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THE AUTONOMIC AMERICAN

by

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Every man discriminates between the voluntary acts of his mind, and his involuntary perceptions, and knows that to his involuntary perceptions a perfect faith is due.

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Self-Reliance"

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Introduction: Benjamin Franklin and the Art of Circulation

The end of the eighteenth century was a paradoxical period for the flesh: Human bodies had become sites of exploration more invasive and more interior than ever before at the same time as they had become sites of exposure more exterior and more public. The yellow fever epidemics that devastated Philadelphia in 1793 and New York in 1798 not only incited tremendous technical controversies in scientific journals regarding the most basic and elemental processes of human physiology, but also engendered a glut of vituperative articles in the popular press, and even a bona fide publishing phenomenon, Matthew Carey's A Short Account of the Malignant Fever, Lately Prevalent in Philadelphia.[1] It was at this historical moment that the first medical journal published in America, The Medical Repository, appeared, proclaiming in the first sentence of the first number of the first volume that it would be dedicated to nothing less than the creation of a cross-disciplinary discourse devoted to both the innermost and outermost phenomena affecting human physiology, a syncretic task aimed at the understanding and cure of epidemic disease:

> The design of the Papers which will be presented to the Public under this title, is to illustrate the connection subisting between Climate, Soil, Temperature, Diet, &c. and

[1]Originally published by the author in Philadelphia in 1793, A Short Account had gone through four printings by 1794.

> Health. . . . [And, in particular, those] diseases which pass under the name of Epidemics.[2]

As Foucault has demonstrated for post-Revolutionary clinical practice in France,[3] it was the failure of medicine, not its success, that instigated such new modes of interspatial and interdisciplinary penetration. Indeed, the unapologetically theoretical, quasi-mechanistic and strictly taxonomic theories upon which the foundation of Enlightenment medicine had rested for more than a century were about to collapse, but not disappear. Medical science, even impotent and half-dead medical science, was transforming into "fresh matter for discourse." As Elihu Hubbard Smith, one of the founders of the Medical Repository, noted in his diary:

> Wherever you go, [Yellow] Fever is the invariable and unceasing topic of conversation. When two persons meet, the Fever is the subject of the first inquiries. People collect in groups to talk it over, and to frighten each other into fever, or flight. I saw, in Maiden-Lane, this morning, a Carman, at a Cabinet-maker's, taking in a load of Coffins. A number of persons, of various colours, ages, and sexes, were

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[2]Edward Miller, Samuel Latham Mitchill, Elihu Hubbard Smith, eds., The Medical Repository, I (New York: T. & J. Swords, 1800): 1.

[3]Michel Foucault, The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), p. 130.

> staring, half dismayed, at this unwelcome sight. Here was fresh matter for discourse.[4]

The popularization of the medical category "Fever"[5] into "fresh matter for discourse" mirrors a massive metamorphosis of body consciousness, a transformation that transgressed burgeoning professional and social boundaries and granted demotic discourse the new and thrilling privilege of clinical language and homology.

The structure of popularization, cross-disciplinary homology and epistemological multiplicity has lately been the focus of much critical scrutiny, and has been particularly relevant to the field of post-colonial studies. As Gillian Beer has noted and on many occasions reiterated,

> I suggest[] that 'cross-category movement of concepts' is 'most active in areas of unresolved conflict or problem. It

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[4]Elihu Hubbard Smith, The Diary of Elihu Hubbard Smith (1771-1798), ed. James E. Cronin (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1973), p. 60.

[5]The taxonomic impulse of the eighteenth century had extended into the medical realm with the work of Francois Boissier de Sauvages (1707-67), who in his Nosologie methodica (1768) classed all "Diseases accompanied by fever, chills, and rapid pulse" as "Febres." Carl von Linnaeus (1707-1778) classed "Diseased characterized by fever and inflammations" as "Phlogistici" in his Genera morborum (1763); while, of most influence to the medicine of Federalist America, William Cullen (1710-90) placed "eruptive" and "continued and intermittent fevers" under the general rubric of Pyrexiae in his Synopsis nosologiae methodicae (1785). See Inci Altug Bowman, "William Cullen and the Primacy of the Nervous System," diss., Indiana University, 1975, pp. 153-189.

signals the significant anxieties of a period . . . '[6]

One of the most intriguing aspects of such "'cross-category movement'" concerns the way in which the extra-scientific discourses such technical dynamics helped to establish retained isomorphic remnants of their scientific origins long after the theories themselves had been relegated to the rubbish heap of clinical discovery.

Throughout the following study I will argue that the disintegrated essence of eighteenth century physiological theories fostered possibilities for a new kind of language particularly enabled to describe the distress and unease of Federalist America; and that this popularizing mode of various and vying physiological polemics projected onto and even generated genres of discourse outside the realm of the "scientific." I will argue that eighteenth-century physiological science, under tremendous critical pressure and on the brink of collapse, had in its dying days delineated a set of complex dynamics and paradoxical paramaters that would enter the early Republic's literary imagination and retain a stronghold there well into the nineteenth century. Thus was forged a scientistic structure and a clinically interventionist thrust that often informed and occasionally controlled the descriptive processes, notions of emplotment, and dialectics of meaning shared by Benjamin Franklin, Charles Brockden Brown, and, eventually, even

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[6]Gillian Beer, Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), p. 96.

the major writers of the American Renaissance.

What were the theoretical bases of this imaginatively potent yet soon-to-be-outmoded physiological science? One of its controlling elements had emerged as a consequence of the steady development, during the eighteenth century, of nervous science:

> The rise of neuropathology toward the end of the eighteenth century had important implications for medicine: . . . The shift from the circulatory system to the nervous system may be said to have marked the end of traditional humoral pathology dating back to Hippocrates and Galen.[7]

Although no longer containers of medieval humours, the eighteenth-century body circulated within itself quite a number of newfangled liquids. In particular, "electric fluid"[8] and "vital fluid"[9] composed elements of an "aetherial"[10] ocean upon which rode the supreme power of nervous impulse.

> The sensorial power, or spirit of animation, resid[es] in the contracting fibres [and is] perpetually renewed by the secretion or production of it in the brain and spinal

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[7]Bowman, p. 15.

[8]Erasmus Darwin, Zoonomia; Or, the Laws of Organic Life, vol. 1 (London: J. Johnson, 1801), p. 9.

[9]ibid., p. 84.

[10]Bowman, p. 13.

marrow.[11]

This mysterious nervous fluid, "secret[ed . . . by] the brain and spinal marrow" was first given physiological priority by Thomas Willis (1621-75). One of the seventeenth century's founders of nervous science, Willis wrote a number of works that were published well into the eighteenth century:

> According to Willis, the heart and the brain were the centers of the circulatory and nervous systems, respectively. Both systems circulated fluids of vital significance, the blood and the 'nervous juyce' . . .[12]

An understanding of the nature of the circulation or "motions" of this "'nervous juyce'" became one of the goals of eighteenth-century physiology. And, by the close of this century, a set of highly refined theories and rules that governed "The Immediate Causes of Animal Motions,"[13] in particular the dynamics of the human body's "Absorbent" systems, had been summarized and given its most authoritative voice by Charles Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus, in his monumental four-volume work,

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[11]Darwin, p. 96.

[12]Bowman, p. 49.

[13]Darwin, Zoonomia, title page.

Zoonomia.[14]

According to Darwin, the "Absorbent" system consisted of a set of "glands" that controlled the motions of all the body's fluids:

> . . . these glands . . . consist of a mouth to select, a belly to digest, and an excretory aperture to emit their appropriated fluids . . .[15]

A healthy "Absorbent" system balanced the circulatory motions of the nervous juice. Balance was the key term, for the eighteenth century clinician had to understand and subsequently learn to manipulate or "librat[e]"[16] the human "sensorium," Darwin's name for the fine-tuned realm of nervous excitements and torpors. Thus, to "librate or circulate" were, to Darwin, synonymous terms.[17] And the diagnostic procedures and materia medica described in Zoonomia invariably outline methods for the clinician to "proportion[]" "catenat[e]," and balance "overbalance[d]" bodily systems.[18]

The master trope of this nervous balancing act was

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[14]Samuel Latham Mitchill and Elihu Hubbard Smith, who along with Edward Miller co-founded The Medical Repository, were the respective editors of the first American editions of Erasmus Darwin's Zoonomia and The Botanic Garden.

[15]Darwin, p. 389.

[16]ibid., p. 78.

[17]Darwin, Zoonomia, II: 257.

[18]III: 15-17.

"glandular appetency."[19] To Darwin, even the circulation of the blood fell under this figure of "imbib[ing]," "drink[ing], and "absorbing mouths."[20] If the balance of digestive input and output, the basis of the "animal oeconomy,"[21] were not properly librated, the result would be a dangerous "inversion"[22] or nervous dyspepsia. Unbalanced absorptions could instigate "retrograde motion," and the resultant "excitement" or "torpor" of the sensorium would produce "nervous fevers."[23] For,

> . . . life itself is . . . carried on by the production of sensorial power being equal to its waste or expenditure in the perpetual movement of the vascular organization.[24]

"Vascular organization" was thus a capacious category that not only covered the circulation of blood, but of oxygen, nutrients and, above all, the "nervous juyce." Indeed, a healthy, functioning body was nothing less than enfleshed circulation. And the science of human life thus became a matter of effecting and maintaining carefully catenated "circle[s] of actions."[25]

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[19]I: 395.

[20]I: 399-401.

[21]I: 415.

[22]I: 415.

[23]I: 410, 420, 91.

[24]I: 109.

[25]I: 110.

Inextricably involved with each other on the conceptual level, the clinical models of circulation and digestion not only became master tropes for the variegated relationships between the nervous excitements and torpors at work inside the confines of organic systems, but for the relationship of any discrete organic system to the potential torpors and excitements that lay outside its confines (note the Medical Repository's initial reference to "Climate, Soil, Temperature, Diet . . . "). In short, such a digestive/circulatory paradigm for the nervous sensorium and for human physiology in general fostered a quasi-fetishistic focus on what would and would not enter the "mouths" of organic systems, what would and would not be circulated, what would and would not be expelled. And such cross-spatial obsessions about penetration and influence, balance and expenditure, align with the social and political problems and paranoias of Federalist America, personified in the figure of Benjamin Franklin.

Which brings us to one of the most seemingly inconspicuous yet heavily freighted episodes of eighteenth-century American literature, which appears in that section of Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography in which he explains how and why he stopped being a vegetarian:

> I believe I have omitted mentioning that in my first Voyage from Boston, being becalm'd off Block Island, our People set about catching Cod & hawl'd up a great many. Hitherto I had stuck to my Resolution of not eating animal Food; and on this Occasion, I consider'd with my Master

> [Thomas] Tryon, the taking every Fish as a kind of unprovok'd Murder, since none of them had or ever could do us any Injury that might justify the slaughter. -- All this seem'd very reasonable. -- But I had formerly been a great Lover of Fish, & when this came hot out of the Frying Pan, it smelt admirably well. I balanc'd some time between Principle & Inclination: till I recollected, that when the Fish were opened, I saw smaller Fish taken out of their Stomachs: -- Then, thought I, if you eat one another, I don't see why we mayn't eat you. So I din'd upon Cod very heartily and continu'd to eat with other People, returning only now & then occasionally to a vegetable Diet. So convenient a thing it is to be a reasonable Creature, since it enables one to find or make a Reason for every thing one has a mind to do.[26]

Punned upon and made subservient to "convenien[ce]" and desire, Franklin has here stripped "Reason" of all pretensions of primacy, and ironized its privileged status. A number of unsettling questions immediately arise: How could logic and "Mind" as thinking machine be so casually superceded by "Love[]," "Inclination" and "Mind" as nervous impulse in a text that so typified those heady decades directly preceding the Revolutionary War, decades which have been touted as nothing less than the crowning moments of the Age of Reason? Furthermore, what defining

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[26]Benjamin Franklin, The Autobiography (New York: The Library of America, 1990), pp. 34-35. Italics are Franklin's.

trope of human behavior, if not "Reason," did possess an unironic, unassailable status for Benjamin Franklin and, by extension, for all of Federalist America?

Throughout this study I argue that ideas of regulation such as circulation and digestion -- not the labored processes of reason but the evanescent flows of impulse -- acted as such a defining trope. I will argue that for Benjamin Franklin, as for Ralph Waldo Emerson (illustrated by this chapter's epigraph), "involuntary perception" retained a privileged status. But what did "involuntary" mean to the Federalist mind?

One of the basic inheritances modern medicine retains from eighteenth-century physiology is the differentiation between what was called, on the one hand, sensibility, and, on the other, irritability.[27] "Sensibility" defined the realm of all voluntary activity, controlled by what we now call the central nervous system; "irritability" referred to the hidden yet monolithic realm of involuntary response. Twentieth-century scientists have granted this second mode of nervous response a pair of compelling, rather literary names (one of which I have appropriated for the title of this dissertation): the sympathetic, or autonomic nervous system.

The autonomic nervous system -- a web of nervous plexuses emanating from that ancient region of the lower brain and spinal chord -- regulates such vitally important functions as heartbeat,

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[27]The next chapter will outline the history of this dialectic, and attend to the vicious debates that raged between the neuropathologists whose polemics first defined the nature of this issue.

respiration, body temperature, blood pressure, and digestive peristalsis. Even when we sleep the autonomic system remains awake, haunting our bodies with a mysterious presence.

The Autonomic American is, like Ben Franklin, a person who considers balanced circulations to be paramount in any discourse of health, long life, and happiness. This dissertation contends that the Autonomic American -- particularly in its literary avatars of the 1740-1860 period -- grounds desire and insight, certainty, ecstasy, necessity, and often nothing less than an epiphanic version of universal truth in the organic mysterium of unconsciously controlled physical processes, the ceaseless dilations and graspings of autonomic being.

What were Franklin's autonomic principles? What defined his art of circulation? Perhaps the key regulating principle for Franklin was his own highly nuanced idea of diet. The thematic climax of Part Two of Franklin's Autobiography centers on the particulars of his "bold and arduous Project of arriving at moral Perfection":

> I wish'd to live without committing any Fault at any time; I would conquer all that either Natural Inclination, Custom, or Company might lead me into. As I knew, or thought I knew, what was right and wrong, I did not see why I might not always do the one and avoid the other.[28]

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[28]Franklin, Autobiography, p. 79-80.

While a certain ironic element (particularly the phrase, "or thought I knew") may partially undercut Franklin's prose here, the "Thirteen Names of Virtues" that he subsequently lists are decidedly sober, serious and straightforward. These "Virtues" prescribe justice, duty, industry, sincerity, cleanliness, chastity and humility -- and even a casual reader cannot help but be reminded at this point of Franklin's strongest literary antecedent, the Ten Commandments. Of course, the First Commandment for the ancient Hebrew was, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus, 20:3), whereas Franklin's first "Virtue" is,

> TEMPERANCE.
> Eat not to Dulness
> Drink not to Elevation.[29]

Now, the observant Jew must submit to numerous dietary laws, but none of these laws dislocates Yaweh from His preeminent place in the hierarchy of belief. In contrast, Benjamin Franklin privileges diet above every other "Commandment" given to his new nation. And what may be the most uncanny aspect of the primacy of diet in Franklin's "Method" towards "moral Perfection" is not the incongruity of its position, but how little this primacy surprises us.

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[29]Ibid., p. 80.

Indeed, Franklin has scrupulously prepared his readers for this moment of dietary and digestive ascendancy. He has told us that becoming a vegetarian and cooking his own "Potatoes or Rice" and "Hasty Pudding" allowed him to save half his rent while living at his brother's house;[30] that when he first arrived in Philadelphia he feasted on "Puffy Rolls" -- which could be enjoyed for a very reasonable price;[31] that while learning the printing trade he gave a "Woman in the Neighbourhood" a "List of 40 Dishes to be prepar'd . . . at different times, in all which there was neither Fish Flesh nor Fowl . . . not costing [me] about 18d. Sterling . . . per Week";[32] and that a "large Porringer of hot Water-gruel, sprinkled with Pepper, crumb'd with Bread, and a Bit of Butter in it" was a better breakfast than a pint of beer.[33]

The minute detailing of Franklin's dietary intake belies the assertion made at the beginning of the Autobiography:

> . . . little or no Notice was ever taken of what related to the Victuals on the Table, whether it was well or ill drest, in or out of season, of good or bad flavour, preferable or inferior to this or that other thing of the kind; so that I was bro't up in such a

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[30]Ibid., p. 16.

[31]Ibid., p. 25.

[32]Ibid., p. 36.

[33]Ibid., p. 45.

> perfect Inattention to those Matters as to be quite Indifferent what kind of Food was set before me; and so unobservant of it, that to this Day, if I am ask'd I can scarce tell, a few Hours after Dinner, what I din'd upon.[34]

Of course, the reality was quite the opposite of what Franklin here proclaims. In the light of Franklin's subsequent focus on food and diet, the critic with a modicum of psychological insight would be justified in concluding that this excerpt from the Autobiography demonstrates that Benjamin Franklin was "in denial."

Franklin subsequently gives an obsessively thorough history of his decision to become a vegetarian, and its personal, economic, and intellectual effects:

> When about 16 years of Age, I happen'd to meet with a Book, written by one Tryon, recommending a Vegetable Diet. I determined to go into it. My Brother being yet unmarried, did not keep House, but boarded himself & his Apprentices in another Family. My refusing to eat Flesh occasioned an Inconveniency, and I was frequently chid for my singularity. I made my self acquainted with Tryon's Manner of preparing some of his Dishes, such as Boiling Potatoes, or Rice, making Hasty Pudding, & a few others, and then propos'd to

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[34]Ibid., p. 11.

> my Brother,that if he would give me Weekly half the Money he paid for my Board, I would board my self. He instantly agreed to it, and I presently found that I could save half what he paid me. This was an additional Fund for buying Books: But I had another Advantage in it. My Brother and the rest going from the Printing House to their Meals, I remain'd there alone, and dispatching presently my light Repast, (which often was no more than a Bisket or a Slice of Bread, a Handful of Raisins or a Tart from the Pastry Cook's, and a Glass of Water) had the rest of the Time till their Return, for Study, in which I made the great Progress from that greater Clearness of Head & quicker Apprehension which usually attend Temperance in Eating & Drinking. And now it was that being on some Occasion made asham'd of my Ignorance in Figures, which I had twice fail'd in learning when at School, I took Cocker's Book of Arithmetick, & went thro' the whole by my self with great Ease. -- I also read . . . Books of Navigation, & . . . Geometry . . . And I read about this Time Locke on Human Understanding . . .[35]

The "Master," the man all Americans can thank for giving Benjamin Franklin the opportunity and "Clearness of Head" to understand John Locke and to learn "Arithmetick," was Thomas Tryon (1634-1703). The most renowned vegetarian of his day, Tryon's books include Health's Grand Preservative (1682), A

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[35]Ibid., pp. 16-17.

Treatise of Cleanness in Meats and Drinks (1682), The Good House-Wife Made a Doctor (ca. 1692), and The Way to Get Wealth (1702).[36]

Tryon was a mystic who had studied the hermetic texts of Jacob Behmen and undergone a spiritual transformation. Thus, a "Vegetable Diet" is not all that Tryon's The Way to Health, Long Life and Happiness: Or, a Discourse of Temperance had recommended to young Ben Franklin.[37] Tryon endowed food, diet, and digestion with both highly specific and extraordinarily universal powers, powers that crossed all normative taxonomic bounds of separation and influence. The book contains not only highly detailed discourses on "Fatness," "Food Proper for Children," "The Mischief of Variety of Meats," "Of Melted-Butter," and "Of Plum-cakes," but also chapters devoted to "The Cause of Wars," "How to Cure Wounds," and "The Reasons in Nature Why Cities and Great Towns are Subject to the Pestilence."

More a victim of than a victor over the eighteenth century's encyclopedic impulses, Tryon's book conflates a vast, inter-disciplinary array of natural, political and agricultural sciences along with recipes, biblical exegesis and numerology under the all-embracing rubric of diet. At its most philosophical moments, however, The Way to Health unfolds a metaphysics of

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[36]For more on Tryon, in particular his influence on the Quakers and Percy Bysshe Shelley, see Colin Spencer, The Heretic's Feast (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1995), pp. 206-9.

[37]The Way to Health was originally published in 1683. My page numbers refer to the second edition of 1691.

space that maps two contesting positions, "inward" and "outward."

> The Root of all Knowledg [sic] that man is capable of, is in himself: Therefore if any will understand any thing truly, he must first turn the Eye of his Mind inward, not outward, as the custom of most is; . . . but if man will be gazing abroad, and not regard the inward Voice in the Heart . . . then he can never come to any true Judgment either in things Divine or Natural, because the Foundation of all Wisdom and Right-knowledg [sic] is within a mans [sic] self. . . . Therefore if a man would know how to rule, govern and preserve any Creature, or thing, this Wisdom and Knowledg must be first Essential in himself . . . with a due consideration had to the nature of the Food, the Age, Air, Imployments, &c. And also the Quantities of all those things ought to be regarded, and not to heap together too much; this being a sure Rule of Health, if a man finds himself as lightsom and brisk after Meats and Drinks, or rather more than he was before: For the intention of food is to Refresh Nature, and not to dull, oppress, and incommode her, as most in this particular do, especially those whose natural Heats are great, and appetites strong.[38]

Food, the "outward" phenomenon that travels "inward," spans Tryon's two spatial realms. Because of this essential, cross-

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[38]Thomas Tryon, The Way to Health, Long Life and Happiness (London: D. Newman, 1691), pp. 33-35.

spatial role, food must be given its "due consideration," for it can either "Refresh Nature" or "dull, oppress, and incommode her." However, a small yet meddlesome metaphysical inconsistency has now arisen. How can an "outward" phenomenon such as food contribute in any way whatsoever to the "inward" source of "Right-knowledg" when "true Judgment" can only originate from "within a mans self"? Tryon solves this problem by projecting one particular attribute of man's inner self onto the outward phenomenon of food -- the attribute of digestion:

> For the digestive Faculty and true Virtue of all sorts of Food, does consist in the Spiritous parts, and if any Violence be done to them in the Preparation, then such Food becomes dull and half dead . . .[39]

In other words, food can contribute to man's spiritual development and knowledge because food itself partakes, in varying degrees, of the "digestive Faculty." Food itself may contain "Spiritous parts," provided that these "parts" have not been killed in "the Preparation." Thus, the young Benjamin Franklin learned that, "Oatmeal is to be accounted the best of all Flour, by reason of its preparation, the body of the Grain being open'd and the inward Spirit as it were set at Liberty

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[39]Ibid., p. 79. All accidentals are as in the original.

