took two members of the little family, then fled the city by renting from their milkwoman, named Sally. Their small house is in Philadelphia, perhaps near the corner of 3rd and Race Streets.

Winter is upon them. Though she must frequently resort to begging, Monima always prefers to work: she picks up sewing jobs while resisting the efforts of her neighbor and enemy, Ursula Sontine, to remove her from the neighborhood. Ursula is not French, but her husband, Mr. Sontine, is a wealthy French immigrant and a prospective benefactor who is not above disguising himself to judge Monima's virtue. Jealous and manipulative,

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1 *Monima; or The Beggar Girl* (New York: P. R. Johnson, for I. N. Ralston, 1802), v, emphasis in original.

Ursula is deeply suspicious of her husband's seeming affection for Monima, whom she calls "that French serpent" (49). (Underscoring this ethnic prejudice, a city watchman refers to her only as "a French b[itc]h" [43].) In what will become a pattern in the novel, Ursula uses public authority to mistreat the immigrants, for "the old monsieur can't talk a word of English, and so he can't take his own part" (53). First, she has Monima imprisoned in the city workhouse, then she has Monima and her father locked into the upper floor of a remote mansion. But they escape and return to the city.

The novel's structure echoes these departures from and returns to Philadelphia. Chapter 11 begins a thirteen-chapter flashback to France complete with symbols of the *ancien régime* (gothic castles and confinement in the Bastille), in which Ralston presents the Fontanbleu family's eventful backstory. This section largely follows Monima's older brother, Ferdinant, who becomes embroiled in a competition for a young woman's love. Ferdinant's rival, Pierre De Noix, becomes the family's nemesis, baselessly accusing Ferdinant and his father of crimes including murder and kidnapping. Ferdinant is tortured and eventually killed by De Noix in a duel, in approximately 1781. On the way to his scheduled execution, Monsieur Fontanbleu's death sentence is miraculously overturned when the real murderer confesses. After this ordeal and Monima's birth in 1782, Monsieur Fontanbleu decides to move his family to St. Domingo (approximately 1784), where they become planters and supposedly 'humane' enslavers.

On the way across the Atlantic, M. Fontanbleu meets and mentors 19-year-old Sonnetton. Despite their shared ambition to become prosperous slave plantation owners, the narrator opines that "Everything that was good and noble in the principle of man had its seat in the soul of Sonnetton" (134). This virtue, combined with Fontanbleu's "improve[ment]" of his mentee, leads Sonnetton to recoup a fortune he has been cheated out of, allowing him to accumulate 50,000 pounds in just two years. The 21-year-old Sonnetton is a rich man. For the Fontanbleus, however, the West Indies prove no better than France. A slave revolt, exemplified by the burning of the chief city, Cap-Français, in June 1793, forces Monima, a sister, and her parents to leave the two remaining older brothers for dead. The remaining Fontanbleus escape in a small boat and are rescued by an American ship. After five years in Portsmouth,[1] the family moves to Baltimore for a business opportunity.

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[1] This may be the town in Virginia, given the presence of French émigrés in that state and its relative proximity to Philadelphia, but the larger city in New Hampshire cannot be ruled out.

When it fails, the now poor family moves to Philadelphia, arriving in the middle of a yellow fever epidemic (most likely summer 1798) that kills Monima's mother and sister, Annette, in the course of eleven days.

After the flashback portion of the narrative, we return to Philadelphia with teenaged Monima and elderly Monsieur Fontanbleu's tribulations far from over. Nearly blind, Fontanbleu depends on his daughter for subsistence. He has lost touch with Sonnetton, and all three of his sons appear to have died. Because Americans cannot pronounce his name correctly, Sonnetton is now known as Sontine, further preventing the old friends from reconnecting in America. As they teeter on the brink of homelessness in Philadelphia, Fontanbleu and Monima are taken in by friends—first their former milkwoman, Sally, then their neighbor, Debby, and her alcoholic husband, Peter. Monima's virtue turns these ordinary Philadelphia locals into hospitable allies.

In the meantime, De Noix has fled the French Revolution, then come to Philadelphia, where he is determined to hound his old antagonist Fontanbleu and to seduce Monima. After ingratiating himself with Sontine, De Noix begins an affair with Sontine's wife, Ursula. Together, they plot to keep mentor and mentee from reuniting. Seeing Monima pass by, De Noix raps on the window to attract her attention and offers her a dollar, with the promise of more. In a particularly Gothic twist, Monima is lured into following a woman, purportedly for employment, then is forcibly taken to the hospital on the pretext of insanity. She is cuffed to the bed by an agent working for Ursula.

Escaping once more, Monima is employed to do needlework by a Mrs. Firming, who jealously prevents Monima from seeking higher wages from other employers. In an insightful portrait of working-class precarity, Mrs. Firming prefers to keep Monima ignorant of the wage-setting mechanism that would allow her labor to be better compensated. Monima depends on Sontine's assistance, but when the two are caught innocently holding hands by Ursula, Monima escapes with a 20-dollar note. After a prolonged fever, Ursula dies in a fit of jealousy.

With his lover out of the picture, De Noix concentrates on seducing Monima. Posing as a romantic benefactor named Jean de la Rout, he employs a sea-captain's wife, Mrs. Dobson, to take Monima and her father to a country seat. The supposed "asylum" offered by the landed gentleman is a front, which fools the Fontanbleus. Though the Fontanbleus enjoy their summer in the country—they avoid the yellow fever, a gentleman named

Greenaway falls in unrequited love with Monima, and they have access to an extensive library and tranquil rural walks—De Noix finally reveals himself, bursting into the cottage and attempting to rape Monima. In a scene eerily reminiscent of the end of Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond*, Monima shoots her assailant, though De Noix, unlike Ormond, clings to life and recovers, enabling him to torment the Fontanbleus for several more chapters. Father and daughter head back to Philadelphia, fearing that a yellow fever outbreak (likely that of 1799) will bar them from entering any places of refuge. On their way, they witness drunken poor men spending money at a bar while their children starve. The Fontanbleus arrive in Philadelphia to learn that Peter has abandoned Debby and their infant daughter in the throes of the epidemic.

Monima goes back to Mrs. Firming seeking work, but Mrs. Firming refuses to refer Monima to other employers and blames her for her poverty. Chased by a policeman, the beggar-girl bolts into the parlor of a comically modish family. De Noix suborns Mrs. Dobson into giving sworn testimony that Monima's father owes her a $1000 debt; imprisoning Fontanbleu will give him greater access to Monima, now for the purpose of revenge. Monima simultaneously experiences her own legal troubles, as some fine muslin cloth Mrs. Firming has given her to embroider has been stolen, leaving her vulnerable to the charge of theft.

Sonnetton finally enters the scene to scare off Mrs. Firming. Arriving at the mayor's court, he recognizes his long-lost mentor Fontanbleu, testifies on his behalf, and gets Dobson to admit the real culprit to be De Noix, who is then ostracized. At the end of the novel, the news that Monima's two brothers survived the slave revolt reaches the pair, with one a successful sea captain and the other a slave plantation owner in St. Domingo.[1] The novel ends with Monima and Sonnetton's marriage, and its happy result: "From that auspicious day, Monima became the soother of the afflicted, the mother to the orphan, the supporter of the oppressed, and the indulgent friend to the sufferer of sensibility" (251). Not urban institutions, but an individual woman makes Ralston's city a better place for people who suffer. As it concludes, the novel shifts to present tense, indicating that Monima's charitable work will continue indefinitely: "Monima's bliss is supreme, in

1 In 1801, the leader of the now-independent St. Domingo invited the planters back, albeit no longer with slave labor. In late 1802, however, Napoleon invaded to retake the island and reinstitute slavery, though the French would be defeated and expelled by late 1803. It's probable that Ralston composed the novel when French prospects were bright.

her husband, her father, and the means she possesses of administering to the comforts of the children of affliction!" (252)