. . ."[40] In this context, Franklin could be forgiven for his insistence that "a large Porringer of hot Water-gruel"[41] for breakfast would bring us all on step closer to utopia. Indeed, to Franklin, eating oatmeal (the "inward Spirit" of which had been "set at Liberty") may have quite logically seemed to be nothing less than a foreshadowing of the birth of American independence -- in his own stomach.

According to Tryon, by restricting diet to those foods and preparations that most thoroughly contain "Spiritous parts," we enhance our "true Judgment." Hence Tryon's notion of "Nourishment":

> . . . for the spirits of men are not Earthly things, to receive their Nourishment through the Organs by the concoction of Meats and Drinks only, but derive their purer Aliment like spunges through the whole Body, from the clear thin Vapours of the Air, which do powerfully penetrate the Body on all sides, but are hindered through superfluity of Meats and Drinks; and so the Spirits in the Body, for want of being found with these refreshing Gales, become thick, and as it were suffocated.[42]

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[40]Ibid., p. 22.

[41]Franklin, p. 45.

[42]Tryon, p. 37.

The body is a radically open system, for "Nourishment" is not a local phenomenon, occurring through the mouth and the digestive system alone. And it is here that Tryon's mystical-spatial matrix overlaps with the hard science of eighteenth-century physiology, summarized in Zoonomia:

> Circles of [internal] motions, as well as trains and tribes of them, are liable to be affected by external influence, which consist of ethereal fluids, and which, by penetrating the system, act upon it perhaps rather as a causa sine qua non of its movements . . .[43]

Both the spiritual and the clinical worlds of Benjamin Franklin were alive with nourishing spirits that sought to "penetrate the Body on all sides."[44] In both of these worlds human flesh becomes a medium that travels through nourishment. The entire body is a digestive system, a "spunge[]" of pores that processes "Aliment," a huge stomach through which Tryon's "Spirits" and Darwin's "ethereal fluids" -- if not occluded by "superfluity" -- may enter and refresh.

Franklin, of course, was more a man of science and "enlightenment" than a mystic. But, as Darwin's description makes

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[43]Darwin, Zoonomia, IV: 169.

[44]The idea of the penetration of "ethereal fluids" into the body is, in fact, scientifically sanctioned today. Skydivers do not need to breathe through their lungs for the duration of their free falls. Due to the speed of their descent, the divers obtain all the oxygen their bodies require through the pores of their skin.

clear, by the end of the eighteenth century, the structure of Tryon's spiritual idea of a charged atmosphere through which our bodies travel had become isomorphic with the structures of both physiological and atmospheric science.

Indeed, a series of revolutionary experiments were in the process of abolishing the notion of a single, unified atmosphere, and replacing such a monolithic concept with a melange of preternaturally active and variegated "airs." These chemical explorations were crowned by Joseph Priestley's isolation of what he called "phlogisticated air," today known as oxygen.

> There are, I believe, few maxims in philosophy that have laid firmer hold upon the mind than that air, meaning atmospherical air . . . is a simple elementary substance, indestructible, and unalterable, at least as much so as water is supposed to be. In the course of my inquiries, I was, however, soon satisfied that atmospherical air is not an unalterable thing; for that the phlogiston with which it becomes loaded from bodies burning in it, and animals breathing it, and various other chemical processes, so far alters and depraves it, as to render it altogether unfit for inflammation, respiration, and other purposes to which it is subservient.[45]

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[45]Joseph Priestley, "Of Dephlogisticated Air and of the Constitution of the Atmosphere," Joseph Priestley, Selections from His Writings, ed. Ira V. Brown (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1962), pp. 247-8.

"Atmospherical air" was "not an unalterable thing." Air actually did circulate through the lungs into the bloodstream and the body, and the process of inspiration-expiration-respiration, although still not entirely understood, had proven to fit the paradigm of digestive transformation: Atmospheric nutriment entered the body and was subsequently "burn[ed]," stripped of its energic "load[]," and finally transformed into excrementitious matter, "depraved" and "altogether unfit for inflammation, respiration, and other purposes." The atmosphere through which we lived was, for the first time, scientifically described and understood to be as full of complex interactions between unlike parts as any organic system. Alive with the potential to create either excitements or torpors, the atmosphere was also rife with the dangerously "depraved" dross of organic circulations.

Priestley's discoveries provided proof for the paradigm of respiration as digestive absorption, and thus coincided with the reigning physiological notions of circulatory exchange. Such homology between atmospheric chemistry and human physiology spurred the scientific community into a frenzy of cross-disciplinary speculation:

> Upon the whole, there is not perhaps an example, in all the history of philosophy, of so much zeal and emulation being excited by any object. I even question whether the subject of electricity, under the auspices of Dr. Franklin, ever engaged more general attention; and now these two pursuits are happily united, and admirably promote each other.

> In reality, this is not now a business of air only, as it was at the first; but appears to be of much greater magnitude and extent, so as to diffuse light upon the most general principles of natural knowledge . . .[46]

The world outside the body had become an organic miasma of gaseous fluids, exteriorized aliments and poisons uncannily similar to the ones that already flowed within the confines of the human "sensorium." Erasmus Darwin noted that "atmospheric electricity," "aerial electricity,"[47] or "electric fluid . . . surrounds and pervades us."[48] And we are "equally immersed" in the fluid element of heat. Even "gravitation," "like heat," "acts in its medium state rather as a causa sine qua non of animal motion . . . "[49]

Which brings us back to Benjamin Franklin's belly. Franklin's highly fetishized image of his own digesting stomach, engendered by Thomas Tryon's notion of circulating "spiritous airs," had, through the advent of Erasmus Darwin's physiology and Joseph Priestly's atmospheric science, been legitimated as a springboard for cross-disciplinary and cross-spatial projection. Just as Erasmus Darwin had used digestive metaphors to define the circulatory structure of health in both micro- and macro-systems,

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[46]Joseph Priestley, Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air (1774-1777), reprinted in op. cit., p. 245.

[47]Darwin, Zoonomia, II: 239.

[48]Ibid., I: 306.

[49]Ibid., II: 206 and 298.

the stomach became one of Franklin's most powerful conceptual tools, capable of almost infinite reticulation and extension, informing a large proportion of Franklin's ideas, inventions, and literary output.

The digestive/circulatory homology of Franklin's stomach with outward phenomena works particularly well with the example of the creation of the Franklin Stove. What is the stomach but the stove of the body? What is fuel but food? What is a house but an extension of the body, a body whose temperature must be kept at a regulated level, no matter how cold it gets "outside"? And what is a healthy atmosphere but the regulated motion of circulating air?

Throughout his "Account of the New Invented Pennsylvanian Fire-Places," Franklin personifies the stove, endowing it with "two Ears," a "Profile," a "Back" and a "Breast." And here is Franklin's description of a "German Stove": "'Tis a kind of Oven revers'd, its Mouth being without, and Body within the Room that is to be warm'd by it."[50]

Franklin created his stove in order to curtail excessive consumption of fuel, to enhance the heating power of a fireplace, and to distil healthy "airs" from unhealthy airs by forcing smoky air out of a house while circulating fresh (Tryon's "refreshing gales" must not be "suffocated"). Moreover, the underlying concept for the stove was precisely the same as Franklin's desire for a well-regulated stomach: ". . . [a] Turn

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[50]Benjamin Franklin, The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, vol. 2, ed. Leonard W. Labaree, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1962), pp. 429-443.

of the Register, will check the Violence of the Draught, and let your Fire burn with the Moderation you desire."[51] If Franklin could not get rid of his pot-belly, he could at least create a librating or homeostatic machine whose intake he could control, a stove that would always eat with "Moderation":

> By the Help of this saving Invention, our Wood may grow as fast as we consume it, and our Posterity may warm themselves at a Moderate Rate, without being oblig'd to fetch their Fuel over the Atlantick . . .[52]

Here is nationalism, economic self-sufficiency, well-regulated consumption, and "Posterity" -- all happpily collapsed into a stove. Here is a transformation or replacement of Franklin's own "Digestive faculty" into the outside environment in order to facilitate one of the most basic autonomic imperatives of an individual: a steady body temperature. Here is a cross-category movement that assuages popular anxieties, a practical isomorph of then-current physiological notions of libration and equilibrium. Here is nothing less than an objective correlative to Franklin's first "Virtue" of his "bold and arduous Project of arriving at moral Perfection."

Franklin could hardly contain his enthusiasm. In a utopian fit of magnanimity he refused to accept any profits for the sale

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[51]Ibid., p. 435.

[52]Ibid., p. 441.

of this invention. And he ended his "Advertisement" for his stove with nothing less than a highly uncharacteristic (and genre-crossing) lyric poem:

> ANOTHER Sun! -- 'tis true; '' but not THE SAME.
> Alike, I own, in Warmth and genial Flame:
> . . .
> But, faithful still to us, this <u>new Sun's</u> Fire,
> Warms when we please, and just as we desire.[53]

Franklin had sublimated both a spiritually Tryonic and a clinically Darwinian paradigm of circulation as digestion into an exterior mechanism he could regulate with a flick of the wrist. He had projected his gastric and bodily circulations into a salvific "Sun," that starry biological center around which so much of the American solar system still revolves.

Benjamin Franklin's worshipful attitude towards balanced circulations of "inner" and "outer" realms in the contexts of food and fireplaces also informed his interventionist approach to sleep. In "The Art of Procuring Pleasant Dreams," Franklin recommended that,

> Another means of preserving health . . . is the having a constant supply of fresh air in your bed-chamber. It has been a great mistake, the sleeping in rooms exactly closed,

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[53]Ibid., pp. 445-6.

> and in beds surrounded by curtains. No outward air that may come in to you is so unwholesome as the unchanged air, often breathed, of a close chamber.[54]

Franklin ridicules the notion of "aërophobia," and insists that "thinner and more porous bed-clothes, which will suffer the perspirable matter more easily to pass through them" will guarantee "sweet and pleasant" dreams. Just like the ubiquitous appetitive glands of Darwin's Absorptive System, Franklin's "bed-clothes" and blankets become digestive membranes which must be "clear[ed] of the perspirable matter they have imbibed."[55]

Franklin's stove, his advice on sleeping and even his notion of a circulating library can thus be structurally interpreted as involuntary or autonomic circulations projected into mechanical devices, hygienic habits, and social networks. Franklin may or may not have been conscious of the homology of his literary and social achievements with the syncretic impulse of the sciences of his day, but he certainly was aware of his own quite practical desire to understand and balance processes that had long resisted the pressure of human manipulation, processes such as heating houses, procuring pleasant dreams, the general dissemination of knowledge, and steady economic growth.

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[54]Benjamin Franklin, Writings, ed. J.A. Leo Lemay (NY: Library of America, 1987), p. 1119. The original essay was published by the author in Philadelphia, May 2, 1786.

[55]Ibid., pp. 253-4.

Many of Franklin's economic policies and his general attitude towards money formed a structural isomorph with his biological paradigm for circulation. Money, like nutriment, achieves its privileged status because of its transformative ability or "liquidity," its stubborn refusal to be reduced to any solid, fixed substance, that is, any substance outside some kind of circulatory system (money is not a porringer of gruel; neither is it a fireplace). In fact, to believe that money is anything in a rigid sense has long been the focus of moral censure in Western culture. The valorization of money does not arise from its iconic stasis but from its value as a medium of exchange.

It was because of a perceived lack of "a sufficient Medium" to conduct trade that Franklin argued for an increase in Philadelphia's paper currency throughout the 1750's.[56] As a legislator arguing for an increased issuance of credit -- or, in his more biologically explicit language, an "emission" of credit (this word appears throughout his Pennsylvania Assembly Committee Reports of 1754) -- Franklin sought to manipulate and increase "value" much in the same way as a healthy, librated stomach will involuntarily process the "Spiritous parts" of food into both physical and mental power. At this point, it is virtually impossible to tell that it is not Benjamin Franklin, but Erasmus Darwin making the assertion that

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[56]Franklin, Papers, vol. 5, p. 194.

> . . . [t]he cure, which nature has provided for the increased exertion of any part of the system, consists in the . . . expenditure of . . . power.[57]

Almost all of Franklin's dietary prescriptions and regulations point in the same general direction -- towards an advantageous regulation of one's own personal supply of money (or, more colloquially, dough). Franklin, too, incorporated the language of food to describe money. The first metaphor of "The Way to Wealth" -- an essay whose title perhaps not so coincidentally mirrors Tryon's The Way to Health -- conflates money with "solid Pudding."[58] The Almanacks constantly connect the trope of food to money, such as when Poor Richard succinctly declared that, "Who Dainties love, shall Beggars prove."[59] Indeed, the historical figure of Ben Franklin has had to weather tremendous criticism for his obsessive preoccupation with money, exemplified by his oft-quoted dictum that "Nothing but Money,/is sweeter than Honey."[60]

Money inhabits a position in the market that in many ways parallels the position of involuntary systems of circulation within each of our bodies. We notice neither until they become

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[57]Darwin, Zoonomia, I: 123-4. Italics are mine.

[58]Franklin, Writings, p. 1295. This phrase appeared in the introduction to the Almanack of 1758.

[59]Ibid., p. 1253. This axiom first appeared in the Almanack of 1749.

[60]Ibid., p. 1197. First appeared in the Almanack of 1735.

disturbed (i.e., the dollar drops precipitously against the yen; the stomach experiences heartburn, or we faint because of low blood pressure). Thus, both are sleeping giants. Moreover, both circulations defy rigid structures of definition; indeed, both work to unground reductive, lexical strictures (money by its relentless fungibility, biological circulation by its ubiquitous yet inarticulate presence -- as hearbeat, peristalsis, digestion, blood pressure, smooth muscle dilation and retraction). Yet while the specific ontological status of both money and involuntary circulatory systems remains hidden and may perhaps be ungraspable, their cloaked power reigns supreme.

The idea of balanced circulations of the autonomic nervous system thus crossed over from the realm of the spiritual and pseudo-scientific (Tryon), the physiological (Darwin), and the chemical (Priestley) into the social, political, economic, and literary. In the following chapters I will show how this cross-disciplinary process of translating scientific into extra-scientific epistemologies was taken up by a wide variety of American intellectuals, and continued well into the nineteenth century.

As a conclusion to these preliminary reflections on the art of circulation (itself a cross-disciplinary phrase), I offer one particularly salient example of the power this trope would eventually hold: In his conclusion to "Life Without Principle," Henry David Thoreau felt the urge to neologise the political state he yearned for as a perfect stomach, a stomach of utopian -- and thus involuntary -- digestive circulations:

> Those things which now most engage the attention of men, as politics and the daily routine, are, it is true, vital functions of human society, but should be unconsciously performed, like the corresponding functions of the physical body. They are infra-human, a kind of vegetation. I sometimes awake to a half-consciousness of them going on about me, as a man may become conscious of some of the processes of digestion in a morbid state, and so have the dyspepsia, as it is called. . . . Not only individuals, but States, have thus a confirmed dyspepsia, which expresses itself, you can imagine by what sort of eloquence. Thus our life is not altogether a forgetting, but also, alas! to a great extent, a remembering of that which we should never have been conscious of, certainly not in our waking hours. Why should we not meet, not always as dyspeptics, to tell our bad dreams, but sometimes as eupeptics, to congratulate each other on the ever glorious morning?[61]

How had Thoreau reached such an uncannily politicized image of biological perfectionism, of unconscious regulation, of perfect physiological concord and equilibrium between inner and outer? Why, on the verge of civil war, biological bliss?

In order to have come to such a strange bodily projection of

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[61]Henry David Thoreau, "Life Without Principle," Reform Papers, ed. Wendell Glick (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), pp. 178-79.

itself, America first had to progress through a period in which this utopian hope had been a dystopian vision, in which the terrifying collapse and not the redemptive rebuilding of medical science was paramount, and in which the master trope was not "eupepsia" but dyspepsia, epidemic disease, and all manner of unequilibrated stimulations and dangerously enervating excitements and torpors. And the literary figure whose work typified and embraced this preliminary stage of autonomic ascendancy was America's first professional novelist, Charles Brocken Brown.

Section 1:

Charles Brockden Brown's Body

Amidst the medical . . . discussions which are now afloat in the community . . . the author of these remarks has ventured to methodize his own reflections, and to weave into an humble narrative such incidents as appeared to him most instructive and remarkable . . .

-- Charles Brockden Brown

Preface to Arthur Mervyn

So that science should be inhaled . . . as it were with the ambient air . . .

-- Elihu Hubbard Smith

Diaries

An increasingly apparent rift between sense and sensibility was about to manifest itself in England as Romanticism, but in America the equation between reason and impulse had its own particular development, prototypically manifested by the cross-disciplinary syncretism of Benjamin Franklin. But Franklin, although an abiding hero of Charles Brockden Brown's,[1] was not -- for all the carping about his endless dissimulations -- a writer of fiction. Although his thought process and imagination were permeated by the physiological paradigms of digestion and circulation, Franklin never was able (or never had the inclination) to project such fields into a poem or a novel.

The first American to transfer the science of human life into the blood and guts of a substantial body of literary work was Charles Brockden Brown, who not only inherited the medical science that Franklin had so completely absorbed, but something newer and more disturbing: premonitions of the end of this science. What is perhaps most compelling about reading Brown's work in the context of physiological science is that medicine as the eighteenth century knew it came to a clinical and polemical watershed at a time coincident with Brown's major period, that two-year span from 1798 to 1800 in which he completed his four greatest novels.

There is no doubt that Charles Brockden Brown was

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[1]See Steven Watts, The Romance of Real Life (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994) p. 30.

tremendously influenced by the medical science of his time,[2] but no one has yet calibrated the precise nature and quality of his reception of such influence, nor explored the structure and substance of the literary homologies thus engendered. In this chapter I will argue that from his earliest days as a professional writer Brown coopted, imitated, revised and exploited the language, methodology, and thought processes employed by eighteenth-century clinicians on both sides of the Atlantic. And as a result of his immersion in a number of scientific systems and theories that were at the time vying for hegemony not only over the ways in which bodies would be treated in doctor-patient relationships, but vying for priority as true accounts of a radically new kind of relationship that would be understood to exist between each individual's body and each individual's self, Brown became obsessed with transcribing the action of involuntary nervous impulses into the substance of his fictions. The results can be discerned over the widest variety of scope and scale: from Brown's word choice to his narrative technique, from his idea of character and character development to his notion of plot. Thus did Brown's work set a template for the great therapeutic traditions and interventionist motifs of American literature.

In order to lay the groundwork for these rather broad assertions, I will try in this chapter to show the ways in which

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[2]See, for example, Elizabeth M. Lamont, "Pathologies of the Postrevolutionary American Soul: The Function of Disease in the Major Novels of Charles Brockden Brown," dissertation, University Tennessee, Knoxville, 1995.

Brown's literary imagination emanated from the general nature of the medical discussions and clinical culture that marked the Federalist period, from the influence of his own deep reading of contemporary and historical medical texts, and from the cross-disciplinary literary endeavours of his myriad medical friends. In subsequent chapters I will attempt a criticism that unites the historicized structures of medical thought and the medical problems these thoughts supposedly addressed with the "literary" strategies Brown adopted. Of course, to show how such cross-disciplinary absorption could mold the literary creation not only of an individual, but of an entire nation, we must revisit the underlying forces that created, sustained, and finally annihilated medical science at the turn of the eighteenth century.

Chapter 1: Triangulating Browns

From the outset, doctors played a decisive role in Charles Brockden Brown's life. It is generally known that he was a sickly youth, that he suffered from headaches and gastric problems and constantly complained about his health, that he was early prescribed a walking cure, that he survived an attack of yellow fever during the New York epidemic that killed his closest friend, the doctor Elihu Hubbard Smith, and that he died after a lingering bout with tuberculosis.[3] However, Brown's fascination with the medical profession from the clinical perspective has yet to be given due consideration, even though there is evidence that the ambition of this lifelong patient was to be a practitioner. Smith notes in his diaries that in August of 1798 Brown accompanied him to the recently founded Bellevue Hospital, where the most severe cases and the indigent were generally brought to die, and that "B. was much gratified by his visit." Later in these diaries, Smith appears to be terrified at the prospect that Brown might actually have initiated his "wild project of devoting [him]self to the care of the sick."[4]

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[3]See Harry R. Warfel, Charles Brockden Brown: American Gothic Novelist (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1949) and Steven Watts, The Romance of Real Life (Baltimore: The John Hopkins U.P., 1994).

[4]Elihu Hubbard Smith, The Diary of Elihu Hubbard Smith (1771-1798), ed. James E. Cronin (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1973), pp. 213, 417.

Brown's knowledge of and fascination with clinical issues might explain the lingering mystery of Smith's and Brown's immediate and intense attachment to one another; why, for example, Smith suddenly devoted himself to the publication of "Alcuin," Brown's tract on women's rights. Perhaps Smith saw Brown as a potential William Godwin on the American continent, a redeemer whose literary output would cross scientific, literary, and political disciplines, one who, through the potent cathartic of fiction, could cure the unequilibrated nervous excitements running amok in Federalist America.