The English Novel and Multilingual America

With a German father and a Huguenot mother, Maria Endress's first language was certainly not English. Her father's European experience, which included study with Voltaire, working at a brewer in Lyon, captivity in Algeria, and a job working for a Venetian merchant that took him to Turkey and Tunis, made him a citizen of a multilingual world. Her mother's history as a refugee, first in Germany and then in Pennsylvania, would have made her pay close attention to what the mouth (*Mund*) of a stranger reveals through the act of speaking, as the unfortunate refugee Aldimund discovers in "A Tale of Truth," a story from *The Ladies' Monitor* we attribute to Mary Ralston and include on pages 258–63. Her parents' mobility, both forced and unforced; their repeated financial losses; and Mary's own experience as the American-born daughter of immigrants are all reflected in *Monima*. Like her heroine, Mary Ralston not only learned enough English to help her parents negotiate in the world, but developed an advanced literary facility in her adopted tongue.[1]

Born in British North America a few years after her father's arrival, Maria Endress's first languages were her father's German and likely her mother's French. (Her father, she later reported, spoke in his final days only French, as he had in Lyon.) The life of her more famous brother, Christian Endress, is a study in linguistic adaptation.[2] A Lutheran minister, Christian would achieve some notoriety for his role in admitting the English language into the church where he had his final ministerial appointment as pastor to the German congregation of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in 1815.[3] Christian's

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1 Baker, "Correcting," 355–56.

2 Baker notes that the father appears as Zacharias Endres, Andreas or even Anedriss in the historical record; we would add that even German Society of Pennsylvania records spell her brother's name as Khristian Endreß, Christian Andreß, and Christian Andress. His father's name was spelled Zachary Andrews in some GSP business records. These changes of spelling mirror the Americanizing process by which, in the novel, "Sonnetton" becomes "Sontine."

3 William Buell Sprague, "Christian Endress, D.D." *Annals of the American Pulpit*, vol. 9 (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1869), 108. See Liam Riordan, *Many Identities, One Nation: The American Revolution and its Legacy in the Mid-Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 152–66.

efforts were met with controversy and political resistance reflective of broader transitions in Pennsylvania's German community.[1]

If her brother turned to English to remain relevant to an American Lutheran congregation, Mary Endress Ralston wrote in English to participate in the rise of what Stephen Shapiro calls "novelism" in the Early Republic: that is, the elevation of novels into the defining commodity of the period.[2] Novels were indelibly linked to the prestige of the English language and British culture. Though abundant, German print in the Early Republic was limited to newspapers, religious tracts, medical treatises, almanacs and other farmers' texts, and poetry. Mary Ralston would then have been unlikely to write fiction in her first language. German readers understood something that native Anglophones took for granted: that fiction was an extension of the prestige of English culture. The existence of *Monima* and *Margaretta* as English-language novels is itself an implicit comment on the cultural significance of different languages in the Early Republic.

Indeed, in German American networks, the English novel became a powerful vehicle of Anglicization, especially among younger, second-generation readers drawn to an exciting, intoxicating product. The leading mid-Atlantic publisher, Mathew Carey, recognized German speakers, who comprised about a third of Pennsylvanians in the Early Republic, as ready consumers of English novels and cultivated networks of German printers and booksellers to whom he sold his stock. Carey's business partners included such German booksellers as the Reading, Pennsylvania, German printer Gottlob Jungmann. As he prepared packets of English books, including *Charlotte Temple*, to send to Jungmann for resale, Carey promised Jungmann that he was "preparing a feast for your novel reading Ladies–& for your Quid Nunc Gentlemen I hope they will fall too without mercy." Carey thought of second-generation Germans as a youth market, and sold the novels alongside the English-language primers he encouraged Jungmann to have "introduced

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1 A subtle analysis of political struggles involved in the introduction of English into the Philadelphia Lutheran Church is Friederike Baer, *The Trial of Frederick Eberle: Language, Patriotism, and Citizenship in Pennsylvania's German Community 1790–1830* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

2 See Stephen Shapiro, *The Culture and Commerce of the American Novel: Reading the Atlantic World-System* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007). It seems clear, however, that the rage for novels in the new republic went well beyond the 1790s, which Shapiro identifies as the crucial decade for novelism.

into your Schools" (13 June 1798).[1] For his part, Jungmann's continual refrain to Carey was that "New Novels is the daily Cry–".[2] That is to say, the novel was anglicizing even the pale of German settlement, appealing to a demographic of second-generation immigrants of whom Mary was one.

The power of the novel to communicate English cultural norms was obvious even to new arrivals. The other non-native-speaking American novelist of the decade was Gotthilf Lutyens (1745/8?-1815), whose *Life and Adventures of Moses Nathan Israel* was probably written in 1809, though it did not appear until 1815.[3] A Hamburg immigrant whose previous book had been a German-language guidebook for immigrants to Pennsylvania, Lutyens struggled with the English language. Yet even Lutyens, when he moved to writing a book in English, chose the genre of the novel, and made the humble protagonist of his national allegory an ethnic German who speaks only English.

The picaresque form of Lutyens's orphan story draws broadly on Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), while *Monima* evokes familiar themes from the most influential English novel of the eighteenth century, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), in its tale of a beautiful yet impoverished young heroine's resistance to an aristocrat's attempts at seduction. Monima's stay at De Noix's country seat recasts Pamela's removal to the Lincolnshire mansion of the latter's would-be seducer, Mr. B., where the abuse inflicted by his servant, Mrs. Jewkes, is a more overtly hostile, and thus perhaps less dangerous, version of Monima's manipulation by Mrs. Dobson. *Pamela* and *Monima* also converge in their treatment of the heroine's struggles to control her clothing.

If Pamela endures mockery for her determination to reject Mr. B.'s gift of noble finery and instead wear clothing she has made for herself, Monima also maintains her rustic summer clothing (she wears Pamela's own "straw

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1 Mathew Carey to Gottlob Jungmann, 7 June 1796 and 13 June 1798, Lea & Febiger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

2 Gottlob Jungmann to Mathew Carey, 6 March 1797, Lea & Febinger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. In other letters to Carey in 1797, Jungmann made similar reports: "Books demanded are: new novels" (Jan. 1); "Books sell very well at present, but Novel Readers I have not been able to please–" (Jan. 14); "The Novel readers of this Place wish me to procure them a new Novel lately published–" (Apr. 3); "Novels of modern Kind will always sell–" (Dec. 19).

3 Gotthilf Lutyens, *Life and Adventures of Moses Nathan Israel* (Easton, PA: Christian J. Hutter, 1815). See the 2016 edition, Oliver Scheiding, ed.: http://etext.obama-Institute.de/wp-content/uploads/Luytens_Life_and_Adventures_1815_Final_20_04_2016.pdf.

hat") in the face of ridicule, signifying an innocent virtue which Mrs. Dobson reads as the artifice of a "mountebank" (169, 172, 183), or charlatan. Instead of rewarding Monima's chastity with marriage to an aristocrat, however, Ralston has Monima violently reject him in a scene of self-defense reminiscent of Brown's *Ormond*, and her status will be elevated through marriage to a man who, though born into a wealthy French family, must suffer poverty before being rewarded with the recovery of his fortune.

Unlike Lutyens, Mary Ralston had been born in British North America. Unaware of her identity, a contemporary reviewer attributed her ornate but mistaken diction to women writers' affectation or ignorance. A negative review of the New York edition compiled a list of the novel's "inappropriate use of words [that] continually betrays [the author's] ignorance, or forgetfulness of their precise signification and force."[1] We might instead credit her diction to the creativity of the nonnative speaker moving across languages. For example, her epithet for Philadelphia policemen—"men of the staff"—is not a contemporary English phrase, but a calque for *Männer des Stabes*, a nineteenth-century German term for the police (206, 214). Such phrases as "confess upon" or "confess on" are similarly unidiomatic but may be literal translations of *bekennen auf* (165, 185). More subtly than would be the case for Lutyens, Ralston's prose exemplifies Elizabeth Kimball's suggestion that Early Republican Pennsylvania was a translingual environment—that is, one in which the boundaries between languages would have been broken in everyday discourse.[2] Admittedly, the stumbling English in some of Ralston's surviving letters may lead readers to ask questions about her ability to write a florid prose style. But writers have always used a variety of registers to suit the rhetorical occasion. When her solicitation letters are rife with misspellings, she may be emphasizing her lower-class status to demonstrate her need.