Indeed, in some of his first known writings for The Universal Asylum, and Columbian Magazine[5] (published two years before he even met Smith[6]), Brown obsessively dwells on a number of rather technical medical issues, clearly illustrating the deep impression the physiological theories, issues and polemics of his time had made on him. By the final installment of "The Rhapsodist" it is clear that the medical and the literary were fully and unequivocally mixed in the mind of the seventeen-year-old Brown, and that the notion of a genre-crossing "literary empiric" was firmly lodged in his creative imagination.[7]

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[5]In particular, the four essays from August to November, 1788, that comprise "The Rhapsodist."

[6]Warfel, p. 40

[7]In many ways, Brown anticipates by almost two centuries one of Stanley Fish's most compelling critical insights, which differentiates the aesthetic modes of the "good physician" (dialectical, purgative, and consequently "self-consuming") from the "bad" physician (rhetorical and self-satisfying). Like Brown, Fish views the conflation of the medical and the literary as both necessary and fruitful. See Stanley Fish, Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature (Berkeley: U of

In what will be one of the first of many metatextual moments of Brown's literary career, he inserts within this anonymously penned essay a letter supposedly received by the author of "The Rhapsodist," a letter signed by a man named "Brown." The second and final installment of this essay-within-an-essay contains a section in which Brown as "Brown" describes the urge to write as a "disease," a "disorder," a "malad[y]," and an "infection." But what did such a medical/literary conjunction actually imply to an eighteenth-century mind steeped in medical science?

> The cacoëthes scribendi, or itch of writing . . . is a term invented by literary empirics, to denote a species of disease. . . among the middle class of writers. The nature of this disorder has been so frequently defined, its rank in the synopsis of moral maladies, so repeatedly ascertained, and all the variety of symptoms which precede and accompany the infection so minutely described and so accurately enumerated, that I fear my endeavours farther to elucidate so curious a subject, would meet with neglect . . . . My aphorisms, though dictated by experience, and written in the spirit of the eloquent professor of Leyden, would be deficient in novelty . . .[8]

California P, 1972) pp. 1-4.

[8]Charles Brockden Brown, The Rhapsodist and Other Uncollected Writings by Charles Brockden Brown, ed. Harry R. Warfel (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1943), p. 23.

The "eloquent professor of Leyden" is a reference to Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738), just as Brown's carefully chosen use of the word "aphorisms" here is a sly reference to Boerhaave's Aphorisms: Concerning the Knowledge and Cure of Diseases.[9] The most renowned medical teacher of his day, and generally accepted as the originating point of the eighteenth century's seachange in medical science, Boerhaave privileged arborescent structures as theoretical models of human physiology, and insisted upon a mechanistic (and, as a consequence, a strictly chemical and, again, highly theoretical) approach to the identification and cure of disease.[10] It was Boerhaave who instigated the Cartesian notion of the animal machine as a medical dynamic, and brought a Newtonian perspective to the workings of the human body.[11]

Brown was so steeped in the style of the medical literature of his time that, as he continues to elaborate his half-parodic theme of "the cacoëthes scribendi," he sounds less like the neophyte essayist he was than a revered lecturer on clinical theory. It might even be argued that, through such a refined imitation and transumption of medical literary style at this early point in his career, medical literature should be elevated

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[9]Boerhaave's Aphorisms were published in English editions of 1724, 1735, 1742, and 1755, a French edition of 1765-68, and numerous Latin editions, published from 1716 to 1794.

[10]See such titles as De usu ratiocinii mechanici in medicina (Lugduni Batavorum: H. Teering, 1730).

[11]For a summary of Boerhaave's general influence, see Inci Altug Bowman, "William Cullen (1710-1790) and the Primacy of the Nervous System," dissertation, Indiana University, 1975, pp. 33-38.

to the select group of Brown's primary literary influences.[12] Furthermore, Brown's familiarity with medicine extended beyond his mastery of its mode of literary expression, for he was acutely aware of the social milieu of eighteenth-century medical science, a culture rife with the vicious polemics of incessantly warring schools. Yet, confronted with the opportunity to identify himself, both personally and intellectually, within this contested space, Brown opted to hide within the ambiguities of a metatextual maze worthy of Borges. For almost as soon as "The Rhapsodist's" voice vanishes within the voice of his correspondent, "Brown," "Brown" himself, the fictional writer, becomes "allied" with yet another, all too historical writer named Brown:

> I need not inform my medical readers, that novelty is indispensably necessary to enchance [sic] the reputation of a new system, and procure it infallible success among the students, and the teachers of the healing art . . . . You may often have observed . . . that this ruling passion has prevailed upon a learned professor, at one time publicly to utter precepts, and adopt a system, which has only ingenuity to recommend it . . . . the unexampled success of one allied to me, at least in name, if not in family, and studies,

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[12]And, in the pure realm of psychological conjecture, such a cross-over of enabling influence may reveal another aspect of Brown's and Smith's immediate mutual attraction to one another: Brown was a literary man endlessly fascinated by things medical, while Smith was a medical man endlessly fascinated by things literary.

cannot inspire me with confidence.[13]

The "one allied to me, at least in name, if not in family, and studies . . . " was John Brown (1735-88), the Scottish doctor who founded what was then known as the Brunonian System of Medicine. Almost entirely forgotten today, this brilliant weaver's son became famous throughout the newly formed and already obsessively reformed America as "the reformer of medicine."[14] It was as such that he was dubbed by Brockden Brown's fellow Friendly Club member, the doctor, chemist, climatologist, geologist, poetaster and future United States Senator, Dr. Samuel Latham Mitchill, who had known John Brown from his student days at the University of Edinburgh, and had there become an ardent admirer of his system.[15]

John Brown's revolutionary new medical system mesmerized, enraged, and riveted the attention of his contemporaries. Half a century after his death, nineteenth-century American doctors were still gaping at the phenomenon:

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[13]The Rhapsodist, pp. 23-24.

[14]This phrase is taken from the title of Samuel Latham Mitchill's eulogy for John Brown, "Some account of the celebrated Johannes Bruno, the reformer of medicine, in Scotland." See The American Museum: or repository of ancient and modern fugitive pieces, &c. prose and poetical, Vol. VI (Matthew Carey: Philadelphia, 1789) p. 469.

[15]Mitchill edited The Medical Repository along with Elihu Hubbard Smith and Edward Miller, and had, with Miller, presided at Smith's deathbed. Along with Smith and Brockden Brown, Mitchill was a founding member of the American Mineralogical Society.

> The opinions of [John] Brown exerted so wide a sway in Great Britain as to affect, for a time, the whole practice of medicine. In Italy his works were translated . . . and so great was their influence in that country that there was hardly an intelligent pupil who did not openly avow himself as a Brunonian. The "doctrine," also speedily found its way into Germany and France. . . . In a number of continental universities its principles were formally expounded by the professors. In Germany . . . Brown was hailed as the medical Luther. . . . At Gottingen the Brunonians were so rebellious as to require the authority of the military to keep them in subjection . . .[16]

However, in 1788, when Charles Brockden Brown wrote this final installment to "The Rhapsodist," the far-flung influence of John Brown's theory was less evident than the ugliness of the increasingly apparent fact of its suppression by the faculty at Edinburgh.

What was the nature of this medical theory that was already wreaking such havoc? John Brown's "doctrine" could be seductively essentialized: all properties of "animal systems" were reduced to a concept called "excitability," which could actually be measured in units of "excitement."

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[16]Samuel D. Gross, M.D., "Brunonianism, Toddism, and other Isms," a paper read before the Philadelphia County Medical Society, 14 November, 1860. Originally published in the North American Medical-Chirurgical Review (January, 1861), my quote is taken from a reprinted edition (J. B. Lippincott & Co.: Philadelphia, 1861) p. 9.

> We know not what excitability is, or in what manner it is affected by the exciting powers. But, whatever it be, whether a quality or a substance, a certain portion is assigned to every being upon the commencement of its living state.[17]

All health and all disease became matters of the body's quotient of "excitability," which could be calibrated by either increasing or decreasing levels of "excitement."

> The cure of universal diseases, is to restore the healthy measure of excitement, by increasing it when too low, and diminishing it when in excess.[18]

Brown's dualistic theory was thus the most highly reductive of a century's worth of reductive medical theories. His physiological taxonomy came down to two directions on a single line: Either the arrow pointed up and a body was "sthenic" (suffering from too much excitement, and thus too little potential excitability) or the arrow pointed down, indicating that the body was "asthenic" (suffering from too little excitement, and thus a dangerous pooling of unused excitability). John Brown and Charles Brockden

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[17]John Brown, The Elements of Medicine of John Brown, M.D., Translated from the Latin, with comments and illustrations, by the Author (J. Johnson: London, 1795) p. 7.

[18]Ibid., p. 129.

Brown not only shared a "name," a "family," and "studies," but an abiding fascination with "excitement," one for clinical and the other for literary reasons (that is, if such a separation could unproblematically be asserted).

The last installment of "The Rhapsodist" thus presents a scrim of three "Browns": 1) Charles Brockden Brown, the anonymous yet eponymous "Rhapsodist"; 2) "Brown" the "Rhapsodist's" "correspondent" (who thus "correspond[s]" in more way than one); and 3) The "one allied to me," (that is, to the "correspondent"), Dr. John Brown. Such an intricate palimpsest of revealed and re-veiled identities indicates, above all, a tremendous ambivalence. Although insistent upon entering the fray of medical opinion, Brockden Brown was refusing to map himself on the polemical grid.

Brown's refusal to locate himself forces the reader bent on positioning the author within the physiological parameters of his time to triangulate between three Browns, as though we were drifting in the middle of a vast ocean with nothing but the distant stars as our guides. (The same is true in both Arthur Mervyn and Edgar Huntly, in which comprehension of the true nature of the heroes' identities comes not through direct exposition but through interpretive triangulations.) Of course, floating lost upon violent waters at night (which happens to both Mervyn and Huntly) was precisely the dystopic mastertrope for the state into which medicine itself was drifting, as a century's worth of physiological progress through ordered grids was crumbling before the uncontainable realities of physical disorder.

The place to initiate our medical triangulation of Browns in

"The Rhapsodist" must be both a biographical and technical understanding of what Brockden Brown meant when he cited "the unexampled success" of John Brown. Brockden Brown's knowing irony clearly indicates that he was quite familiar with what was happening at that historical moment to his Scottish namesake. Indeed, among early Americans interested in medicine, such insider knowledge would not have been particularly unusual. No student of medical history could underestimate the effect that the University of Edinburgh's medical culture had upon Federalist America.[19]

If the details of John Brown's life had not infuriated Brockden Brown and filled him with resentment at the injustice being done, they certainly gave him a preternatural skepticism about the most distinguished members of the profession he found so compelling. Once the most sought after classical translator in a city packed with "grinds," John Brown was then in the final throes of addiction to laudanum and whiskey (two substances he

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[19]A number of scholars, most notably Terence Martin, Daniel Walker Howe, and Henry May have focussed on the formative influence of Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart, and other Scottish Common Sense philosophers on the American character. However, almost all of this work has neglected the cultural ramifications of Scottish scientific thought as deployed throughout the colonies. Perhaps we should reconsider the cultural significance of this widespread scientific encroachment when, to cite just one example, it was Dr. Adam Spencer, a Scottish medical student from the University of Edinburgh, who, in a public lecture delivered at Boston in 1743, introduced electricity to an audience that numbered a young man by the name of Benjamin Franklin. (It was Spencer's apparatus that Franklin later purchased for his own research.) For further details regarding the particularly pervasive influence of Scottish medical thought in America, see Alvin R. Riggs, "The Colonial American Medical Student at Edinburgh," University of Edinburgh Journal, 20 (1961-62): 141.

had often employed while teaching in order to stimulate himself into heightened physiological insights). Once the darling of Dr. William Cullen, Chair of the Practice of Medicine at the University of Edinburgh, Brown had become a pariah, at war with Cullen and the entire medical establishment, and had sunk from prospects of a brilliant, financially secure future into penury. At what was perhaps his lowest point, Brown delivered lectures on his revolutionary "Doctrine" from debtor's prison.[20]

John Brown's vertiginous fall culminated in brutal and bitter attacks against the renowned Cullen, the man who had once been Brown's most ardent champion, the man into whose house he had been welcomed, the man after whom Brown had named his first son. Cullen had gone from idol to "brat" to less than human, the

> . . . feeble, half-vital, semi-production of phrenzy, the starveling of strained systematic dullness, the forlorn outcast of the fostering care to which it owed its insect vitality . . .[21]

Here is language that clearly informed that arch, scornful voice of "The Rhapsodist's" "correspondent" when he proclaims in a tone dripping with sarcastic bitterness that "novelty is indispensably

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[20]For three contrasting contemporaneous accounts of John Brown's life, see Samuel Latham Mitchill's eulogy, in The American Museum; Thomas Beddoes' "Biographical Preface" to the 1795 edition of Brown's Elements of Medicine; and the "biographical account" written by John Brown's son, William Cullen Brown, which prefaces The Works of Dr. John Brown, Vol. 1 (J. Johnson: London, 1804).

[21]Beddoes, p. xxxi.

necessary to . . . the reputation of a new system, and [will] procure it infallible success . . ." For it was the undeserved success of a "system" that was at the very center of John Brown's diatribe against Cullen, a medical system

> . . . pampered by a crude and indigestible nutriture, collected from all the materials which had composed the several fabrications of former erroneous systems, [that] was to be decorated with every foreign plumage, and in this its totally borrowed and heterogeneous form, instead of the hideous caricatura [sic], which it was . . . was to be ostentatiously obtruded upon the world as a new, and respectable doctrine, and held up . . . as the formidable rival of a splendid system.[22]

Every eighteenth-century medical mapping of the human body had imposed its own system of closed, physiological hermeneutics. William Cullen was less a creator than a collator of these systems, and such talent undoubtedly helped him to reach and retain the esteem and popularity he enjoyed at Edinburgh for so many years. Recent scholarship has reiterated the dependence of Cullen's medical taxonomy upon the previous systems of Sydenham, Sauvages, and Linnaeus.[23] Indeed, Cullen's only major innovation seems to have been his idea that fever, as a nervous disorder,

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[22]Ibid.

[23]Bowman, pp. 156-177.

emanated from the brain.[24]

Was Brockden Brown, like John Brown, bursting with savage scorn at those unoriginal systems foisted upon the world by men whose talent was not innovation but systematization itself? Did Brockden Brown, like John Brown, despise William Cullen, and could such a perspective adequately map Brockden Brown's position on the battlefield of physiological polemics? To put it bluntly, was Brown a Brunonian?

Such a supposition, although initially compelling, is immediately undercut by that same, cynical voice of "The Rhapsodist's" "correspondent." This "correspondent," aware of John Brown's immense failure in a way that John Brown himself could never have admitted (and never did), is not only ironic about the publicly uttered precepts of "a learned professor" (perhaps Cullen), but rather jaded concerning the concept most dear to John Brown's intellectual value system, that of "novelty" in the field of medicine (as opposed to "the hideous caricatura" of "borrowed and heterogeneous form[s]"). Indeed, when the "correspondent" refers to the "unexampled success" of John Brown, such a phrase goes beyond bitterness and sarcasm and is, in fact, quite aggressive.

So John Brown, who undercut William Cullen, has been himself undercut by "Brown," the "correspondent." Yet one last paragraph remains in "The Rhapsodist," a paragraph in which Brockden Brown

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[24]Ibid., p. 147. The etiology, dynamics, and mode of cure of fever were some of the most debated topics of 18th-century medical discourse.

resumes his "own" voice for the sole reason of undercutting, in the most medically arcane of ways, the authority of "Brown":

> I shall here impose silence upon my correspondent, with remarking, that he does not appear to consult propriety, in the application of his medical knowledge -- and seems particularly unacquainted with the distinctions that maintain between "mania phrenitis, and delirium" -- my friend, however thinks it necessary to declare, how little he pretends to a rivalship with Boerhaave![25]

Thus does Brockden Brown's first major series of published essays come to an end, his readers left to ponder for themselves whatever the particular differences might be between "'mania phrenitis and delirium.'" Of course, "The Rhapsodist's" haughty, ridiculing tone makes it eminently clear that the medical triangulation of "Rhapsodist"/"correspondent"/John Brown could not possibly be completed until such a distinction has been perfectly understood. Again, and this time quite climactically, Brockden Brown demands that his readers approach him through an understanding of medicine. Perhaps Brown was already considering what would become the recurrent themes of his novelistic work, and the origins and development of such maniacal and/or delirious characters as Welbeck, Huntly, Wieland and Ormond. If so, it would not only be logical but absolutely essential that any and

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[25]Ibid., p. 24.

all of his future readers understand the different modes of accounting for frenzy ("mania phrenitis"[26]) and delirium.

The structural basis of the distinction between mania and delirium will thus prove crucial to my reading of Brown, even though such a distinction is, in fact, quite subtle. So subtle, in fact, that Herman Boerhaave himself considered the two phenomena quite closely related. His 700th medical "Aphorism" states that:

> A Delirium is that Production of Ideas, which doth not agree with the external causes, but is only the Effect of the internal Disposition of the Brain . . ."[27]

In other words, just as indigestion was to Thomas Tryon and smoky houses, night sweats, and economic deflation were to Benjamin Franklin, Boerhaave's "Delirium" was the result of improper or occluded circulation. Since "the eloquent professor of Leyden" considered "Life" itself to be "a constant Progress of the Fluids,"[28] a "Delirium" was nothing but an occluded passage of "nervous Juice" between the bodily membrane that separated "internal Disposition" from "external cause[]":

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[26]So called, because the disease supposedly originated in the brain's phrenic nerve.

[27]Herman Boerhaave, Aphorisms (William and John Innys: London, 1724) p. 172.

[28]Herman Boerhaave, Institutions in Physick (Jonah Browne: London, 1714), p. xvii.

> 701. It supposes therefore always a diseased Affection of the medullar Brain, which may arise from any Obstruction whatever; the hindrance of Influx, of the Transflux, and flowing out of nervous Juice thro' the substance of the Brain . . . [29]

Remedies "to help remove Obstructions" included "Applications of emollient, light, and anodyne medicines to the . . . Head," "bleeding in the Foot," and "an opening of the haemorrhidal [sic] veins . . . "[30] Here were concretized medical responses in line with a circulatory model of human physiology: If there were an "Obstruction," the body must as a consequence be opened and purged so that the fluids of "Influx" and "Transflux" could once again flow.

To Boerhaave, "Mania phrenitis" (or, as Brockden Brown spelled it throughout Wieland, "Phrenzy"), was an advanced or accelerated state of "a perpetual Delirium"[31] in which "ariseth . . . a Fierceness in Looks and Actions and a continual acute

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[29]Aphorisms, p. 172. Note the description of occluded circulation of "nervous Juice" in Wieland (New York: Penguin, 1991), p. 15. The night before his spontaneous combustion, Wieland Sr. "appeared fully engrossed by his own reflections," and that "pressing his hand to his head, complained . . . that his brain was scorched to cinders." Such were the "fits" reported by Clara's uncle, the physician.

[30]Ibid., p. 173.

[31]Ibid., p. 196.

Fever."[32]

> A genuine Phrensy doth require the most powerful Remedies without any delay, which are able to remove the Inflammation of the Arteries of the Brain.[33]

Such "Remedies" included even more powerful modes of obstruction removal, including letting "a large Quantity" of blood from "a large Orifice of one or more veins at once, in the Foot, Throat, and Forehead"[34]; "cooling Decoctions" and "cooling Purges" along with anal "Glysters" and other "Opener[s]," "Gargles" for the mouth, "Opiates," and "Blisters."[35] For Boerhaave, then, both "delirium" and "mania phrenitis" were matters of occluded circulation in a specific portion of the brain, the same disease meriting the same cure, differing only in the intensity of

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[32]Ibid., p. 196. Note Brockden Brown's description of Theodore Wieland:

> His countenance suddenly became troubled. His hands were clasped with a force that left the print of his nails in his flesh. His eyes were fixed on my feet. His brain seemed to swell beyond its continent. He did not cease to breathe, but his breath was stifled into groans. . . . [And I] was transfixed with inexplicable horror by the symptoms which I now beheld.

This quote is from Wieland (NY: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 174.

[33]Aphorisms, p. 200.

[34]Note the intense bleeding from the throat that marks Theodore Wieland's death. The clinical quality of this description adds to its gruesomeness. Wieland "plunged" the knife "to the hilt in [his own] neck; and his life incessantly escaped with the stream that gushed from the wound." Wieland, p. 264.

[35]Aphorisms, pp. 200, 201.

symptoms and the urgency of intervention. But John Brown saw things differently.

By insisting that "excitability is not different in parts of its seat, nor does it consist of parts; but it is one . . . undivided property, over the whole system,"[36] John Brown had shifted the most basic physiological paradigm from circulation to stimulation, which severely complicated reigning notions of medical emesis. Since "Life" was no longer a circular "Progress of the Fluids," as it had been for Boerhaave, but a vibrating spring of fluctuating nervous excitements, the level of excitement itself became the decisive factor in diagnosing and curing disease. Thus, mania could no longer be classified as a heightened or "perpetual" delirium. The very fact that made the two correspond in Boerhaave's mind made them ineluctably separate in Brown's. And, by choosing to highlight this particular distinction in the definition of nervous disease at the end of "The Rhapsodist" (which, by implication, highlighted diametrically opposed methodologies of treatment, as will become clear in the following section), Brockden Brown was not so much taking part in a polemical tease as demonstrating a paradox: In the most knowing of voices, here was a case of clinical aporia.