Ralston begins the New York edition of her novel with just such a letter of appeal to a man "whom I know to be" (apparently quoting Job 29:16) "a father to the poor" (iii–iv): the wealthy Bucks County physician and farmer Dr. Hugh Meredith. She notes that "I am a stranger here, and as an author, surrounded with many difficulties"—difficulties which, as we now know, included not just her gender, but her being a nonnative speaker of English. In his study of U.S. texts written in Spanish during the same time period,

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1 "Monima, or the Beggar Girl; a Novel, in one Volume, founded on Fact. By an American Lady." *American Review, & Literary Journal* 2.2 (April 1802): 164–66.

2 Elizabeth Kimball, *Translingual Inheritance: Language Diversity in Early National Philadelphia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021), 35 and passim.

Rodrigo Lazo recovers a tradition of writers whose signature line might be described as "Anonymously Yours": rather than simply being a mark of republican abstraction, these writers' unsigned appeals to readers attempt to produce a feeling of intimacy among a wider print public.[1] Ralston's unsigned appeal to Meredith is both intimate and public, aiming to inspire a broader circle of benefactors to provide for impoverished strangers like herself. Unlike Lazo's Spanish elite, however, Ralston could not, or chose not to, claim charity from others who spoke her native language. Instead, she made the humble eloquence of her English provide proof of her worth, which she hoped would be all the more moving for being the acquired tongue of a "stranger."

Ralston veiled her translingual background in an ideology of fluent literacy, making characters' eloquence a measure of their virtue. Rhetorical situations typical of a multilingual city are frequently dramatized in the novel. However, while Ralston makes language difference an important theme in her portrait of Philadelphia, her novel is highly selective in representing it. Verisimilar representations of language difference in *Monima* include the misspelled missive of Madame Sontine as transcribed by her servant (40) and the slang of Peter and Debby. Ralston treats these characters' demotic idioms as a sign of their ignorance. In contrast, upper-class French characters' speech is rendered in fluent English, though the words are obviously spoken and composed in French (45, 84, 85–86).

Ralston projected some of that linguistic ideology onto the language learning of her heroine: "Monima had, during her residence at Portsmouth, been taught to read and write the English language, and aided by a natural genius, she had become a proficient in the art, so that she could understand the beauties of the poets with the same facility of conception as of her mother tongue" (203). This description of Monima's literary talents may well nod to Ralston's own. But whether or not Mary Endress Ralston possessed natural genius, she did not create *Monima* alone. We should remember that the author was simply one agent in the production of a text in the Early Republic, and not necessarily the most important one. To pursue her literary aims, and apparently even to receive charitable support, Mary had to write in English. She married a native English speaker, Isaac Ralston, who supported female writers. Perhaps her husband's need to produce original content for a weekly magazine provided an exigence for the creation of her

[1] Rodrigo Lazo, *Letters from Filadelfia: Early Latino Literature and the Trans-American Elite* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020), 156–91.

writing. We have no evidence of the extent to which her husband may have helped in editing her writing, but we do know that her last known work (*Margaretta*, 1807) appeared four years after his disappearance, and that she seized every opportunity to see her work in print and to earn financial support for her struggling family. And as we will see, her story echoed the collective concerns of Philadelphia's ethnic German community, even as she sought to distance herself from it.

Monima and German America

If *Monima* were simply one poor widow's attempt to earn a few dollars for her family by embedding her experience in the life of a beautiful heroine, it might remain merely a historical curiosity. But as critics have noted, the novel is a collective fantasy. Its elements mirror ideas that many German immigrants held about Anglo institutions. While the publication of a novel written in English signaled her literary revolt against the patriarchal German Lutheran establishment, German Philadelphians' pursuit of political change by appealing to established Anglo authorities is visible in *Monima*. By exposing the machinations of Pierre De Noix and Madame Sontine, the novel suggests that, while individuals may be kind, the court system, hospitals, and workhouses exist to serve the powerful. By the same token, the novel develops the fantasy that powerful Anglo male allies will be able to see past differences of language and ethnicity to identify a virtuous though penurious citizen like the heroine.

The idea that sympathetic Anglo civic leaders might be moved to resolve the distresses of ethnic "strangers" was widely shared by the Germans of Philadelphia. The mayor in *Monima* is among the many father figures in Ralston's fiction. His role in the novel's denouement, to ensure that the good Fontanbleu and the evil De Noix are rewarded and punished, respecttively, reflects widely held beliefs about a mayor's role as an instrument for social justice for immigrants. The directors of the German Society of Pennsylvania (GSP), a mutual-aid society based in Philadelphia, made numerous appeals to the mayor to increase legal protections for immigrants who, like Fontanbleu in *Monima*, struggled to understand the English language and the American legal system. The GSP sought to redress the plight of the immigrant underclass by providing charitable donations and scholarships to the city's German-speaking worthy poor.