Thus, undecidability comprises the third (and supposedly anchoring) point of our triangulation of Browns. "The Rhapsodist's" final, undercutting voice is itself undercut by the latent option offered between two incommensurable positions, that

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[36]The Works of John Brown, p. 85.

of Herman Boerhaave and that of John Brown. Perhaps Brockden Brown is revealing that he could not sustain himself as either a tragic, visionary and rhapsodic "healing art[ist]"[37] (like John Brown), or as a cynical "correspondent," and that each voice was the result of a different nervous mood that was beyond his control. For Brown was aware that not only his literary product, but the writing process itself was to a great extent a result of involuntary nervous excitements: "When I am sufficiently excited to write, all my ideas flow naturally and irresistibly through the medium of sympathies which steep them in shade . . ."[38] Writing was itself the "mania," whose "progress and effects are not unlike a partial frenzy."[39]

Brockden Brown thus seeded his early prose with a synechdoche for the greatest (and what would ultimately prove to be the most destructive) medical controversy of the late eighteenth century. For the difficulties of sustaining a

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[37]The Rhapsodist, p. 23.

[38]Sidney J. Krause. "Historical Essay," Edgar Huntly (Indiana: Kent State UP, 1984), pp. 295-6.

[39]The Rhapsodist, p. 24. Also note Jay Fliegelman's introduction to Wieland (New York: Penguin, 1991) pp. xxii-xxiii, in which Fliegelman compares Brown's cacöethes scribendi to "a similar term. . . used by Dr. [Benjamin] Rush, who described writing as a form of purgation, like bloodletting." Rush, as we shall see, used the reformist Brunonian theories of excitement to justify his conservative practice, which relied almost entirely on older, Boerhaavian interventionist techniques, principally venesection. Writing, to Rush, was thus a state of heightened excitement which would be lessened, quite literally, by letting the ink flow. Brown, however, caught between Boerhaavian and Brunonian structures, clearly had a more complex idea of the dynamics of the writing malady. One example of this complexity: How to account for the fact that the more one wrote, the more excited one became?

separation between the visionary and the cynical (both involuntary and "irresistibl[e]" nervous states incessantly slipping into and undercutting each other's theoretical territory) paralleled the polemical and methodological oppositions between "mania phrenitis" and "delirium" (another nervous pair which would not cease slipping and undercutting categories). And it was precisely this crisis of taxonomic order that defined the clinical world of Charles Brockden Brown.

Understanding "the distinctions that maintain between 'mania phrenitis' and 'delirium'" was so immediately pressing, so profoundly problematic, and had such far-reaching implications to the clinicians of this time that the "literary empiric" who embodied such controversy could not simply remain mystified by his maniacal urge to write and his delirious mental state while writing.[40] Caught between physiological modes of description and treatment for that one particular disease that interested him most -- the cacöethes scribendi -- a literary account was in order. Of course, a literary account that had for its subject an explanation of the malady that was itself creative of literary accounts would have to be presented both analogically and

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[40]As opposed to today, in an age of heightened awareness of and respect for psychobiology and neuropsychiatry, when writers are often quite aggressively satisfied to remain in the dark about their own cases of "cacöethes scribendi," fearing the culture of authority and certainty that pervades the modern clinician's mode of diagnosis and treatment (as opposed to Brockden Brown's quite opposed sense of being overwhelmed by the sharp ambiguities of his century's clinical culture). Perhaps the writers of the late twentieth century are secretly afraid that present-day etiological and methodological practice could all too efficiently eradicate their disease.

metatextually.

If the clinicians of his time could neither diagnose nor remedy his disease, the patient would have to attend to himself. So Charles Brockden Brown finally did undertake his "wild project of devoting [him]self to the care of the sick." Unable to decide whether writing was a cathartic (and thereby debilitating) release of occluded nervous fluid or itself a stimulation of the exciting powers, Brown was impelled to experiment with a mode of literary account that could somehow contain both diagnoses, a new mode, entirely his own, that could in retrospect be described as a composition of visceral antinomies. Unable to sustain himself as either a visionary or as a cynic, there was only one prognosis: Some previously uncharted mixture of the two.

Chapter 2: The Ironies of Physiology

Our triangulation has highlighted certain areas of Brockden Brown's expertise and perplexity as he launched his literary career. But "The Rhapsodist"'s general level of clinical sophistication along with its ultimate and unsettling medical remystification reverberates beyond this stage of Brown's development, and provides a hitherto unexamined entryway to the pervasive undecidabilities and ironies of nervous excitement and nervous torpor, nervous circulation and nervous occlusion, that mark the major work. In the next chapter I will argue that clinical ironies became the structural basis of Brown's gothic creation: that delirious dislocation of ordered space and frenzied undercutting of systematic thought (not to mention the ubiquity of fever and all manner of madness) evident throughout Mervyn, Huntly, Wieland and Ormond.[1]

However, before fully entering the nervous writing of the novels, we must examine a number of what today would be considerered the oddest of eighteenth-century medicine's theoretical positions, in particular the physiological ironies inherent within the counter-intuitive dialectics of Brunonian logic. Physiological irony will be a broad term applied

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[1]In a normatively Freudian reading of Brown's professional career, his obsessive translating, editing and mapping of geographical position in the period after 1798-1800 would thus be interpreted as a reaction formation to the crisis of disorder so evident throughout the novels.

throughout these pages, but it essentially applies to "retrograde" medical logic,[2] a way of approaching medical disorders that received its most rigorous theoretical underpinnings from Brunonian diagnostics, and when fully developed and embraced by such influential practitioners as Erasmus Darwin and Benjamin Rush,[3] became the paradigm that proved to be most destructive of both the theory and the practice of eighteenth-century medicine. Yet it was just this overarching -- and quite deadly -- paradox of the "retrograde" that contributed most to Brockden Brown's literary frenzy of 1798-1800. Oddly enough, it was a literary incorporation of clinical antinomy that enabled a young man mystified by his own novelistic urges and powers to become America's first full-blown professional writer.

In order to appreciate fully what now seems to us the outrageous medical tautology of "retrograde" diagnostics, a short review of John Brown's system is in order. At first glance, this system appears to be simple. Indeed, editions of the Elements invariably contain a foldout chart on an unnumbered page which

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[2]See Zoonomia, Part III, p. 519.

[3]Rush, educated at Edinburgh under William Cullen, was a signer of the Declaration of Independence and eventually became the most renowned doctor of Colonial and Federalist America. Yet his synthesis of the various medical systems vying for authority at that time brought him to the medical monotheism (or, less kindly put, fanaticism) of something he called equilibrated capillary pressure. Obsessed with emetics of all kinds (". . . cathartics, diuretics, diaphoretics, errhines and sternutatories, sialagogues, emmenagogues . . . "), his hobbyhorse was bloodletting. The merciless venesection of Rush and his followers contributed to the phenomenally high morbidity rates of Philadelphia's Yellow Fever epidemic of 1793.

maps both disease and health along a single vertical axis of excitement and excitability. "Perfect Health" lies exactly in the middle of this vertical axis, while at both the very top and the very bottom resides "Death." To rise from the bottom of the scale to the top is to rise along a numbered scale of 0 to 80 calibrated measurements of "excitement" (from "Extreme" to "High" to "Mild" Asthenic diseases, through health, then into "Mild" to "High" to "Extreme" Sthenic diseases). At the top of the scale, "excitement" measures 80 units, while "excitability" measures 0; at the bottom of the scale, "excitement" measures 0 units, while "excitability" measures 80. All diseases and all cures are ranged to the right of this single vertical axis. Every disorder possesses its own, clearly defined location. Moreover, the quotients of "excitement" and "excitability" are always perfectly inverse. As one rises, the other falls.

However, as we shall see, John Brown's "doctrine" did not end with these simple ratios of inversion, although such normative quotients did hold true throughout the middle portion of such foldout charts, and thus for Brunonian definitions of "Mania" and "Phrenitis."[4] John Brown's cure for mania was not retrograde and ironic but strictly mechanistic, and thus in direct line with Boerhaave's approach. Since "phrenzy" indicated too much excitement, the clinician should simply "diminish the excitement; which is to be effected by avoiding powerful stimuli,

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[4]Both "Mania" and "Phrenitis" were "High Sthenic" diseases. Only "Plague" and "Malignant Fever" were any higher in units of "excitement," and were as a consequence categorized as "Extreme Sthenic" diseases.

and employing slight or defective stimuli, as lying cool in bed, tranquility of mind, bleeding, purging, spare diet, and the like."[5] "Delirium," on the other hand, was to John Brown a form of "Hysteria," which was not defined as a "High Sthenic" but as a "Mild Asthenic" disease, for which the "indication of cure was not to decrease but to increase the excitement."[6] "Delirium," wrote John Brown, was not

> . . . to be imputed to inflammation [that is, a high level of excitement in the cranial blood]. It is, on the contrary to be attributed to a scantiness of blood, and a deficiency of other stimuli. Nor is that by any means to be doubted; since stimulant remedies . . . successfully and quickly cure every delirium . . .[7]

It is at this juncture in John Brown's discussion of the means of treating delirium that his son and editor, William Cullen Brown, interrupts with the following hyperbolic footnote:

> This is a fact as new, and of as much importance as any [in Brown's Elements of Medicine]. Physicians, hitherto, have had no distinct notion of a variety of inflammation. . . . The truth is, that pain may not only arise from an

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[5]John Brown, Elements of Medicine (London: J. Johnson, 1795), no page number.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid., Book II, pp. 288-9.

> inflammation . . . but it arises from spasms, convulsions, and even from emptiness.[8]

John Brown was "the reformer of medicine" to Samuel Latham Mitchill and the Friendly Club because of his assertion that pain and disease and bodily torpor were as often matters of flow and loss as of occlusion and surfeit. Having intuited that a free-flowing circulation of "nervous Juice" was not invariably salubrious, Brown understood the morbid possibilities of "bleeding, purging, spare diet, and the like." The assertion that purgative emeses could provoke dangerous decreases to bodily "excitement" made for the first great physiological irony of this radically new diagnostic system: Stimulating a patient could be as effective a cure as debilitating them, even when the sickness of the body seemed to be a form of over-stimulation (as in certain kinds of inflammations, fevers, and nervous diseases -- such as the cacöethes scribendi). The great novelistic stimulants of Charles Brockden Brown could thus qualify not only as rhetorical descriptions of such diseases, but as dialectical embodiments of their cure.

John Brown articulates what is at stake here when he concludes his paragraphs on delirium by attacking normative treatments for the then prevalent disease of "nervous fever," in which

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[8]Ibid., p. 289.

> [i]nflammation is apprehended, blood is let . . . blisters . . . are clapped on, silence and darkness prescribed, even the most gentle stimulants are forbidden. In consequence of the emptiness of the stomach, as well as of the vessels of the whole body, and of the highest degree of langour from the want of many stimuli, vertigo is superadded to delirium, and the patient, deprived of strength, sense and intellect, breathes out his last.[9]

Without the saving grace of excitement, a body wracked with "nervous fever" will most certainly die. Yet excitement was at the same time the single element that united all sthenic disease. What, then, could differentate sickness from cure? Or, to translate once again into the homologous literary context of the novels of Brockden Brown, how can we differentiate the dynamics of vice from virtue? Of course, such a homology suggests an even earlier American dilemma: How can we separate a devilish excitement from a graced affection?

Clinical practice was facing a dilemma, and as a consequence the actual, hands-on "physic" of medical intervention was in the process of transformation. Since John Brown's theoretical paradigm was of stimulation, not circulation, the late eighteenth-century clinician could no longer retain a uni-directional idea of remedy (i.e., all interventions must be mechanistic, obstruction-clearing tactics to reinstitute healthy

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[9]Ibid., p. 319.

flows of Boerhaave's "Fluids" or "nervous Juice"). Cure and disease (vice and virtue, graced and ungraced affections), which for centuries had lived in the clear and distinct comfort of absolute taxonomic differentiation, were more closely related than anyone had imagined. Yet this retrograde approach to normative clinical procedure -- e.g., the use of stimulating techniques when debilitation was the norm -- was simply a prologue to the Brunonian's most counterintuitive insight into human physiology.

As previously noted, only "Plague" and "Malignant Fever" (both of which qualified as "Extreme Sthenic" diseases) possessed more Brunonian units of "excitement" than "Mania" and "Phrenitis." Yet the cure for these most "Extreme[ly] Sthenic" diseases was not simply a matter of decreasing bodily excitement (as it had been for the "High Sthenic" category). When the body had attained its highest and most deadly pitch of excitement, the Brunonian physician was not about to bleed and purge (which John Brown, to his credit, knew would invariably kill these most dire cases). Instead, the reformist practitioner would "support the excitement."[10]

The cure for the most morbidly excited patient was not debilitation, not an application of less, but of more excitement. This was an astounding assertion. Not only was such a notion diametrically opposed to a century's worth of Boerhaave-inspired practice, but at its most critical moment the neat Brunonian

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[10]Elements, fold-out diagnostic table, no page number.

ratios of inversion had collapsed. Yet Brunonian practice insisted on the administeration of "electricity, opium, aether, spiritous liquors, wine, musk, chinchona bark, snake root, camphor, rich soups"[11] and other "powerful stimuli" to treat "Extreme Sthenic" diseases.

In order to bring such paradoxical medical logic into the fold of his theoretical structure, John Brown had to revise his notion of excitement; but his revisions only served to undermine what had been a brilliantly reductive system:

> What is the effect of food, drink and the things that support life? They produce strength. What is their effect afterwards? Always less and less. What is it towards the end of life? So far from giving strength, they evidently prove weakening. Nay, the very same powers, by which life was at first supported, at last put an end to it . . .[12]

Since excitement could both support and collapse itself, its clinical efficacy was seriously impaired, and its totalizing ratios overthrown. And thus the strict calibration of excitement, "the cure of universal diseases," was hopelessly subverted.

This theoretical subversion, embedded in Brunonian physiology, became underscored as other practitioners sought to synthesize excitement- and circulation-based systems. Such was

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[11]Ibid.

[12]The Elements of Medicine, p. xviii.

particularly evident in the scientific system of the medical man most revered by Brockden Brown and his set: Erasmus Darwin. Indeed, it is neither Herman Boerhaave nor John Brown that Brockden Brown footnotes regarding Theodore's Wieland's malady, but "Darwin's Zoonomia, vol. ii, Class III. I. 2."[13]

A world of meaning resides in that cryptic "III. I. 2." Darwin, like all his eighteenth-century predecessors, had arranged human disorders in a taxonomic matrix that mirrored the great classification systems of the century. According to Zoonomia, "Mania Mutabilis" was in "the Third Class of Diseases," i.e., "Diseases of Volition" (thus the initial "III"). It was a disease of "Increased Volition," which was "Ordo I" of these diseases (thus, the "I"). And its genus, or "Genera," was "2. With increased actions of the organs of sense" (Thus, "III. I. 2"). As such, "Mania mutabilis" was grouped with "Vigilia" ("Watchfulness"), "Erotomania" ("Sentimental love"), "Ira" ("Anger"), "Satyriasis" ("Lust") "Rabies" ("Rage"), and many other "diseases" that structure the novels of Brockden Brown, all "III. I. 2."

To our late-twentieth-century clinical mindset, one of the most uncanny diagnostic givens of the medicine of two-hundred years ago was how closely madness was related to that final "2," which called for an "increased actions of the organs of sense," most commonly indicated by fever. Such a connection between madness and fever was of particular relevance to Brockden Brown,

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[13]Wieland, p. 204.

for this clinical relationship links the two diseases most prevalent in his major work (diseases which, to our modern eyes, appear almost entirely unrelated): Mania and Yellow Fever. As Darwin asserts,

> . . . where the quick pulse is permanent, it shews the presence of fever; and as the madness then generally arises from the disagreeable sensations attending the fever, it is so far a good symptom; because when the fever is cured, or ceases spontaneously, the insanity most frequently vanishes at the same time.[14]

Not only is "mania mutabilis" related to blood, pulse, and fever (the classical Boerhaavian locus of circulation) but to John Brown's hobbyhorse, involuntary muscular excitement: "[T]he analogy between the insanities of the mind, and the convulsions of the muscles described . . . is curiously exact."[15] Indeed, Brockden Brown's literary struggle with clinical antinomies in his final installment to "The Rhapsodist" mirrored Darwin's technical attempt to negotiate a reconciliation between the Boerhaavian and the Brunonian, circulation and excitement:

> The accumulation of sensorial power [which was Darwin's term for what John Brown called "excitability"] from the defect

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[14]Elements, pp. 55-6.

[15]Ibid., p. 58.

> of accustomed actions seems to give rise to some inordinate muscular motions. . . . And I am inclined to think, that these insanities, which are termed melancholy . . . are in general occasioned by accumulations of sensorial power . . . [16]

Just as John Brown divided bodily disorders into those arising from too much excitement (e.g., mania), and those arising from too little excitement (e.g., delirium), Darwin reasoned that since

> insanities arise from excess of action of the sensorial power of volition, this excess of action may be owing either to the increase of motive or stimulus, or to an increased quantity or accumulation of that sensorial power.[17] [Italics are mine]

"Excitement" and "excitability" have collapsed their categories; cure has transmuted into paradox. Even the materia medica Darwin recommends admits of this clinical aporia:

> Venesection. Vomits . . . so as to purge gently every day. Afterwards warm bath for two or three hours a day. Opium in large doses. Bark . . .

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[16]Ibid., pp. 60-61.

[17]Ibid., p. 60.

While "Venesection" (bloodletting) constitutes a strong cathartic, the "Vomits" and "warm bath" would be weakly debilitating, while the "Opium" and "Bark" are very strong stimulants. The fact that "insanities" could either originate in too much or too little excitement, and that its cure could be either debilitation or stimulation, eventually left Darwin's syncretic system wide open to attack.

We find such an attack in a medical dissertation that was submitted to the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania medical school in 1805, entitled Remarks on the Medical Theories of Brown, Cullen, Darwin, & Rush.[18] In his short critique, John T. Rees[19] notes that "[T]he reasoning and explanations [of] Darwin . . . may . . . 'mean any thing or nothing.'"[20] Rees asserts that Darwin's syncretic attempt "appears here to have burlesqued theory, and almost rendered it ridiculous, by an excess of theorizing."[21]

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[18]John T. Rees, Remarks on the Medical Theories of Brown, Cullen, Darwin, & Rush, (Philadelphia: Robert Carr, 1805). From 1790 to 1800 Philadelphia was not only the medical capitol of the United States, it also served as the formal political Capitol. There was thus a natural, geographical and social cross-cultural encounter of clinical and political ideas, oddly satisfying Thomas Paine's proleptic claim for an America filled with "political physician[s]." Thomas Paine, Common Sense (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995), p. 5.

[19]An avid taxonomist, Rees was a member of the American Linnean Society.

[20]Ibid., p. 55.

[21]Ibid., p. 57. Only Benjamin Rush escaped Rees's excoriation. (Indeed, the dissertation is dedicated to Rush.) As Rees reverently explained it, demonstrating one evolutionary line of connection between excitement and circulatory theory, "the philosophic

Half a decade before John Rees, Clara Wieland voiced a similar anxiety manifest in the new ironies of physiology. After her physician uncle has told her about a number of "cases" he has witnessed "in the course of [his] practice in the German Army," all of which demonstrate Darwin's theory of the "maniacal" "class" of "affections,"

> Ideas thronged into my mind which I was unable to disjoin or to regulate. . . . Whatever supposition I should adopt, had I not equal reason to tremble? What was my security against influences equally terrific and equally irresistable? . . . Was I not likewise transformed from rational and human into a creature of nameless and fearful attributes? Was I not transported to the brink of the same abyss?[22]

This string of interrogatives indicates a radical fear of physical susceptibility to "ideas." Since reason has sublimated into a miasma of morbid excitements, there could be no "security," for exciting "influences" as often defined disease as cure. Franklinian "regulat[ion]" had become impossible. Indeed, when the "abyss" finally hit New York in 1798, it was an abyss in which clinical "regulat[ion]" -- either by calibrating circulation or by balancing excitements -- proved to be

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practitioner [i.e., Rush] . . . bleeds to relieve suffocated excitement, and thus [to] resuscitate the strangulated blood vessels." Ibid., p. 12.

[22]Wieland, pp. 204-5.

fruitless. Yellow Fever, like its clinical homology, Mania Phrenitis, was "irresistable," and the "transform[ations]" it wrought were "fearful" and, even worse, "nameless."

> He was yellow -- and had the Black-vomit, with few intermissions. The matter vomited up was very black -- mixed with coagulated blood, which sunk to the bottom of the vessel into which he puked. He threw up a great quantity. He discharged by stool like colored matter. He died Tuesday night.[23]

Yellow Fever violently subverted all orders, all names, all circulations and all excitements of the body. "Vomit," "blood," and "stool" had fallen out of their "natural order," and become "mixed." Here was a terrifying personification of the physiological irony Darwin had labelled "Retrograde Motion." This nomenclature appears throughout Zoonomia, but particularly in Darwin's chapter on "Invertentia," which discusses "Those things, which invert the natural order of the successive irritative motions . . ."[24] Here, Darwin noted that it was not only "emetics," "cathartics," "errhines" and a slew of purgative materia medica that can "invert," but that "fear [and] anxiety," so prevalent throughout Brockden Brown's major work, " . . . act

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[23]Diaries, 368.

[24]See Part III, p. 519. As previously noted, Zoonomia was considered nothng less than a medical bible t Bron's medical friends such as Ehu Hubbard Smith and Samuel Latham Mitchill.

by inverting the natural order of the vascular motions." Thus, Darwin had both a name and a system to describe the inverted "motions" of Yellow Fever; the only thing lacking was a cure:

> A man of the name of Wiggins, died about ten or eleven, night before last, with this disease. . . . He was exceedingly yellow -- bled from the nose & gums -- & vomited for some days, matter as black as ink. His stomach was so irritable that, at best, he puked only from taking a teaspoonsul of barley-water. He was bled only once, a small quantity, on the 2nd or 3rd day of his attack. A blister over the stomach seemed to increase its irritability (in common language) or sensibility -- Darwin. The physicians tried to excite gentle sweats, & kept the bowels open. The reason for not repeating the bleeding was, that his pulse seemed to fail, during the flowing of the blood.[25]

Physicians had no idea how to handle this avalanche of retrograde motions. The "excitement" could neither be debilitated nor supported. And emetic methods to reopen occluded circulations had proven to be totally ineffectual.

Yet it was just this "Plague" that had been up to the time of his death the most intense and sustained scientific and literary focus of Brockden Brown's closest friend, Elihu Hubbard

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[25]Diaries, 371.

Smith. Published in the first issue of The Medical Repository,[26] "The Plague of Athens" argued for a single, syncretic epidemic that spanned from ancient to modern history, from Greeks to Philadelphians. In fact, Smith argued that the ancient epidemic "offers so many points of resemblance, both in its nature and origin, to our own fevers, that we may be justified in declaring it to have been, in all essential particulars, the same disease."[27] Just as they were to become one of the great novelistic obsessions of Brockden Brown, "Febrile Diseases" were Smith's clinical obsession. He vowed to "discover their causes, determine their histories, explain their mode of action, ascertain their method of Cure, illucidate their peculiarities, and effectuate their prevention."[28] In a letter to Benjamin Rush (11 Dec 1797), Smith argued for the single etiology of fevers, a single cause for "diarrheas," "dysenteries," "choleras," and "yellow fever."[29] Two weeks later, in his letter to William Buel, Smith concluded that "Fever & Dysentery" are "the same, only in different forms."[30]

Here was the clinical essentialism that had flourished

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[26]"The Plague of Athens" was a highly respected work, and immediately reprinted in James Tytler's A Treatise on the Plague and Yellow Fever, (Salem: Joshua Cushing for B. B. MacNaulty, 1799).

[27]Edward Miller, Samuel Latham Mitchill, Elihu Hubbard Smith, eds., The Medical Repository, I (New York: T. & J. Swords, 1800), pp. 31-32.

[28]Diaries, 185.

[29]Diaries, 403.

[30]Diaries, 409. Letter dated 23 December 1797.

throughout the eighteenth century in its most ironic synthesis. For Elihu Hubbard Smith became a casualty of that same "Plague" he had spent the greater part of his life explaining, dying before the publication of his essay. The story of Smith's death appears in numerous fictionalized variations throughout Arthur Mervyn. What happened was this: At the height of New York's Yellow Fever epidemic of 1798, Elihu Hubbard Smith brought a Venetian doctor stricken with the disease into his house at 45 Pine Street. Dr. Joseph Scandella soon died, and Smith subsequently suffered a severe attack of the same disease. Despite the assiduous care of his fellow Medical Repository editors, Edward Miller and Samuel Latham Mitchill, Smith died on September 21, 1798, at the age of twenty-seven, in the same bed in which Scandella had succumbed.

Elihu Smith died while Brockden Brown lay in a stupor, struck with the same disease. The next day Brown wrote:

> Thursday morning. The die is cast. E. H. S. is dead. O the folly of prediction and the vanity of systems. . . . He is dead. Yesterday at noon.[31]

The organic oneness of all etiology, the beautiful taxonomic tree that Linneaus and Sauvage and Cullen and Brown and Darwin and Rush and finally Elihu Hubbard Smith had labored to synthesize, had become the "folly of prediction . . . the vanity

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[31]Warfel, p. 122.

of systems!" Darwin's neat "III. I. 2" had grown so physiologically ironic as to collapse the structure that contained it. Pathology, the interior plot of bodies, clearly did not function as its greatest practioners believed it did. Like Catherine Wieland, Sophia Westyn, Arthur Mervyn and Edgar Huntly, the learned clinician was now an unreliable narrator.

None other than Thomas Welbeck, Brockden Brown's arch-villain who swindled himself a fortune through his brilliant capacity for unreliable narration, noted man's "'proneness to multiply inferences and conjectures.'"[32] John Rees expanded this sentiment in the introduction to his medical dissertation on Brown, Cullen, Darwin and Rush into a broad syllogism: "Since, then, 'to think is to theorize,' we must all theorize who think[.]"[33] The precipitating and perpetual crisis of Brown's fictions was this ineluctable process of reason that led from thought to theory to inference to conjecture. For one hundred years of clinical systematization had been subverted by Yellow Fever, and the ironies of physiology had turned deadly on a mass scale.

"So convenient a thing it is to be a reasonable Creature," Benjamin Franklin had joked as he elevated the desires of his stomach above the dictates of his head, "since it enables one to find or make a Reason for every thing one has a mind to do."[34]

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[32]Mervyn, p. 72.

[33]Rees, p. 12.

[34]Autobiography, p. 35.

Indeed, Brockden Brown's most successful hero, Arthur Mervyn, achieves his greatest victories not by his reasoning process (which inevitably leads him to difficulty, and the plot into digression) but by following the silent dictates of his own involuntary circulatory flows and excitements, dictates that almost invariably transgress normative categories of physical space and social behavior. Mervyn triumphs by becoming an autonomic American. Of course, to be subsumed by involuntary impulse was also potentially disastrous, as in the fatally transgressive case of Edgar Huntly. But Brockden Brown and his heroines and heroes and villains really had no choice: Their bodies had become more ironic than their books.

Chapter 3: The Doctrine of Septon

In December of 1797 Elihu Hubbard Smith wrote a letter to his father[1] in which he asserted that "our work is not meant to be confined to mere medicine, but to include natural history & agriculture, chemistry & the arts."[2] And so Charles Brockden Brown was not the only member of his circle to deal with the anxiety of clinical irony by transposing it onto literary grids. Among his most intimate contemporaries, both Smith and Samuel Latham Mitchill were working this same medico-poetical ground.

Smith's medical reading alone crossed innumerable fields within today's notion of the discipline. A sampling of the broad array of topics he studied includes the dynamics of contagion, the workings of the circulatory and pulmonary systems, treatises on gunshot wounds, and poisons such as rattlesnake venom. He read articles on innoculation, smallpox, cholera, scurvy, consumption, rheumatism, dropsy, apoplexy, croup, dysentery, inflammation, tetanus, gangrene, fractures, rabies, sterility, headaches, and

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[1]Reuben Smith, born July 12th, 1737. Elihu Smith's father received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Yale in 1757. Three years later he began to study medicine and soon thereafter "commenced the practice for physic & surgery, & opened an apothecary's shop, in Litchfield, Connecticut":

> Medical erudition, indeed, was at that time at a very low point. Some common book of anatomy, & the Institutes of Boerhaave, were almost the only works of any value then . . . [But] I will remember the lively expressions of pleasure which he used in relating to me the delight he received from the first reading of Boerhaave's Chemistry . . . (Diaries, p. 467.)

[2]Diaries, 402. Letter dated 10 December 1797.

tropical diseases. His interest in chemistry was satisfied by "Beddoes Considerations on Factitious Airs" (which he consumed "with indescribable eagerness & satisfaction"[3]), "Scherer on the breathing of vital air,"[4] and dissertations on "Pestilential Vapours,"[5] and "Carbonated Hydrogen Gas."[6]

Such wildly divergent scientific reading crossed into even wider avenues due to Smith's fascination with the plague, the etiological dynamics of which he believed to be intimately connected -- if not identical -- "to our own fevers."[7] He assiduously applied himself to Thucydides and any other ancient or modern authority on the plague of Athens, the 1720 and 1722 outbreaks at Marseilles, the "Great Plague" of London in 1665, and the contemporary plague of Smyrna. In addition, he was obsessed with gathering, studying, and publishing all reports of American, European, Caribbean, and any other historical or contemporary instances of yellow, "bilious" or "remitting" fevers.[8] Still, he found time to be an avid and critical consumer of all that was being published by Condorcet, Diderot, Rousseau, Smollet, Holcroft, Richardson, and, of course, Godwin. His reading was anything but "confined to mere medicine."

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[3]Ibid., p. 331.

[4]Ibid., p. 373.

[5]Ibid., p. 443.

[6]Ibid., p. 351.

[7]The Medical Repository, I, pp. 31-32.

[8]Ibid., pp. 432-3.

Smith's spoken words, too, crossed intellectual fields with impunity. 1797's September meeting of The Friendly Club included "conversation on various topics":

> Theater -- Othello . . . of Shakespere, of Addison -- Of the taste of the Ancients -- On the Yellow Fever -- Health of the City -- Topography of it . . . City election of to-day. . . . [C]riticism on the political works of . . . Sydney, Sir T. Moore, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Adam Smith . . . the Economists . . . the metaphysics of Locke, Reid, Beattie, [Dugald] Stuart . . . Berkley, Priestley, Jon. Edwards . . . Historical Writing . . . Machiavel & John Adams . . . of Gibbon's Geographical Collections . . . [9]

Note how "Yellow Fever" appears, packed between "Theater," "Othello," "Shakespeare," "Addison" and the "taste of the Ancients" on one side, and geography, politics, economics, the philosophy of Scottish Common Sense, and "Historical Writing" on the other. Did the dread "Yellow Fever" somehow act to connect these variagated fields? Or, to consider the obverse, could this mysterious disease have helped to collapse the boundaries of such distinct epistemologies?

One hint as to how the seemingly linked etiologies and dynamics of such medical conundrums as yellow fever, plague,

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[9]Ibid., p. 371. All accidentals as in the original. This particular meeting was held on the Saturday night of September 30, 1797.

contagion, infection and venom helped enable these medical intellectuals of the Federalist Period to cross from purely scientific into literary fields comes from Smith's own poetic oration on the occasion of the opening of William Dunlap's New Theater in New York, a poem Smith first committed to paper on January 6th, 1798.[10] In these rhymed couplets of high-minded iambic pentameter, Smith argues for an indigenous American theater, "distinguish[ed] from all other lands":

> Pernicious custom that, from foreign shores,
> On our devoted state its fury pours;
> Thro' town and village, with contagion fierce,
> Scatters the deadly venom of its curse;
> Infects, in lisping infancy, our schools . . .[11]

Here, infectious disease becomes a metaphor for more than the dangers of a certain kind of theatrical experience. It is not so much the reproduction of European plays in America being warned against, as the deeper and more personal danger of foreign modes of feeling. Smith calls for "Another Sheridan, with nobler zeal,/[to] Convulse with mirth, or teach the heart to feel." As we have seen in the previous section, the issue of convulsions -- mirthful or otherwise -- was under extreme polemical and clinical pressure at this time. John Brown himself had insisted that

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[10]Dunlap, too, was a Friendly Club member, and a close friend of Smith's and Brown's.

[11]Diaries, p. 415.

"[T]he analogy between the insanities of the mind, and the convulsions of the muscles . . . is curiously exact."[12]

Theater, like yellow fever, works to instigate "Convuls[ions]," among a host of other autonomic responses: "So shall a loftier Dryden rouse your fears;/A tenderer Rowe beguile you of your tears."[13] The physiological dynamics of febrile diseases (which Smith believed comprised the single, essentialized etiology of all diseases) trope the theater because both have the power to loosen and release involuntary nervous excitements or circulations, and thus both held what was for a number of years in the late eighteenth century deemed the ultimate power of life and death. Smith's New Theater oration incorporated the language of such cutting-edge medical issues as yellow fever, plague, contagion, infection and venom in order to assert that the theater, too, could enact dystopian and utopian possibilities not only on the personal, but on the national level.

The momentary linkage of once-and-future separate intellectual fields reinforced Federalist anxieties of unbridled passion (which could lead to both mobocracy and anarchy), for the homologies were based upon isomorphic "ratio[s] of affection[s]."[14] These "affections," of course, were already collapsing the old molds of nosological prejudice. Again, the

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[12]John Brown, Elements of Medicine, p. 58.

[13]Diaries, p. 415.

[14]John Brown, Elements of Medicine, p. 87.

autonomic responses of the involuntary nervous system (whether governed by the laws of circulation, excitement, or some mixture of the two) were gaining ascendancy over what had been for the previous one-hundred years the crown jewel of the central nervous system: Reason (now become increasingly ironized by Brunonian and Darwinian theories of the "Retrograde" logic of animal motions).

In the multi-faceted conversation of the Friendly Club, in Smith's omniverous reading, and in the chosen tropes for his public declamations, medical disorders -- and the supposedly essential qualities of yellow fever in particular -- both linked and perforated intellectual boundaries; in contemporary clinical theory, yellow fever performed the same function. A few weeks before his New Theater oration (and one day after declaring to his father that his "work" should not be "confined" to any specific field), Smith argued that yellow fever itself was not in fact confined to any single field either of the animal, vegetable or mineral kingdoms. Yellow fever, Smith reasoned, crossed into our midst due to the "putrefaction" of both animal and vegetable matter, and arrived in the form of a chemical "exhalation."[15]

Such a belief in yellow fever's ability to transpose itself from the vegetable to the animal world through some sort of chemical respiratory action was not a matter of Smith's whimsy, but endemic to the science of his time. Less than five months

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[15]Diaries, p. 403, from a letter to Benjamin Rush, 11 Dec. 1797. Note how such an "exhalation" theory of febrile disease could be interpreted as a dystopic progression from Benjamin Franklin's dogma of harnessing universalized circulations into salubrious systems, a progression exactly paralleled by the state of medicine in 1747 as opposed to 1797.

after the previously cited September, 1797 meeting of the Friendly Club (14 Feb. 1798; precise dates are important here, because they so exactly coincide with the onset of Brockden Brown's major period), Smith received a visit from "Mr. Meigs, professor of Mathematics & Natural Philosophy at New Haven," who "communicated" the "following facts":

> The late Dr. Stiles was exceedingly fond of Oysters, and accurate judge of them, & seldom past [sic] a day without eating them. He told Mr. Meigs that the oysters of New Haven had the Yellow fever (this was his expression) in 1794, (when it was in that town) being unusually poor & worthless. . . . [And] Mr. Isaac Jones informed Mr. Meigs that, [in that same year] his Cabbages . . . sickened and perished.[16]

The "fact" that Dr. Smith, Dr. Stiles, Professor Meigs and Mr. Jones were convinced that not only human beings, but oysters and cabbages could contract yellow fever might strike us at first as comically ignorant, but such earnest scientific reportage belies a terrible anxiety. Fever had a mysterious power to cross taxonomic boundaries, an awful, unsettling pathogenic power, not only highly toxic to oysters, cabbages, and men, but to one of the most cherished notions of eighteenth century taxonomy -- the individuated integrity of its borders. Those arborescent fields whose subtle ramifications had flourished under reason's

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[16]Diaries, p. 424. Again, all accidentals are as in the original.

sponsorship were once again being ravaged by the uncontrollable excitements and emeses of this malevolent agent.

It was thus in some sense unavoidable that as transgressive an element as fever would at this particular historical moment cross from the purely scientific into the literary field. Elihu Smith clinically referred to his own poetizing as a "fever of sonnetteering"[17] and composed quite a number of fourteen-line literary deployments of medical theories, in particular sonnets on such subjects as "Early Rising," "Cold Bathing," "Cleanliness 1," "2," and "3," and "Exercise 1" and "2." These poems mix heuristic, therapeutic, moral and allegorical strains, and are proleptically Whitmanian in their unapologetic insistence on the poetic qualities inherent in the American body. But Smith's greatest moment as a poet of physiology is his "Elegy," composed in April of 1797. Here, the young doctor bids "Farewell" to the "passtimes [sic] of [his] boyish days" and recalls the past,

> . . . when the lively blood of gay seventeen
> Dance[d] in frolic maze, my veins along;
> When the young spirits, sensitive and keen,
> Dart[ed] thro' the brain and to the bosom throng[ed]...
> . . . when on the cheeks a deeper crimson dwell[ed];
> And tingling sympathies the nerves o'erflow[ed] . . .[18]

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[17]Ibid., 416.

[18]Ibid., p. 312.

Here, qualities of the "blood," "veins," "brain" and "nerves" define the difference between youth and adulthood. This poem does not so much equate lost youth with lost innocence as with a lost capacity for circulatory and nervous excitement. Explosive capillary pressure (the control of which, as we shall see in the following chapters, was the monomaniacal obsession of Smith's medical idol, Benjamin Rush), freely reigning throughout an interior "maze" (as opposed to a diagrammable, and thus governable, map), and the involuntary "tingling" of nervous "sympathies" unharnessed by strictly ramified paths, though gone, are both valorized and privileged by their absence.

Smith's poem reverences these moments of clinical instability, when "youth's yet untried delights" could still wield an overpowering, catatonic effect on the entire body, to "freeze with [their] terrors, [and] with [their] raptures melt." (Note the similarity here to Smith's hope for a new, youthful American theatre which would, ". . . rouse your fears . . . [and] beguile you of your tears.") Youth is pure and good and mourned because here one can be totally subsumed by the intoxications of sudden "spells," those moments when sense lies beyond reason's regulation, completely under the dominion or "controul" of immediate, involuntary reactions. Nervous response was, then, unoccluded by any bodily media, like Thoreau's "<u>infra</u>-human" and "vegeta[ble]" responses of the perfect body politic envisioned at the climax of "Life Without Principle."

When Smith wrote his "Elegy" for the lost nervous excitements of younger days, he was struggling with his own

nervous complaints, recording bouts of "lethargy," "sleepiness & imbecility."[19] He was also in the midst of preparing the first American edition of Erasmus Darwin's "Botanic Garden," a book he had first encountered almost a decade earlier, in 1789, at the home of Timothy Dwight, Smith's post-Yale instructor.[20] On September 1, 1797, Smith noted in his diary:

> [Samuel Latham] Mitchill showed me some verses, in which he has attempted to display his doctrine of Septon, after the manner of [Erasmus] Darwin -- with more success than I should have expected, but not without many prosaic lines & low expressions.[21]

Mitchill would soon send these verses to Dr. Thomas Beddoes (1760-1808), the atmospheric chemist and biographer of John Brown, and by the end of that eventful September of 1797, Smith was preparing Mitchill's mock epic for publication. On Wednesday, September 27, Smith noted: "The morning & afternoon chiefly employed in making corrections in Mitchill's Verses -- for which perhaps he will not thank me."[22]

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[19]Ibid., p. 319.

[20]Ibid., p. 461. It is interesting to note that when Timothy Dwight eventually became President of Yale, he was the main force behind the formation of the medical school. On the institutional (as opposed to literary) level, Dwight allowed medicine to permeate the fold of disciplines.

[21]Ibid., 356.

[22]Ibid., p. 368.

"The Doctrine of Septon, Attempted after the Manner of DR. DARWIN" was first read to The Friendly Club three weeks later and eventually published in the second volume of the Medical Repository. "There are 140 lines," Smith noted, "of which about 50 are mine."[23] The combined work of Smith and Mitchill, in imitation of Darwin, "Septon" is perhaps the greatest example of medico/poetic genre crossing of the Federalist Period -- that is, of course, until the 1798 advent of the novels of Charles Brockden Brown.

It should be noted that even more than by his medical brilliance, the poet/scientists of the Federalist period were struck by the literary genius of Erasmus Darwin. Even John Rees, after his sharp critique of the untenably ironic dynamics of excitement propounded in Zoonomia, added:

> But though Darwin stands thus high as a philosopher, he stands no less conspicuous as a poet. If we view with admiration the boldness of his genius, in penetrating and unravelling the intricacies of science; we listen with delight when his muse shakes her tuneful wings in the regions of fancy.[24]

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[23]Ibid., p. 369.

[24]Remarks, p. 66. The Medical Faculty of the University of Pennsylvania clearly did not see anything particularly out of the ordinary when, after a medical dissertation almost entirely devoted to excoriating the synthetic clinical models of Erasmus Darwin, John Rees concludes his work with an encomium on Darwin's poetry, and a quote from Darwin's "Temple of Nature":

> Deep-whelm'd beneath, in vast sepulchral caves,
> OBLIVION dwells, amid unlabell'd graves;

Not only did Elihu Smith worship Zoonomia as "the most masterly performance ever given to the world on the subject of Medicine,"[25] Zoonomia and The Botanic Garden were the great exempla for the kind of epistemological field-crossing texts Brockden Brown and his literary/scientific coterie transformed into an American genre.[26] In a letter from October of 1797, Smith gushes:

> You are a subscriber for Zoonomia -- O! my friend, when you read that immortal work, may it remind you that we also are physicians, that we also have sought to gain the favours of the Nine, & may we strive to conciliate the regards of Phebus in his twofold capacity.[27]

But it was The Botanic Garden upon which "The Doctrine of Septon" was overtly based.

> Deep-whelm'd beneath, in vast sepulchral caves,
> OBLIVION dwells, amid unlabell'd graves;
> The storied tomb, the laurell'd bust o'erturns,
> And shakes their ashes from the mould'ring urns.

Again, as the taxonomic model for clinical intervention imploded into just that Darwinian "OBLIVION" of "unlabell'd graves," such science rose from the clinical dead into the new possibilities of literary life.

[25]Diaries, 236.

[26]Mitchill was the editor of the first American edition of Zoonomia, Smith of the first American edition of The Botanic Garden.

[27]Diaries, 375-6. Letter written to Mason Fitch Cogswell, dated 11 October 1797.

Two questions immediately arise: What exactly was this "Manner" being imitated? And, what was it about the content of The Botanic Garden that made its formal qualities so tremendously influential?