Despite this mutual aid, however, the GSP doled out charity to women only if they lacked a male relative to support them. They did not fund the

professional ambitions of women like Mary Ralston, even though her brothers enjoyed significant assistance in the form of scholarships from the same organization. We do not know where, or how, she was educated. Even in the most privileged families, sons enjoyed far greater educational opportunities than daughters, no matter how talented. Judith Sargent Murray, whose brother learned Latin and Greek at Harvard University, was restricted to attending primary school in her hometown of Gloucester, Massachusetts. Though Murray would become a pioneering essayist, novelist, and playwright, she felt that she had been "robbed of the aids of education" that her brother enjoyed.[1]

Similarly, the GSP paid tuition at the University of Pennsylvania for Mary's older brother, John Zacharias, and younger brother, Christian, and regularly sent an examiner to evaluate whether he and the many other young German men they sponsored were becoming "useful citizens" [*brauchbare Mitbürger*]. The Society tracked Christian's progress through his graduation on July 8, 1790, and paid the "etwa 10. bis 12. Schillinge" required to purchase his diploma.[2] In turn, Christian later served as an examiner for scholarship recipients.

Because she was a girl, Maria Endress could not claim any educational support from the German-speaking community. Instead of turning to the GSP, the teenaged Endress sought help from the ultimate American father figure when she appealed to George Washington for five dollars. *Monima* echoes this moment when its weeping heroine receives a bank note of $5 from Sonnetton (69). Later, as Mrs. Ralston, she increasingly turned to Anglo rather than German benefactors. As Baker discovered, Mary Ralston pointedly sought help from the English mutual-aid organization to whom she dedicated her later novel, *Margaretta*.

If she had indeed been widowed, as Baker surmises, Mary Endress Ralston might have received a charitable donation at one of the GSP's weekly meetings, as her sister-in-law Rosana Lauria Endress did in receiving $5 in 1812 or 1813, shortly after the death of Mary's brother John Zachary.[3] But the Society did not seem equally disposed to help petitioners who married

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[1] Sheila L. Skemp, *First Lady of Letters: Judith Sargent Murray and the Struggle for Female Independence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 21.
[2] *Minutes der incorporirten Deutschen Gesellschaft* [Directors' meetings] 1770–1802, Joseph P. Horner Memorial Library of the German Society of Pennsylvania (Volume 1), 166, 188.
[3] German Society of Pennsylvania Records: Logbook, relief, 1811–1827 (Series I, Volume 28), Joseph P. Horner Memorial Library of the German Society of Pennsylvania, 48.

Anglophones and thus lost their German surnames. (If Isaac Ralston had abandoned his pregnant wife, her situation might have cast the appeal for charity in a shameful light.) And the German Lutheran establishment would have been shocked at her writing romantic novels, especially in English. The marriage to Isaac Ralston that liberated her from patriarchal Lutheran norms and gave her access to print barred Mary from the Lutheran community and from the support of the GSP. As Baker concludes: "Maria Endress's youthful iconoclasm and desire for female empowerment, her marriage outside the faith at the age of twenty-seven, and her subsequent foray into English-language novel writing, taken together represented a kind of declaration of independence from the constraints of traditional Lutheranism."[1]

We see this independence not just in her writing but in her work in Easton as a teacher and schoolmistress. Reunited with her father and brother, Mary Ralston claimed a new identity as she pursued an ambitious reading schedule and involved herself in charitable work. Perhaps most importantly, by teaching the young women of Easton, Ralston did her part to address the educational inequities she had faced as a young woman. Like Judith Sargent Murray and Susanna Rowson, Mary Ralston offered a new generation of American women access to an education that went far beyond what they had received.

Monima and Language Justice

The denouement of *Monima*, in which one French immigrant, De Noix, uses his superior knowledge of English language and legal structure to exploit another, exposes the ways that the legal system could be manipulated against non-Anglophones. De Noix initiates a complex vengeance plot, seeking to overcome his enemy, Fontanbleu, by using the instruments of legal authority: "Every word the mayor would say would be misinterpreted to Fontanbleu, and every sentence the suffering man would say in his own vindication was to be wrongly interpreted to the mayor, and thus, by a well-constructed story, to betray the old man relentlessly into prison" (241). De Noix's hireling, Mrs. Dobson, agrees to bear false witness because "it don't seem any crime to swear against a man who is no Christian [...] he can't talk a word of English" (238). Sonnetton, however, steps in to save his "more than father" by exposing to the mayor the way De Noix has "taken advantage of my friend's ignorance of the English language" (244, 245). As Pethers notes, the

1 Baker, "Correcting," 363.

novel does not point to a conspiracy among the city's various institutions (almshouse, asylum, courthouse) so much as reveal the class politics of taking Monima's silence as a sign of plebeian sloth rather than aggrieved innocence.[1] To this important class dimension of the novel we would add the ways that ethnicity and gender make her words unintelligible to the city's constituted authorities. When we recognize that female voices like Ralston's had to remain anonymous, whether in the English- or German-speaking communities, we can see Monima's wordlessness as Ralston's own.

Though Ralston rebelled against the patriarchal Lutheran establishment's discrimination, *Monima* reflects concerns with language justice that had long been a preoccupation of Philadelphia's Germans. In the last decades of the eighteenth century, the GSP waged a campaign aimed at the mayor of Philadelphia to provide legal protections for immigrants, whose unfamiliarity with a new country and language frequently led to exploitation. As early as 1785, the GSP had appealed to the mayor of Philadelphia to protect its non-English-speaking indentured servants (known as "redemptioners" because they signed papers to work off the cost of their transportation to America) by providing them with proper documentation translated into their native tongue. The GSP complained bitterly that successive mayors and city administrations failed to learn German (even though one-third of their constituents spoke the language) and were content to leave disputes over contracts of indenture to unelected justices of the peace.

Names were frequently misspelled, making it difficult for immigrants or their descendants to claim inheritances or locate family members. Many immigrants were unaware of the terms of their indentures, resulting in deception, mistreatment, desertions, and even suicides. Meanwhile, officials involved in the trafficking of German immigrants profited directly from the system, raising ethical concerns. The Pennsylvania legislature responded by appointing a bilingual officer in 1785 to take the names of all incoming passengers and to record the precise terms of their indentures. Despite passage of the law, complaints made to the GSP reveal that the abuses suffered by immigrants like the Fontanbleus continued, even though the formal practice of indentured servitude had declined by 1800.[2] Instead of depicting

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1 Matthew Pethers, "Poverty, Providence, and the State of Welfare: Plotting Parabolic Social Mobility in the Early Nineteenth-Century American Novel," *Early American Literature* 49.3 (2014): 730–31.

2 Birte Pfleger, *Ethnicity Matters: A History of the German Society of Pennsylvania* (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, 2006), 14.

an indentured underclass, however, Ralston decided to focus her story on a family whose previous prosperity demonstrated their capacity to sustain themselves. The 1785 law also had addressed concerns about taking in German beggars, as the legislature charged the mayor with "enquir[ing] whether any of them are superannuated, impotent or otherwise likely to become chargeable to the Public."[1] *Monima* critiques the equation of poor immigrants with "impotence," portraying a heroine who is very willing to work and highly resistant to relying on public charity.

Unlike the petitions of the GSP, Ralston's novel is not a brief on behalf of a particular ethnic group, but demonstrates that language justice should be a concern for all. Despite the underpinnings of the novel in the experience of German Americans like the Endresses, the novel's main characters are French immigrants. Most criticism of the novel has appropriately focused on the novel's French cultural imaginary: that is, how the author's "expansive cartographic imagination" evokes topoi of class, race, and empire.[2] Inherited from the old regime, the Fontanbleu-De Noix conflict evokes the ghost of aristocratic power, but the characters' destinies are ultimately shaped more by the pressures exerted by the new regimes in France and St. Domingo toward class and racial justice.[3] Ralston's negative view of the Haitian Revolution—a phenomenon more central to *Margaretta*—points to the limits of her egalitarianism.[4] Perhaps this reflects the paradoxes of a Jeffersonian ideology. Understanding Ralston's ethnic background leads us to agree with Eve Tavor Bannet that "with de Noix's downfall in *Monima*," Ralston "banished aristocrats from Philadelphia," but she was certainly not a Federalist who would have "left her readers with the vision of a restored and corrected mercantile elite, whose wealth and entrepreneurship were