Darwin's book was neither poetry nor natural philosophy, but a mixture of the two. The same "twofold capacity" Smith cited for "Phebus" himself was inherent on the title page of this poem, which "contain[ed] The Loves of the Plants[,] A Poem with Philosophical Notes" (the italics here are mine).[28] Darwin's "Advertisement" for the book was quite open about the mongrel nature of his project:

> The general design of the following sheets is to inlist [sic] Imagination under the banner of Science, and to lead her votaries from the looser analogies, which dress out the imagery of poetry, to the stricter ones, which form the ratiocination of philosophy.[29]

But what was perhaps most intriguing about the "Manner" being imitated by Mitchill and Smith was not simply the fact of such an analogical mode of syncretic cross-reference. The Botanic Garden, like "The Doctrine of Septon" and the major novels of Brockden Brown, contained a number of formal features that

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[28]Erasmus Darwin, The Botanic Garden, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1978) Part II, title page. This facsimile edition is based on the London second edition, first printed by J. Nichols in 1790.

[29]Ibid., i.

increase the nervous irritability of literary engagement by dividing the consciousness of its readers. The poem's lyric verses about the sexual lives of plants are constantly interrupted by an explanatory stream of scientific footnotes, and such a glossed form demands that one read each text through the other. The melodramatic and visionary poetry literalizes its scientific subtext while the cool, distanced scientific prose literalizes the poetry.[30]

The Botanic Garden further divides the consciousness of its readers through the repeated interjection of prose "interludes" in which the aesthetic qualities of "The Loves of the Plants" and poetry in general are debated in the form of a dialogue. The incorporation of the dialogic form in these intervals (between "Poet" and "Bookseller") further underscores the emphasis on mixed discourse. Moreover, the dialogue's self-referential and consequently metatextual content (the "interludes" feature arguments waged by Erasmus Darwin as two analytic voices on the merits of Erasmus Darwin as a poet of science) further opens the scope of this literary endeavour to critical and economic fields (every bookseller's perennial concern).

The reader soon learns not to be surprised by such incessant crossings of disciplinary fields and taxonomic boundaries. When the "Poet" notes that, "Some parts of Mr. Burke's eloquent orations become intricate and enervated by superfluity of poetic

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[30]Note the similarity here to the clinical and literary tensions between the "visionary" and the "cynical" that drove "The Rhapsodist" to its conclusion.

ornament,"[31] we unhesitatingly accept the clinical language of enervation (a staple of Brunonian and Darwinian theory) as literary theory. And just as we accept the scientific as the literary in the critical interludes, we accept the literary as the scientific in the poetic interludes:

> O'er their wan lips, and . . . haggard cheeks;
> Through each fine nerve rekindling transports dart,
> Light the quick eye, and swell the exulting heart.[32]

Like animals and the atmosphere itself, plants and flowers have both "nerve[]s" and "irritability"[33] which are the physiological bedrock of emotional "transport[]," for the "electric air" shoots "with quick impulse through all nature's frame."[34]

Such self-conscious transposition of the scientific and the literary throughout The Botanic Garden authorized that same synthetic mode in "Septon" (and anticipated my own critical readings). It licensed a wide range of analogies, such as those between intense emotional states (which flouted boundaries of behavior), the "electric air" of involuntary nervous "sympathy"[35]

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[31]Botanic Garden, p. 50.

[32]Ibid., p. 85.

[33]Ibid., p. 12.

[34]Ibid., p. 179.

[35]To the Federalist intellectual, the word "Sympathy" was heavily freighted with clinical implications. Benjamin Rush defined nervous sympathy as "a certain connection of feeling in the nerves . . . which is of the following uses: 1. That stimuli applied to one part of the body may extend over and affect every other part,"

(which flouted boundaries of natural science), and epidemic diseases (which flouted boundaries of nosology).

This inter-marriage of clinical and literary fields gave birth to a number of the physically, psychologically and even narratively monstrous themes Brockden Brown would eventually turn into what many have viewed as the wildly coincidental plots and far-fetched tropes of his major period. As a matter of course, The Botanic Garden both discusses and poetizes quite a number of the seemingly bizarre phenomena that so obsessed Brockden Brown. No one could mistake spontaneous combustion,[36] sleepwalking,[37] plague,[38] and the (sexually and murderously) monstrous[39] as gothic

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and further noted that, "Sympathies are . . . divided into reciprocal, nonreciprocal and inverse." (Lectures on the Mind, pp. 238 and 239.)

[36]Ibid., p. 110. From a footnote:

> Fraxinella. In the still evenings of dry seasons this plant emits an inflammable air or gas, and flashes on the approach of a candle. There are instances of human creatures who have taken fire spontaneously, and been totally consumed.

[37]Ibid., pp. 102-3. From a footnote:

> Sleep consists in the abolition of all voluntary power, both over our muscular motions and our ideas . . . But, at the same time, many of our muscular motions, and many of our ideas, continue to be excited into action in consequence of internal irritations and of internal sensations . . . and we experience a variety of passions . . . Hence I conclude, that our nerves of sense are not torpid or inert during sleep . . . [For w]hen the sleep becomes so imperfect that some muscular motions obey this exertion of desire, people have walked about.

[38]Ibid., p. 88. The Botanic Garden synthesizes the medical with the geological (in much the same way Mitchill would do in "Septon") when Darwin conjectures that "contagious miasmata may be . . . emitted from subterraneous furnaces . . . " (p. 171).

sublimations in The Botanic Garden, for they are rigorously defined clinical singularities

> restore[d] . . . to their original animality, after having remained prisoners so long in their respective vegetable mansions . . .[40]

Crossing categories is not transgressively unsettling so much as "restor[ative]" and satisfying here. And to such readers in America as Brockden Brown, Elihu Smith, and Samuel Latham Mitchill, the union of "vegetable mansions" not only with a wide variety of poetic literary genres (some episodes of the poem are comic, some tragic, while some suggest epic romance and quest narratives), but with far-flung intellectual fields (including geology, atmospheric chemistry, climatology, medicine, economics, and literary criticism), endowed the poem with a sublime power of influence.

If The Botanic Garden illustrated, like an actual English garden, an Anglo-colonial bordering of multifarious orders and kingdoms (a synthetic embrace and consequent intellectual possession of the seemingly differentiated discursive realms of science and aesthetics), "The Doctrine of Septon" was a measure

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[39]See, for example:

> With strange deformity PLANTAGO treads,
> A Monster-birth! and lifts his hundred heads
> Yet with soft love a gentle belle he charms (Garden, p. 10)

[40]Ibid., p. x.

of America's heightened concern, if not outright paranoia, about just such over-arching borders. For "Septon" was the name Mitchill gave his unified model for all septic action. Synonomous with pollution, deterioration, disorder and disease, "Septon" was nothing less than a perversely personified Satanic imp (or organic impulse) whose sole daimonic duty was to breach borders.

Not only a scientist but a member of the United States House of Representatives from 1801-1804 and 1810-1813, and a United States Senator from 1804-1809, Samuel Mitchill eventually became a staunch advocate of quarantine laws, a clear if unsavory political correlative for the anxiety of foreign (septic!) invasion. But such cross-disciplinary transference of medical paranoia was not unusual for Mitchill. "Dr. Mitchill," Smith noted in his diary, gave monthly lectures on "Contagion, its influence on Animals, plants, &c.,"[41] and one of his scientific papers Smith found noteworthy concerned "a Theory of Hail -- connected with [the] theory of Contagion."[42] Mitchill's obsession with the invasion and subsequent collapse not only of bodily but of epistemological boundaries was evident not only in his literary but in his scientific submissions to The Medical Repository. An abstract to his "Remarks on Manures" in the first issue states that an "Inquiry into the Nature of Septon . . . and its Relations to other Bodies . . . will [show] how nearly Physic

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[41]Diaries, p. 293.

[42]Ibid., p. 185.

[Medicine] and Farming are allied to each other."[43]

Mitchill's science was based on the assumption that the only way to expose the hidden interiors of orders and epistemes was by crossing them. Although almost all his syncretic theories eventually proved fanciful, they led others to important findings, particularly regarding soaps, disenfectants and fertilizers. This Quaker from Long Island (who had studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh and idolized John Brown) thus inadvertantly became one of the founding fathers of what would eventually flower in the 19th and 20th centuries into full-blown American obsessions with hygiene, sanitation, and environmentalism.[44]

Although The Botanic Garden and "The Doctrine of Septon" had subtly different thematic underpinnings, they give the reader an uncannily similar experience. While The Botanic Garden was published with extensive footnotes, "The Doctrine of Septon" was typographically rendered as two columns, one in small italic type that provided the "scientific" voice, explaining the allegory that was simultaneously being rendered through an adjacent "literary" voice, presented (just as in The Botanic Garden) as rhymed couplets of iambic pentameter. In both poems, neither

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[43]The Medical Repository, Volume I, No. 1, p. 32. The chemistry of cathartics transformed toxins into nitrogen-rich fertilizers just as it equilibrated animal bodies.

[44]Mitchill's efforts to regulate waste disposal of tallow chandlers became one of America's first examples of environmental legislation. See the Dictionary of American Biography, ed. Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), vol. xiii, pp. 69-71.

scientific prose nor lyric verse can be read without the intrusion of the other. In "Septon," the margins can only be justified when both visual fields (and their attendant disciplinary fields) are allowed to permeate each other.

The poem begins with the principle of "life and vigour" and "the peccant principle of death" as perfectly separate and nosologically distinct categories; however, "Grim SEPTON" awaits, a brooding Satan of malignant circulations and influences, poised to intertwine the two.[45] Septon has prepared for his nefarious moment, for he is

> Arm'd with [the] power to intervene,
> And disconnect the animal machine.[46]

The mechanistic, Boerhaavian model of human physiology ("the animal machine") can no longer sustain itself under the "interven[tionist]" and "disconnect[ive]" pressures of "pestiferous" (and thus contagious and transgressive) "miasma,"[47] diseases such as yellow fever that were imperceptibly smuggled

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[45]Michel Foucault notes that at this point in medical history, " . . . death [read here as "Septon"] became the concrete a priori of medical experience [and could therefore] detach itself from counter-nature and become embodied in the living bodies of individuals." See The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books) p. 196.

[46]All quotes from "The Doctrine of Septon" are from The Medical Repository. Volume I, No. 2, pp. 183-186.

[47]The phrase "pestiferous miasma" comes from a letter Smith wrote to Benjamin Rush. See Diaries, p. 215.

across the border of animal and vegetable bodies by the recently discovered degraded "airs" of atmospheric chemistry. "Septon" thus personifies a disordering process rather than a static state of malady or complaint, a process which penetrates and pathologizes all the systems of every susceptible (or, in Brunonian parlance, "diasthetic") body.

While poetic danger is lurking, the italicized scientific prose to the left of this first stanza authoritatively intones the dual intellectual "principles" that will govern the ensuing drama: "Oxygen, the principle of excitability; septon, the principle of dissolution." The prose gloss parallel to the baseline of the first line of the following stanza remains expository, calm, and clinically distanced: "Effects of septon and its compounds, on the mind and body, in producing diseases." But the growing nervous excitement of the poetic voice will soon demand personal engagement and belie all scientific control.

Within the great DISORGANIZER lurks,
And plans, unseen, his undermining works;
Insidious, first, with onset mild assails,
Till <u>sluggishness</u> or <u>unconcern</u> prevails; . . .
. . . bolder grown, the <u>Tyrant</u>, with a frown,
Bids SCURVY break the blood and vessels down;
LEPRA and SERPIGO attacks begin,
And SORES and BLOTCHES desolate the skin;
Shews greedy CANCER how he best may thrive,
And gorge and feast on human flesh alive;

Tells FEVER, as in ambuscade he lies,
An hundred ways to take us by surprize;
TO INTERMITTENT, PLAGUE and HECTIC joins, . . .
Possessing each, and all, as war they wage,
Sporadic force or epidemic rage . . .

In its dying hour, the great theoretical thrust of an entire century's worth of medical philosophy transformed into this bizarre mythopoetic display.[48] The "principle of dissolution" trampled tropes as thoroughly as immune systems, turning from images of apathy and torpor[49] to political tyranny, desolation, destruction, surprise attack and cannibalism in all of seven lines. For the "principle" was not so much cold scientific hypothesis as culturally dystopic daimon, a compendium of Federalist terrors.

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[48]Just as the idea of "cacöethes scribendi" was at the same time both parodic and terrifying to Brown, "Septon," too, has elements of both genres. A full genre-crossing of medical phenomena is not unusual, as soon as they are fully demystified: Sleepwalking and ventriloquism are almost immediately classified as parodic today, but were both able to strike panic in the hearts of scientific votaries of the Federalist period (and can still be employed for melodramatic purposes). Parody, dystopic comedy, and melodrama, dytopic drama, are dyspeptic cousins. Even Brown redacted the melodrama of Mervyn with the parody of "Omar and Fatima; or, the Apothecary of Ispahan," a late short story (1807) that burlesqued Brunonian paradigms of excitement and exhaustion along with a doctor named Nadir, "a man of literature, of science, and, which was still better, of honour and integrity." See Somnambulism and Other Stories, (Frankfurt: Verlag Peter Lang, 1987), ed. Alfred Weber, p. 187.

[49]Which recall Smith's own bouts with "lethargy," "sleepiness & imbecility" at this time.

From a purely clinical perspective, it is clear that the most basic idea of disorder or disease was not then what it is understood to be today, e.g., a matter of pinpointing and attacking particularities culled from widely variegated evidentiary fields. Bodily disorder was to the eighteenth-century practitioner a single, etiologically unified entity. By penetrating social and natural bodies (both organic and inorganic) and by manifesting itself in different ways throughout the interior of human bodies by exploiting and subverting the mysteriously essential process of nervous sympathy,[50] "SEPTON" could be isolated not only as the cause of scurvy and leprosy but as the single source of fever, cancer, plague, "SORES," "BLOTCHES" and "sluggishness." Disease troped into such an inescapable and universal pathologizing process disordered all logic of localization, and "DISORGANIZE[d]" and defied all efforts to predict its course. Cure could only be synonymous with

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[50]Benjamin Rush, the leading doctor of Federalist America, noted:

> A correct knowledge of sympathies is of great practicality; thus by being acquainted with the sympathy between the head and stomach we may remove puking by bleeding, and a headache by puking; by knowing the sympathy between the stomach and the trachea, we are able to cure . . . trachealis by a single puke. By knowing the sympathy between the stomach and feet, we are enabled to translate gout from the stomach to the feet. . . . By knowing the sympathy between the nose and the intestines, we remove the itching of the nose, by dislodging worms from the intestines.

Lectures on the Mind, pp. 243-4.

expulsion.[51]

But "The Doctrine of Septon's" over-arching literary structure is not one of expulsion and subsequent cure or redemption, but of borders irretrievably crossed, boundaries permanently perforated. Nervous excitement, circulation, digestion, and even "human thought" will never again be what they were before.

> -- Thus, when of old, as pious men believe,
> The SERPENT whisper'd in the ear of EVE,
> The subtle fiend a fit occasion sought,
> With hellish guile, to poison human thought . . .

Paradise Lost has been invoked here, but "Septon" has no room for visionary prophecies of ultimate salvation. The earth and the atmosphere are chemically tainted, and as a consequence man's body is unilaterally (and physiologically) tragic. What Milton had gone to such great lengths to present as a complete cycle in every moment of his epic poem has here been curtailed into the parody of a "principle" that can only degrade and "poison." Bodies cannot help but absorb the "pestiferous miasma" that surrounds them on all sides, and the literary result of this venomous introjection is a personification Milton never would have dared contemplate, much less make:

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[51]Rush provided copious and exact instructions for administering "emetics, cathartics, diuretics, diaphoretics, errhines and sternutatories, sialagogues, emmenagogues . . ." Lectures on the Mind, Introduction.

> . . . And Man, depraved, to vice and error hurl'd,
> Still proves the Septon of the moral world.

Man, "the Septon of the moral world," metaphorically engendered by the transgression of Oxygen/Eve through the temptation of Septon/Satan, not only contains and embodies but himself becomes the "depraved" principle. Such allegorization both essentializes its tenor and limits its vehicle, which again problematizes the issues of escape, cure and redemption.

Mitchill subsequently emphasizes the chemical and "moral" isomorphism of "Septon" and "Man" by fully developing the themes of replication and parturition. Not only does his scientific gloss redundantly note that we are witnessing the "Production of pestilential fluids, by the union of septon with oxygen," he inflates and embellishes this moment of chemical determinism by explicitly invoking figures from pre-Christian mythology. Then, in the style of Erasmus Darwin, he transfers the trope of chemical affinity into the literary genre most congenial to passionate melodrama, the seduction plot:

> Stand by while captivating SEPTON draws
> Unwary OXYGEN to aid his cause; --
> -- Thus JUNO's charms, entranc'd, the thunderer held,
> While her lov'd Grecians claim'd the bloody field; --
> Their silent union gives the MONSTER birth,
> Who wastes with septic fury half the earth . . .

"The Doctrine of Septon" ends with the dread sexual congress of Oxygen and Septon, whereby both "Man" (in the "moral" sense) and "pestilential fluids" (in the chemical sense) become the death principle's corporeal representatives. Every breath seduces and degrades the all-important nervous power of "excitement" into the waste of "septic fury." And "Man" holds a privileged position in this autonomic allegory of respiration, for every one of his breaths (i.e., each instance of involuntary, transgressive "union" with oxygen) enables him to re-establish within himself the physiological phenomenon in whose iniquitous image he was created, that of his own "moral" father, Septon. Thus, along with the presentation of Christian and Roman myth is a clinically localized representation of the Oedipal, the result of which is, unsurprisingly, "the MONSTER birth."

Instead of expulsion, the dissolute "MONSTER" had been given a home. "DISORGANIZ[ATION]" had been firmly ensconced within the human frame, and the implication is that organic matter cannot be mapped except through antithetical or "retrograde" means (precisely what was making the ironies of Brunonian and Darwinian clinical approaches so damagingly evident). Erasmus Darwin's beautiful poetic assertion of scientific analogy, the dream of equilibrated and involuntary states of "vegetable" or "botanic" health for all physiological systems (akin to Thoreau's utopian vision of political "eupepsia" fifty years later), once recreated by Mitchill and Smith in the Federalist "Manner," now stood in dire need of cathartic intervention. But the exact nature of what

this intervention should consist of (either in terms of methodology or "materia medica") is an issue "The Doctrine" never even considers.

Instead, "The Doctrine of Septon" posits war and sickness as ineluctably steady and degrading chemical states. Human "ratio[s] of affection" are not only susceptible but exposed to a continuous stream of morbid miasma, for the body's own interior has become an irretrievably agonistic site. Such a conflicted localization anticipates the Hawthornian conception of evil, not a simple, opaque presence of "dark" over and against "light," but evil as the "lurid intermixture of the two."[52] Septon's "foul mephitic vapours"[53] were as real and present as oxygen. "Excitability" and "dissolution" were as mixed as the "airs" atmospheric scientists such as Priestley, Lavoisier and Beddoes were then in the process of distilling.

Just as with post-lapsarian knowledge, so with atmospheric chemistry and with human biology: the categories of good and evil (oxygen and septon, excitement and torpor, expulsion and introjection) had become impossible to separate into the kind of neat, arborescent maps of containers and containments (in particular, physiological taxonomies, medical nosologies and diagrammatic representations of sympathies) that dominated

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[52]"Rappaccini's Daughter" in: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Selected Tales and Sketches (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1987), ed. Michael J. Colarcurcio, p. 399.

[53]Hawthorne, too, redacted Satan, "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians, 2:2) into an atmospheric taint in The Scarlet Letter (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 1995) p. 292.

eighteenth-century "physic." The most primal, automatic and unstoppable nervous responses could no longer be isolated and separated from the fully conscious desirings of Benjamin Franklin's "reasonable Creature." And it was precisely this anxiety of disorganization that spurred the literary impulse of Brockden Brown and his intellectual circle, an anxiety that sublimated into a felt necessity to cross and re-cross genres in a mad attempt to regain the lost path, the lost idea of order.

Septon, the "Great DISORGANIZER," had fulfilled his mission. As the eighteenth century drew to its close, poetry and science united into a sphinx, a hybrid form. And so we enter the novels of Charles Brockden Brown, those texts permeated with nervous disease and hysterical sickness, buried and blazed nervous maps, metatextual labyrinths of endlessly split discourses, aporias of morbid or salubrious sympathies, essentialized personae, excitements, seductions, and all manner of monsters and miasmas, torpors and transgressions.

Section 2:

Arthur Mervyn's Body

> As often as the tale was embellished with new incidents, or inforced [sic] by new testimony, the hearer grew pale, his breath was stifled by inquietudes, his blood was chilled, and his stomach was bereaved of its usual energies. A temporary indisposition was produced in many. Some were haunted by a melancholy bordering upon madness, and some, in consequence of sleepless panics for which no cause could be assigned and for which no opiates could be found, were attacked by lingering or mortal diseases.[1]
>
> -- Charles Brockden Brown

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[1]All quotes from Arthur Mervyn will be designated AM and are from Arthur Mervyn or Memoirs of the Year 1793 in Two Parts (Albany, New York: NCUP [Formerly New College & University Press, Inc.], 1992). This quote, pp. 98-99.

Chapter 4: I Think Therefore I'm Wrong

The fictional world of Arthur Mervyn emanates from a body in which mental activity has an intimate yet shattering relationship with nervous "fluid," a body in which the very category of voluntary action has been invaded and usurped by its indomitable double, the hidden yet monolithic force of those involuntary excitements simultaneously generated, transmitted, or absorbed. Moreover, the physiological dynamics of Arthur Mervyn's body correspond to the strange workings of the universe that lies outside this interior, biological sphere (if such normative boundaries as "inside" and "outside" are applicable here): Arthur Mervyn's body both contains and roils within a cosmos governed not by the laws of rationality but by the antithetical dictates of "retrograde motions," "reverse sympath[ies]" and unbalanced ratios of circulation.

What were the novelistic consequences of a medical science on the verge of collapse? If the seemingly endless reticulation of the tale within a tale (a structure that has confounded and frustrated so many readers of Arthur Mervyn) can be recontextualized by an historicized homology of body within body (an array of sympathetically interlocked organic states, a geography of biological containments and containers), then these somatic textualities become subject to all the physiological ironies and aporias that marked late eighteenth-century clinical

science. Stated most reductively, the narrative result is as follows: Arthur Mervyn thinks that he should think; but whenever he thinks, he's wrong.

The obsessive interplay of Mervyn's mind and his body, his thought and his impulse, his "deliberation" over and against his "unmindful[ness]," begins early, when this sickly youth crosses the Schuylkill without paying the toll:

> These deliberations [regarding what to do about entering Philadelphia as a pauper] did not slacken my pace. I was almost unmindful of my way, when I found I had passed Schuylkill at the upper bridge.[2]

Impelled by the habitual nature of his walking, Mervyn's body has crossed a geographical, political, and economic border unimpeded by the "deliberations" of Mervyn's mind. A monetary toll has certainly been neglected, but so has the toll of ratiocination. And this introductory moment of autonomic ascendancy not only enables Brockden Brown to initiate his plot, but allows for the reader's anticipatory conjecture that the structure of Mervyn's Philadelphia may delineate a radical destabilization of previous mappings and orders. This dangerously perforated geographical space is from the outset unencumbered by the tolls that mark traditional borders. Philadelphia can thus be interpreted an exterior homology for the interior, physiological

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[2] AM, p. 22.

structure of Mervyn's body. The exterior space is unconfined by the normative strictures that limit and regulate the social behavior of reasonable creatures, while the interior space is unconfined by the normative strictures that limit and regulate the excitements and circulations of healthy bodies.

When the landlord of the inn cheats Mervyn out of his change, "The first impulse was to call him back and contest the equity of his demand, but a moment's reflection shewed me the absurdity of such conduct."[3] While Mervyn's "impulse" easily perforates the boundaries of the inkeeper's subterfuge, his "reflection" ironically dulls his insight. The archetypal country bumpkin has a native intelligence, but his rude behavior gives him away; here, Mervyn's thoughts are themselves the symptoms of his foolishness, while his impulsive actions and desires signal an intrinsic sophistication.

Mervyn's series of mistakes upon entering Philadelphia (a series that culminates with the accusation of being an accessory to murder) can all be classified as misprisions directly resulting from his reliance on "reflection" and "deliberation" as opposed to his involuntary responses. While crossing the Schuylkill without paying a toll and being cheated at the inn may instigate this paradigm, in and of themselves they remain trivial examples of such a phenomenon. However, Mervyn's misreading and subsequent placement of trust in Wallace seriously jeopardizes Mervyn's mental and physical health, and almost lands him in

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[3]Ibid., p. 21.

jail. Furthermore, Mervyn's misreading of Wallace is crucial not only from a characterological but from a narrative perspective: It creates the basis and motivation for the first of Mervyn's many crossings into one of this novel's centers of nervous excitement, the Thetford mansion.

> I fixed my eyes with some eagerness on [Wallace]. He was a young man, expensively and fashionably dressed, whose mien was considerably prepossessing, and whose countenance bespoke some portion of discernment.[4]

Brockden Brown undercuts Mervyn's primitive phrenological readings regarding the "mien" and "countenance" of "discernment" just as he will undercut Mervyn's other rational processes: "I paused to reflect upon the possible designs of this person." The irony of cynical undercutting continues as long as Mervyn continues "deliberating,"[5] that is, until Wallace's practical joke reaches its nasty conclusion and Mervyn finds that while his mind has been busily "reflect[ing]," his body has been locked up in a dark, unknown chamber.

To read another individual (as Mervyn does Wallace) is to retell his story, to create a narrative. More dispassionate than emotional, critical reading deploys "reflection" and "deliberation" in order to impose a theoretical coherence upon

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[4]Ibid., p. 25.

[5]Ibid., p. 26.

resistant structures[6] -- and thus Mervyn is wholly unfitted for the process. The incorrect conclusions Mervyn reaches regarding Wallace lead to a number of questions: Is there in fact any coherence whatsoever to any of Mervyn's narratives? If so, what would be the basis for such coherence? Stated in this manner, the question posts a striking resemblance to the problems and anxieties Brockden Brown had quite recently been contemplating in a different context, i.e., what is the etiology of the cacöethes scribendi? To what extent is the urge towards narration an involuntary, rhapsodic response? And to what extent is narration based on subsequent, cynical undercuttings of these raptures of emplotment? And which of these two narrative states brings us closer to the truth of our subject matter? The final section of "The Rhapsodist" did not provide a formula for equilibrating the visceral antinomies of rhapsody and cynicism.

Will Arthur Mervyn?

If Philadelphia is a land of borders that can be perforated by sudden impulses, it is also a land of hermetic enclosures. Up until the end of the eighteenth century, inverse quotients of health and sickness would have governed such ratios of circulation and occlusion. Diametrically opposed to the Franklinian/Thoreauvian utopia of eupepsia, Mervyn locked in the Thetford mansion should experience nothing but the Franklinian nightmare, the inevitable biological corruption of "confined air"

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[6]Recall John Rees's twist on Benjamin Rush's medical adage: "Since, then, 'to think is to theorize,' we must all theorize who think." See Remarks, p. 12.

within the "close room," the origin of so many "putrid disorders."[7]

But as atmospheric, chemical, climactic and medical scientists from Priestley to Mitchill had demonstrated, the contrast between radically perforated and radically enclosed systems could not retain the simple, logical structure of opposition. If the structure of the sealed space of the Thetford mansion can be interpreted as a literary homology for a feverish, uncirculating, morbidly excited body, then the terrified inmate, reduced to either a "hot fit" of excitement or a "cold fit" of torpor, must inevitably discover that this physiological state defies rational or theoretical efforts towards "cure"; the enclosed figure in Brockden Brown must, as a survival technique, ignore the entrapping dictates not only of normative spatial understanding but of logic and reason in general and learn to privilege the unspoken (and, clinically speaking, the logically "retrograde" or "reverse") mandates of his own sympathetic nervous system.[8]

Moreover, in Brockden Brown the very fact of morbidly increased or decreased levels of involuntary nervous excitement creates its own narrative impulse (and even, as we shall see, its own narrative mode), which may create either morbid or salubrious

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[7]Again, see Franklin's "The Art of Procuring Pleasant Dreams."

[8]The identification of the closed domestic interior with the body has long been a commonplace among Marxist critics. For a particularly striking example of the conclusions that can be reached by means of such an interpretive method, see Elaine Scarry, The Body In Pain (1985: New York: Oxford UP), particularly Chapter 1, "The Structure of Torture."

emplotments. In other words, the intensely heightened or depressed level of excitement of Arthur Mervyn's body dominates the dynamics of Arthur Mervyn's text more than any logical, spatial, or temporal consideration.

Shut up in a room in the dark of the Thetford mansion, his pulsing heart buried alive within a symbolic tomb, Meryvn's body has been forcibly frozen within what had heretofore been a radically fluid region. It is here that Mervyn's level of excitement begins its dangerous, Brunonian escalation. Static and occluded, Mervyn's body now approaches the farthest reaches of John Brown's infamous chart from his Elements of Medicine, the area in which normative relationships between release and restraint are no longer ruled by strictly inverse quotients, where logical thought itself is overpowered by excitement.

> I cannot describe the mixture of dread and of shame which glowed in my veins. . . . [T]he precipitate alarms that might be given . . . threw my thoughts into painful confusion.[9]

Arthur Mervyn's body has now entered the "Extreme sthenic" realm, the area in which the only cure was to "support the excitement,"[10] the area which ironically overthrew what had been the brilliantly simple dynamics of John Brown's own theory of

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[9]AM, p. 29.

[10]Elements, fold-out diagnostic table, no page number.

excitement and excitability.

> What a condition was mine! Immersed in palpable darkness! shut up in this unknown recess![11]

On the one hand, being locked in a pit thus quite specifically mirrors nosological wreckage and the untenable "condition" of late-eighteenth century physiology, the "unknown recess[es]" of which had become so glaringly evident in Darwin's Zoonomia. Being "shut up in this unknown recess" recalls the subversion of logical and localizable mappings of sympathies and correspondences, and a subsequent descent into an unnavigable region of pure, ungovernable involuntary response. In part, the extreme psychological terror of the pit stems from just this structural equivalence to the late eighteenth-century crisis of falling into an area in which no known ordering, nosology, syntax, economy or circulation could prevail.[12] On the other hand, never had nosological wreckage and clinical aporia been put to such effective narrative use. For the recurring trope of the enclosed pit of morbidly excited/morbidly depressed sympathies

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[11] AM, p. 30.

[12] Edgar Huntly quite literally falls into one of these pits. And the only way he can extricate himself -- if, in fact, it can be argued that he ever really does extricate himself -- is through a loosing of his autonomic powers, a loosing that ultimately will prove to be his undoing, and land him "off the map" for good. As Norman Grabo concludes: "Edgar has disqualified himself from mature society." See Norman Grabo, The Coincidental Art of Charles Brockden Brown (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina Press, 1981), p. 181.

opens entirely new worlds of possibility for Arthur Mervyn, body and text. The "palpable darkness" paradoxically leads to shattering insight:

> I reflected with amazement on the slightness of that thread by which human passions are led from their direction. With no less amazement did I remark the complexity of incidents by which I had been empowered to communicate . . . th[e] truth.[13]

Later in the novel, when Welbeck dashes off "in search of a spade,"[14] Mervyn and the corpse of Watson are left stranded together in the darkness. Enclosed underground next to this dead body,[15] Mervyn again experiences the sudden and overwhelming power of his own involuntary nervous impulses, first losing the power to speak, then the power to "reflect[]":

> Before I retrieved the power of reflection, the light had disappeared and the foot-steps were no longer heard.
>
> I was not, on ordinary occasions, destitute of equanimity, but . . . [e]very circumstance combined to fill me with shuddering and panick [sic]. For a while, I was

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[13]Ibid., p. 31.

[14]AM, p. 83.

[15]Watson's corpse metonymically doubles Mervyn's body, the literary/clinical consequence of which is (for Mervyn) a heightened susceptibility to morbid efflux, particularly the invasive disorganizing/death impulse of Septon himself.

enabled to endure my situation by the exertions of my reason.[16]

Why does this confinement of the living and the dead together within the dark enclosure of a basement lead to a miniature disquisition on the relationship between losing the "power of reflection" -- mental atonicity -- and a word that was a part of every eighteenth-century physician's vocabulary of health, "equanimity?" Why does Brockden Brown describe Mervyn's situation here in the same terms as he described his painful and confused state within the Thetford mansion, i.e., as a clinically agonistic conflict between impulse and logic?[17]

The answer was a commonplace to the eighteenth-century medical practitioner: such splits between reason and impulse indicated pathology. On the diagnostic level, Mervyn's disequilibrated state had been mapped by William Cullen's cephalo-centric nosology as "Neuroses."[18] But the originary breakthrough in nervous science that reverberates here came out of the University of Edinburgh decades before the ascendancy of John Brown's mentor and foe, and merits a particularly close

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[16]AM, p. 83.

[17]In the case of Watson's corpse, this conflict can also be rendered spatially as the introjection of nervous energy (i.e., being "fill[ed] with "shuddering and panick") versus the projection of "reason."

[18]Impaired voluntary action -- such as temporary muteness -- was to Cullen a form of "Comata," his first "Order" of Neuroses; while an impaired power to think or reflect was "Vasania," Cullen's fourth "Order" of Neuroses. See Bowman, p. 186.

reading. It was the discovery of the autonomic nervous system by Robert Whytt.

Whytt's research in the 1730s and '40s signalled a radical break with past theories of the relationship between the mind and the body; for Whytt systematically proved that brains and brawn could no longer exist in physiological isolation. Perhaps the single most shattering insight Whytt reached was that the mind could not be inhabited solely by rational faculties. As he declared in his Essay on the Vital and other Involuntary Motions of Animals:

> . . . there is not a voluntary muscle in the body, whose motion does not become involuntary, as often as it is either directly, or from its consent with some neighbouring part, affected by any considerable stimulus. . . . Further, in man the sentient and rational principle must be acknowledged to be one.[19]

Subsequently -- and perhaps less in the spirit of a doctor than of a philosopher or poet -- Whytt described the relationship of physical sensations not only to the processes of understanding, but to the mysteries of moral judgment.

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[19]Robert Whytt, An Essay on the Vital and other Involuntary Motions of Animals (N.P.: Printed by Hamilton, Balfour, and Neill, 1751), p. 283.

> . . . As the deity seems to have implanted in our minds a kind of sense respecting morals, whence we approve of some actions, and disapprove of others, almost instantly, and without any previous reasoning about their fitness or unfitness; a faculty of singular use, if not absolutely necessary for securing the interests of virtue among such creatures as men! so, methinks, the analogy will appear very easy and natural, if we suppose our minds so formed and connected with our bodies . . .[20]

In one sense, these words indicated nothing more than a medical corroboration of Thomas Reid's Common Sense philosophy (Reid was at that time a fellow member of the Edinburgh faculty), which posited the sixth moral sense as our inner guide to good and evil (what Whytt here calls the "sense respecting morals"). Upon closer inspection, however, here was the articulation of a radically new, post-Cartesian mind, a mind "formed and connected" with our bodies: "The mind, therefore, in producing the vital and other involuntary motions, does not act as a rational, but as a sentient principle."[21]

Whytt had outlined nothing less than a unified field theory of the nervous system. His revolutionary understanding of the body united a conscious process such as speaking with the unconscious process of, say, respiration. Reason and impulse did

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[20]Involuntary Motions, p. 288.

[21]Ibid., p. 289.

not exist at separate poles, but were mixed and malleable categories, each informing the other.[22]

Whytt's belief in the nervous system's ability to cross the hitherto uncrossed boundary between "thought" (generally considered the provenance of man and only man) and "animal motion" was his essential insight, and consequently became the basis of Whytt's tireless attacks against the nervous separatism of his chief rival, Albrecht von Haller. The controversy between Whytt and von Haller as to whether conscious "excitement" could or could not be detached from unconscious "excitability," and as to whether "sensibility" (nervous response based on conscious feeling) and "irritability" (nervous response that had no basis in conscious feeling) defined one single or two distinct fields, became one of the chief polemical matters of the journals of eighteenth-century nervous science.[23]

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[22]In retrospect, it becomes clear that what made Robert Whytt's view of the nervous system so brilliant and enduring was his steadfast refusal to polarize. The idea of passion and reason as ineluctably mixed categories not only anticipated both the pragmatism of William James (see, in particular, his chapter on "Attention" in Principles of Psychology) but a number of Freud's underlying assumptions. Such a syncretic view of affect and reason limns the basis of late-twentieth century neuroscience, neuropsychiatry and psychopharmacology, and has guided recent efforts to understand the emotional/intellectual role played by the brain's amygdala. See, for example, Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (NY: Bantam Books, 1995).

[23]For a wonderful, in-depth discussion of these issues, see Robert Whytt, The Soul, and Medicine by R. K. French (London: The Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, New Series, Volume XVII, 1969):

> [T]he whole dispute over irritability centred around the nature of irritability -- whether it was a characteristic of matter, or of a life-force -- and its relationship to sensibility. Haller, of course, recognized that in the usual processes of physiology muscular contraction was generally

The relationship between the brain's conscious and "sensible" capacity for logic and the body's unconscious and "irritable" power of sympathy lies at the very heart of the textual dynamics of Arthur Mervyn. Ever since Robert Whytt's synthesis of voluntary and involuntary nervous systems, thought divorced from impulse (not to mention thought opposed to impulse) had become a clinically suspect category.[24]

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brought about by the advent of a disturbance in the nerves, from 'voluntary' or 'involuntary' sources, but he nevertheless maintained that contractility and sensibility were distinct phenomena which could occur without reference to each other. This strict denial of any relationship between sensibility and irritability left him unable to make use of the elaborations of it which Whytt successfully employed in considering the idea of the reflex and sympathy. (p. 70)

[24]One of the inevitable consequences of the clinical nexus of voluntary and involuntary has been the granting of the verbal icon the status of somatic homolog, so that language itself becomes a parasympathetic microsystem of consolidation and dispersal (digestion/excretion, systole/diastole, torpor/excitement). Words themselves become absorbent, imbibing, somatically permeable organisms.

Discourse thereby becomes mimetically circulative, a peristaltic processing of energic fluids. The flow passes through the interior of the body without organs (the sentence), and then, the energy transfer complete, the "excitement" (or "nervous juice") sublimates into an effect on other characters and the reader. The somatic has been transformed into the semantic, which can thus create emesis and cathartic releases. If healthy, sentences will promote circulations. If the somatic sentence does not undergo salubrious equilibration the effect will be a proliferation of morbid sympathies -- e.g., the prison house of false doubles that characterizes Brown's "sensorium" of emplotment.

The theoretical "body without organs" posited by Deleuze and Guattari in Anti-Oedipus has thus entered body criticism. An extended example of this critical approach can be found in Bruce Boehrer's The Fury of Men's Gullets: Ben Jonson and the Digestive Canal, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997). The theoretical tools for this kind of criticism have been in place for quite some time. The practice of historicising such theories is still in its infancy.

Arthur Mervyn's recurrent metaphors of locked chambers, occluded closets and closed basements, all generalized under the rubric of the pathologized pit, can thus be illuminated by clinical analogy on a number of levels. The pit tropes the Federalist structure of disease, for the body was then understood to be an intricate system of perforation and occlusion in which health depended on regulated amounts of energy entering and escaping through a limited number of entrances and exits. Moreover, the darkened pit stood for that agonistic (and thus pathological) area in which the voluntary and involuntary grappled for ascendancy.

Again and again throughout this novel, Arthur Mervyn is "immersed in darkness."[25] But no matter how many times he is locked in a closet (or quite literally and clinically, as a victim of yellow fever, locked in the feverish throes of his own body), it is to the sealed enclosure that Mervyn desires to return: "Will you wonder that the design of entering this recess [Welbeck's study] was insensibly [that is, involuntarily] formed? Possibly it was locked, but its accessibleness was likewise possible."[26]

Why are both Brockden Brown and Arthur Mervyn so enamored of these morbid recesses?

Perhaps the key lies, once again, within the paradoxical structure of cacöethes scribendi. Once contained within the

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[25]AM, p. 61.

[26]Ibid., p. 62.

"recess," Mervyn is inevitably (and even involuntarily) impelled to allow his rhapsodic impulses free rein: "[Inside Welbeck's study,] I would . . . attend to the objects that spontaneously presented themselves to my view."[27] This kind of reading as spontaneous "attend[ing]" or "survey" is strikingly similar to the utopian, quasi-redemptive language used when Mervyn first walked the streets of Philadelphia in a "tumult of delicious thoughts," his "curiousity . . . awake" as he "attentively examin[ed] the objects that successively presented themselves."[28] Note that Mervyn is not consciously, sensibly, voluntarily or teleologically seeking anything in either of these episodes. Instead of working to rationalize a narrative, he is relieving and nourishing himself by leaving himself open (perforated, unoccluded) to the exciting influences of whatever objects may "present[]" themselves to his absorbing, imbibing attention.[29]

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[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid., p. 45. Note the similarity of this state of consciousness to the absorptive throes of Walt Whitman.

[29]This kind of radical openness also demonstrates Mervyn's resemblance to those characters who are victims of malignant exterior influences, from Clemanza Lodi (in Arthur Mervyn) and Helena Cleves (in Ormond) to later embodiments in Hawthorne's work, such as Beatrice Rappaccini and Priscilla. This model of influence and susceptibility also works from the opposite perspective. Note how, through his abuse of his sympathetic powers over Priscilla, Hawthorne deploys Westervelt as a villain in The Blithedale Romance. Note the murderous sympathy of Chillingworth over Dimmesdale in The Scarlet Letter. Arthur Mervyn will not allow his efflux of sympathy to dominate others, and thus becomes a hero in the same way that Holgrave is a hero in The House of The Seven Gables because he refuses to use the sympathetic power of the Maules to influence and dominate Phoebe Pyncheon.

Here, the creation of narrative not only fits the clinical analogy of the freely circulating biological condition, but the excitement-based condition of being radically open or susceptible to outside influence (what John Brown called "diasthesia"), a state indicating an indefinitely expandable realm or sphere of being in which the body vibrates in sympathy with the exterior world. This rhapsodic, nonrational, introjective mode of experiencing (or attending to or reading) the world contrasts with what had been for most of the eighteenth century the normative mode of understanding, i.e., the projection of theoretical systems from the inner realm of "deliberation" and "reflection" onto the exterior world.

Why is this radical openness so emphasized within the hermetic enclosure? The spatial paradox becomes clear if we can suppose the irony of the closed chamber to reflect the irony of the late-eighteenth-century body, whose "retrograde motions" were most fully articulated by Darwin, as in this discussion of "Direct and reverse sympathy":

> The increased actions of the primary part of the trains of associated motions are sometimes succeeded by increased actions of the secondary part of the train; and sometimes by decreased actions of it. So likewise the decreased actions of the primary part of a train of associate motions are sometimes succeeded by decreased actions of the secondary part, and sometimes by increased actions of it. The former of these situations is called direct sympathy, and the

latter reverse sympathy.[30]

The structural intricacies of "direct and reverse sympathy" seemed to be an essential yet not completely comprehended component of the structural intricacies of fever[31]: "[I]n continued fever with debility there appears to be a reverse sympathy between the capillary vessels of the stomach and those of the skin . . ."[32] In other words, while the stomach was most occluded, most "avers[e] to solid food," there exists a "constant heat on the surface of the body," that is, the skin was in a highly excited state,

> and in greater torpor of the stomach, as from contagious matter, the accumulation of sensorial power becomes so great as to affect the arterial and capillary system, and fever is produced in both cases.[33]

In other words, being locked in the "torpor" of enteric enclosures not only increases "the accumulation of sensorial power" (the involuntary nervous energy that may account for the efflux of rhapsodic narration), but by the virtue of "reverse sympathy" the "torpor" can also account for an ironic increase in

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[30]Zoonomia, Vol. IV, p. 172.