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1 "An Act for Establishing the Office of a Register of all German Passengers," etc (1785), *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1682–1801*, Volume 11 (Harrisburg, PA: Harrisburg Publishing, 1906), 604. The petitions and letters that led to the act are in *Minutes der Incorporirten Deutschen Gesellschaft*, 115–22.

2 Duncan Faherty, *The Haitian Revolution in the Early Republic of Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 72.

3 See Stacy Hinthorn Van Beek, "Polite Revolutions: Manners and Civic Virtue in Feminine Fictions of the Early Republic," 2009. University of California, Irvine, PhD Dissertation; Courtney Chatellier, "The French Revolution in Early American Literature, 1789–1815: Translations, Interpretations, Refractions," 2018. Graduate Center, City University of New York, PhD Dissertation.

4 Richard S. Pressman, "*Margaretta* as Federalist Fantasy," in *Margaretta* (San Antonio, TX: Early American Reprints, 2012), 25.

joined to virtue, charity and beneficence."[1] Instead, the novel appears to celebrate the restoration of wealth derived from Caribbean plantations, an object of much Federalist critique.

While a shared concern with language justice links non-Anglophones in the novel, the French are not simply proxies for Germans. Instead of focusing on the religious concerns of Germans, Mary Ralston explored the lives of French émigrés in Philadelphia in order to evaluate the social revolutions underway in the Atlantic world. Many of the concerns of French Philadelphia around 1800, as described by François Furstenburg, are reflected in the novel: the juxtaposition of economic precarity and civilized glamor as wealthy French aristocrats and former West Indian plantation owners became economic refugees as soon as they landed in America; the use of social ritual and personal connections, rather than abstract institutions, to exercise political power; and the role of slavery and empire in building the nation's re-export-derived wealth.[2] French émigrés in Philadelphia continually reminded their Anglo-American counterparts of fractures of class, race, and empire that the Founders sought to repress. The novel's unique contribution to this discourse may be its addition of language difference to these conflicts of identity, its rejection of John Jay's famous claim that "Providence" conferred a unity of language and ancestry upon Americans—a claim that flew in the face of the reality of a multilingual and multiethnic republic.[3] By questioning why anyone would speak a language other than English, characters such as Debby and Mrs. Dobson not only repeat Jay's mystification of actual American conditions but contribute to the misery of the Fontanbleu family.

Immigration and language justice remain at the forefront of American politics and continue to impact the lives of men, women, and children in the United States. As the composition scholar Elizabeth Kimball notes of Philadelphia around 1800, non-English-speaking newcomers and their chil-

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1 Eve Tavor Bannet, "Shifting Cultures and Transatlantic Imitations: The Case of Burney, Bennett and Read," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Atlantic Literary Studies*, eds. Leslie Elizabeth Eckel and Clare Frances Elliott (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 83.

2 François Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French: Five Refugees Who Shaped a Nation* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

3 Writes Jay: "Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country, to one united people, a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language." *The Federalist: A Collection of Essays, Written in Favour of the New Constitution, as Agreed Upon by the Federal Convention, September 17, 1787* (New-York: J. and A. M'Lean: 1788), 7.

dren "faced the same kinds of challenges immigrants might face today."[1] As young Maria Endress grew to become Mary Endress Ralston, she navigated and, in *Monima*, fictionalized the experience of an English-language learner in multilingual early America, highlighting the personal and political discrimination even virtuous immigrants and non-native speakers faced. *Monima* does not just represent multilingualism but anticipates debates over language justice that continue to impact American politics, life, and literature today. By writing *Monima* in English and publishing it both serially and by subscription, Mary Ralston attempted to bring her novel to the widest possible readership. We hope that this edition allows *Monima* to reach new readers more than two centuries after its original publication.

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[1] Kimball, 16.

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