[31]Perhaps the dominant trope of Arthur Mervyn.

[32]Ibid., p. 174.

[33]Ibid., p. 176.

the excitement of the blood. The clinical paradox: When most occluded and torpid, the body can also be most excited and absorptive, most susceptible to the inward-flowing vectors of exterior influences. Darwin, clearly concerned about the implications of such irony on his highly refined taxonomy of disease, noted that "[t]his subject requires to be further investigated."[34] But the transposition of this ironic clinical theory into narrative terms yields the following strange syllogism: When most thoroughly locked up and enclosed, the individual can be the most open and enthusiastic (and perhaps the least critical) reader, and as a consequence, the most rhapsodic narrator.

Compare Darwin's definition of "reverse sympathy" to Brockden Brown's description of the physiological effects of the "rumour" of yellow fever, which was "of a nature to absorb and suspend the whole soul"[35]:

> As often as the tale was embellished with new incidents, or inforced [sic] by new testimony, the hearer grew pale, his breath was stifled by inquietudes, his blood was chilled, and his stomach was bereaved of its usual energies. A temporary indisposition was produced in many. Some were haunted by a melancholy bordering upon madness, and some, in consequence of sleepless panics for which no

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[34]Ibid., p. 175.

[35]AM, p. 98. This description appears as the epigraph to this chapter.

cause could be assigned and for which no opiates could be found, were attacked by lingering or mortal diseases.[36]

In both Darwin and Brockden Brown, occlusion instigates "reverse sympathy," for closure and torpor in one part of the body ("pale[ness]," "stifled" "breath," "chilled" "blood," and a "stomach . . . bereaved of its usual energies") creates a morbid openness or susceptibility to "melancholy," "madness," "sleepless panics" and "lingering or mortal diseases." It is no surprise that Brockden Brown places the nervous potentialities of narrative itself as the origin of such sympathetic disorders.

Let us return to the Thetford mansion where Arthur Mervyn, locked in a closet, first finds himself completely immersed in an autonomic landscape, a geography defined as an array of projected and introjected impulses. When Thetford's son and his wife enter the room, Mervyn will begin to act as an autonomic American, a figure completely governed by the logically counterintuitive (and often nonrational) mandates of his body's involuntary reactions. As Mervyn now asserts, "[t]here was no need to deliberate."[37]

Here is a temporary resolution of the agonistically pathological conflict between impulse and reason, with involuntary nervous response emerging as Robert Whytt's enfolding and unifying field. It is no coincidence that this farewell to the power of logical "deliberat[ion]" marks the introduction to

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[36]Ibid., pp. 98-99.

[37]Ibid., p. 29.

this novel's obsessive mode of uncanny and coincidental doubling. Which immediately presents the following question: What would be the clinical homology for the döppelganger? William Cullen taught that nervous response sympathetically begets nervous response, as though the nervous fluid or "juice" contained the elements of some invisible contagion. Robert French notes that Robert Whytt understood that even "yawning and vomiting" were "'infectious,'"

> and described [such phenomena] as the 'still more wonderful sympathy' between the nervous systems of different people, 'by impressions made upon the sensorium commune,' [Works, p. 583] and acting on the nervous system.[38]

The structure of literary coincidence (in this case, between the interior of Arthur Mervyn's body and the exterior world around him) can be clinically rendered as a conjunction through the medium of some mysterious, sympathetic agency. Again, as French points out, "what is now called reflex was for Whytt a special case of sympathy."[39] Or, as Mervyn narrates: "I once more touched the lock. At that moment the lady shrieked and exclaimed, 'Good God! What is here?'"[40] It seems as though there is some sort of uncanny, invisible yet highly irritative nervous current or nervous reflex connecting Mervyn's hidden motion to the lady's

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[38]Robert Whytt, The Soul, and Medicine, p. 42.

[39]Robert Whytt, the Soul, and Medicine, P. 31.

[40]AM, p. 31.

exclamation.[41]

As Norman Grabo, the greatest student of Brockden Brown's "Coincidental Art," has noted,

> Coincidence is . . . a coalescence of will and fact, a simultaneity of existence joining the ideal and the material into a whole reality. This kind of coincidence supposes a continuity between mind and reality . . .[42]

Coincidence thus finds its clinical bedrock in the neuroscience of Robert Whytt, in which the "sentient" and the "rational" principles were ineluctably "connected." Grabo rightfully understands that the endless doubles and coincidences of Arthur Mervyn are somehow related to medical issues, and even goes so far as to assert that

> [t]he yellow fever is Arthur, the victim and agent of moral righteousness who is caught in the grip of unmodified sincerity and impulse and devastating in his effects on others.[43]

Mervyn does cross geographical and political boundaries in

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[41]Note that this coincidental or sympathetic connection cannot be discovered when sought as a relationship between Mervyn's labored rationality and the exterior world.

[42]Norman Grabo, The Coincidental Art of Charles Brockden Brown (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina Press, 1981), p. 184.

[43]Ibid., p. 113.

exactly the same way nervous impulse was crossing -- and slashing -- nosological boundaries.[44] However, unaware of the relevance of the eighteenth-century's physiological structure of sympathy to this issue, Grabo lapses into medical anachronism when he asserts that Mervyn's "story is a form of bleeding, namely, letting the ill humors out."[45] As we have seen, the entire notion of "humors" had been excised from Federalist medical vocabulary, and the strict logic of venesection ("bleeding") had, with the advent of Yellow Fever, become not so much a solution as itself the problem.

In short, what Grabo (and Jane Tompkins as well[46]) have missed is the irony of physiology. Like eighteenth-century madness or fever, the plot of Arthur Mervyn has entered a realm governed -- or misgoverned -- by the strange sympathies of involuntary response. Once "[i]mmersed in palpable darkness," Mervyn quite rightfully declares, "no one can expect intrepid or judicious measures . . ."[47] As Mervyn sinks into the confinement

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[44]Jane Tompkins comes closer to my conception of Arthur Mervyn's body when she labels him "an impulse of energy." See Sensational Designs (NY: Oxford UP, 1985), p. 68.

[45]Coincidental Art, p. 103.

[46]Tomkins has argued that there is continuous strand of connection between ideas of money and ideas of plot, resting on her interpretation of that key Franklinian concept, circulation. However, the one particular usage of the word that Tomkins neglected was perhaps the most discursive application of the word at the time -- having to do with the way in which the body maintained its health, the various interior circulations of aliment, blood, and "nervous fluid." See Sensational Designs, Section III.

[47]AM, p. 29.

not only of Thetford's closet but of his own body, the entire universe of this novel sympathetically slips into involuntary realms, realms stripped of all "judicious measures." And as Mervyn descends into the horrifying excitements of his own bodily pit, Brown employs narrative language that is itself increasingly allied to autonomic impulse.

Locked within the closed and threatening strictures of Thetford's closet, Mervyn imagines his fate -- being thrown in jail as a thief -- and is overwhelmed by his emotions. That is, he is overwhelmed as long as he "revolve[s]" the "plausibility" of such "ideas," as long as he narrates their endlessly terrifying implications and "embellish[ments]"[48] to himself, making himself sick by thinking:

> These ideas struck me with panick. I revolved them anew, but they only acquired greater plausibility. No doubt I had been the victim of malicious artifice. Inclination, however, conjured up opposite sentiments and my fears began to subside. What motive, I asked, could induce an human being to inflict wanton injury?[49]

Of course, Mervyn's innocent reflections about man's inability to inflict "wanton injury" are parodic in the context of this novel packed with murder, larceny, and seduction.

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[48]Ibid., p. 98.

[49]Ibid., p. 28.

However, as a contrast to the horrifying "plausibilit[ies]" "revolved" by Mervyn (which engender the morbid state of "panick"), Brockden Brown inserts a charged word. At the redemptive and physiologically equilibrating moment of "opposite sentiments," Mervyn is not following the dictates of his reason but of his "inclination." And inclination, in the great, metaphysical sense that Jonathan Edwards gave it,[50] has nothing whatsoever to do with rational choice.

It is "inclination" that arouses "sentiments" against the suspect category of "plausibility." It is "inclination" that makes Mervyn's fears "subside," "inclination" that cures a system set off balance by the errors of deliberation. It is "inclination" that first emanates from and then perforates the terrifyingly closed system in which Mervyn finds himself locked.

Whenever Mervyn reasons, he is wrong, and whenever he follows his inclinations and sentiments, he is right. He is wrong when he reasons that he must see rather than simply deliver the message to Mrs. Wentworth, and this error plays directly into Welbeck's hands.[51] He is wrong when he concludes that "[Welbeck] surely meant not to mislead . . . by fallacious representations."[52] He is wrong when he goes against his impulse and helps Welbeck dispose of the murdered Captain Watson. Note

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[50]And as the Friendly Club discussed it. Recall that September, 1797 meeting. Elihu Smith must have possessed a particularly intimate understanding of this concept as a consequence of his post-graduate studies with Timothy Dwight.

[51]AM, p. 48.

[52]Ibid., p. 53.

how, in this pivotal post-crime scene, "deliberation" will be subsumed beneath a tide of "tumult," "rapidity," and "impulse."

> What would have been the fruit of deliberation if I had had the time or power to deliberate, I know not. My thoughts flowed with tumult and rapidity. To shut this spectacle from my view was the first impulse; but to desert this man, in a time of so much need, appeared a thankless and dastardly deportment.[53]

So Mervyn shuns the immediacy and power of "impulse" in favor of the structure of "deportment." He manages to control his involuntary nervous impulses just as the clinicians of his time were so intent on doing. And just as the clinicians were experiencing the failure of extraordinarily high morbidity rates, Mervyn himself becomes an unwitting accessory to murder (although he has quite logically concluded that "Welbeck intended me no evil."[54])

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[53]Ibid., p. 81.

[54]Ibid., p. 85. The medical science of theoretical taxonomies was not only coming under intense internecine pressure, but exterior pressure as well, as the discredited Benjamin Rush -- who had bled to death no less a light than George Washington -- was almost banished from Philadelphia. Elihu Smith remained loyal, declaring that "No man has been so infamously calumniated" (Diaries, p. 381) and flatly stating that "Dr. Rush . . . leads the way in professional science, in America" (p. 236). The disgrace of Benjamin Rush, like the opprobrium that had been heaped on John Brown, was perhaps felt quite deeply by Brockden Brown, and turned into a tremendous anxiety of voice. And then, despite the most desperate cathartic measures, Smith too became a statistic in the fruitless war against fever.

Even the arch-villain, Thomas Welbeck, in an uncharacteristic moment of candor (and, perhaps, pity), tries to convince Mervyn to be suspicious of reason and rationality by describing in detail "'[t]he facility with which mankind are misled in their estimate of characters, their proneness to multiply inferences and conjectures.'"[55] But nothing can convince Mervyn not to think.

When he gains possession of Lodi's twenty-thousand dollars, he launches into yet another rhapsody of incorrect reasoning, which results in the creation of a seemingly superfluous counter-narrative:

> The dying Lodi was unable to communicate all the contents of this inestimable volume. He had divided his treasure, with a view to its greater safety, between this volume and his pocket-book. Death hasted upon him too suddenly to allow him to explain his precautions. Welbeck had placed the book in his collection, purposing sometime to peruse it . . .[56]

If seduced into following such logic, a perfectly rational reader would be led to perfectly rational, and perfectly incorrect conclusions. As Mervyn comments from the darkness of the Thetford closet: "How baseless are the structures of falsehood which we

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[55]Ibid., p. 72.

[56]Ibid., p. 96.

build in opposition to the system of eternal nature."[57]

Again and again, Brown presents us with false narratives "reasoned" out by Mervyn:

> 'This,' I said, 'is the deed of Welbeck. He entered while I was absent from the room; he hied to his chamber and, prompted by some unknown instigation, has inflicted on himself death!'[58]

The narrative structure Mervyn has so meticulously deduced is, once again, absolutely incorrect. And thus Brockden Brown teaches his readers to suspect any disclosures of Mervyn's rational processes.

Of course, one of the major faults readers have found in the prose style of Brown's major period is the inordinate amount of time spent reiterating the tortuous interstices of reasoning that will ultimately prove to be completely invalid. Throughout his major period, Brown delights in giving his readers endless paragraphs of logical inference -- all fallacious![59] Why does Brown bother to provide his readers with such endless digressions, so endlessly deceiving?

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[57]Ibid., p. 31.

[58]Ibid., p. 63.

[59]In Ormond we have the long soliloquy of Sophia Westyn, while Constantia lies in a dead faint. In Wieland we have Catharine Wieland's endless cogitations. Edgar Huntly, too, is full of tortured ratiocinations.

> I had gained from my books confused ideas of European governments and manners. I knew that the present was a period of revolution and hostility. Might not [Welbeck and Clemenza Lodi] be illustrious fugitives from Provence or the Milanese? Their portable wealth, which may reasonably be supposed to be great, they have transported hither. Thus may be explained the sorrow that veils their countenance. The loss of estates and honours, the untimely death of kindred and perhaps of his wife, may furnish eternal food for regrets. . . . The more I revolved it, the more plausible it seemed.[60]

Brown has gone to great pains to narrate the process through which Mervyn "revolve[s]" such "plausible" yet absolutely incorrect theories. It almost seems as if Brown wants to let the reader in on these musings so that he or she will be tempted to accept Mervyn's reasoning -- and be misled. Instead of faulting Brown for these narrative red herrings, perhaps we should understand them as a subtle undermining of our own desires to draw inferences and theorise. Perhaps Brown is trying to teach his audience how to read a different way, by first enclosing it within some kind of narrative pit, then pressuring us into a pathological escape route based solely on a rational gridwork of arborescent theories severed from the bedrock of impulse, and ultimately forcing a morbid (that is, incorrect) emesis of

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[60] AM, pp. 43-44.

emplotment.

Indeed, right before Brockden Brown's great literary outburst of 1798-1800, Elihu Smith had severely admonished his friend for just these obscurantist throes of error-driven narration:

> We must know our errors, or how can we correct them? We must be informed of their whole extent, of their utmost virulence, or how can we apply the remedy? He deserves not the name of Physician, who, thro' fear of giving pain, temporizes with his Patient, when the ulcer threatens his life, & requires instant extirpation. To wound, is to save; to delay, is to destroy. . . . [T]rust not! withhold not! the poison sinks inward; a moment, & it preys upon the vitals.[61]

As a doctor, Smith reverenced the value of clear language as a diagnostic tool.[62] Words must perform an opening, cathartic function, no matter how painful. They cannot enclose, entrap, or occlude, without running the risk of inducing morbid states of excitement -- either cold torpor or hot fever -- in the reader. But Brockden Brown, having lost his faith in systematic

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[61] Diaries, p. 163.

[62] See, in particular, his instructions on interviewing patients in his 20 Dec. 1795 letter to Nathaniel Terry. Diaries, pp. 107-8. What emerges here, as well as from this excerpt from Smith's Diaries, is the unstated, assumed parallel between the writer and the clinician.

physiological formulas, could no longer accept such a naive reliance on mechanism. The idea of "remedy" as "instant extirpation" certainly possessed a powerful and dramatic logic, but was perhaps for just this reason entirely suspect.

Smith continues,

> Do you, of choice, give to the simplest circumstances the air of fiction? or have you been so long accustomed to deal in visionary scenes, to intertwine the real with the imaginary, & to enwrap yourself in the mantle of ambiguous seeming, that your pen involuntarily borrows the phraseology of fancy, & . . . diffuses round you the mist of obscuring uncertainty?[63]

Smith diagnoses his friend's unfettered urge towards narrative as an "involuntar[y]" and "diffus[ing]" impulse, clearly a case of cacöethes scribendi. But Brown, so acutely conscious of the clouded etiology of this disease, will demonstrate a medical sophistication far beyond Smith's. By mimetically deploying "the mist" of "ambiguous seeming" as a key component of his narrative style, he will threaten more than the already crumbling edifice of eighteenth-century physiology. By subverting the rational and privileging the involuntary, he will interrogate the basis not only of scientistic explanation, but of narrative itself.

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[63]Ibid.

For Arthur Mervyn, despite its subtitle, is not a "Memoir." Nor is it, like so many of its eighteenth-century peers, a picaresque novel. Nor does it rely, like The Castle of Otranto or The Mysteries of Udolpho (the gothic novels to which it has been incessantly compared) on delayed, rational explanation to achieve narrative clarity. Notwithstanding his reputation as a gothicist, Brockden Brown's intellectual set held these originating gothic novels in contempt.[64] And in contrast to Radcliffe, what little rational explanation Brockden Brown offers for his events are soon proven wrong. Instead of narrative as a "succession of contrivances," Brown's narrative workhorse is excitement, and nothing but excitement.

Compare the circuitous and misleading language that constitutes the "labor[]" of rational narrative to what is, throughout Brown, a more powerful and immediate mode of insight into truth -- "exclamation." Exclamation is language's equivalent to involuntary response, nervous immediacy that opposes the endless digressive problematics of reason. Thus, when Mervyn has

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[64]In a letter to his sister (who had loved Udolpho), Elihu Smith included this scathing review:

> The general character of [Radcliffe's] plan of writing appears to me, simply this: To excite & sustain curiosity, by a succession of contrivances . . . & when this is carried as far as it will bear, to clear up all the difficulties, by a disclosure of the insignificant machinery by means of which the illusions have been effected. . . . How marvellous the events have been, the causes are trifling . . . It appears the labour of a Mountain, to bring forth a mouse. . . . [E]very chapter abounds with tricks . . . & the style is a constant ringing of bells, & mists, & glens, & port-cullises, & moats . . . (Diaries, p. 182. The letter is dated 28 June 1796.)

gone to Thetford's counting house to deliver a message:

> 'Lo!' said [Thetford] carelessly, 'this from the Nabob!'
>
> An incident so slight as this was sufficient to open a spacious scene of meditation. This little word, half whispered in a thoughtless mood, was a key to unlock an extensive cabinet of secrets. Thetford was probably indifferent whether his exclamation were overheard. Little did he think on the inferences which would be built upon it. . . . Instead of forthwith returning home, I wandered into the fields to indulge myself in the new thoughts which were produced by this occurrence.[65]

"Exclamation" is the key that "unlocks" the "extensive cabinet of secrets." Where the labor of ratiocination fails, involuntary verbalization, "half whispered in a thoughtless mood," will open "a spacious scene of meditation." An entirely new train of associations and "inferences" will be built upon this impulsive utterance. Set off balance by Thetford's "exclamation," Mervyn will have to "wander[]" across many "fields" in order to "indulge" himself in his reaction.

Just as Brockden Brown was early prescribed a walking cure for his juvenile nervous infirmities, Mervyn walks to work off his excitement, equilibrate his response, regain his equanimity,

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[65]Mervyn, p. 59.

and thus incorporate pure impulse (which was, like the recently discovered advent of pure oxygen, both invigorating and intoxicating) into balanced circulations.[66] In the classic, Boerhaavian locus, excitement demands a physical outlet. But once again Brown subverts Boerhaave, for Mervyn's walking and reasoning brings him no closer to the truth of Thetford than he was before he heard the "exclamation." Yet it is "exclamation" that impels both Arthur Mervyn's body and Arthur Mervyn's plot into forward motion (as opposed to reason, which stagnates both).

Nervous impulse has replaced reason not only as the narrative's driving force, but as our protagonist's epistemological bedrock:

> The constitution of my mind is doubtless singular and perverse . . . It may by no means be uncommon for men to fashion their conclusions in opposition to evidence and probability . . . Thus it was, in an eminent degree, in my case.[67]

Thus, Mervyn confesses that his suspicions regarding the sexual victimization of Clemenza Lodi and the utter depravity of Thomas Welbeck have not emanated from his reasoning capability, but from some other form of sentient evidence. All competing claims of

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[66]For a recent economic interpretation of capitalist "circulation" in Brockden Brown, see Steven Watts, The Romance of Real Life (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994).

[67]AM, p. 58.

"evidence and probability" have been "suspended" by the involuntary shock of the truth. Again,

> [My] thoughts . . . were suspended by a new object. A small volume, that had, apparently, been much used, lay upon the toilet. I opened it, and found it to contain some of the dramas of Apostolo Zeno. I turned over the leaves; a written paper saluted my sight. A single glance informed me that it was English. For the present I was insensible to all motives that would command me to forbear. I seized the paper with an intention to peruse it.[68]

Thus does Mervyn, his "thoughts" "suspended," become "insensible" to all rational "motives" of restraint, and seize the paper in a rush of unstoppable impulse. The perceptive reader has by now learned to trust Mervyn's emotional impulses and to distrust "motives" that "would command" him "to forbear." Other readers, perhaps those most susceptible to the morbid contagion of rationality, will "multiply inferences and conjectures"[69] along with Mervyn, and thus find themselves endlessly bemazed and bewildered by this novel's labyrinthine emplotment.

As Grabo has noted, the kind of emplotment that most obsessed Brown was that which depended upon the coincidental interpenetration of individual nervous impulse and a sympathetic

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[68]Ibid., p. 62.

[69]Ibid., p. 72.

cosmos. By logically extending Robert Whytt's original clinical model of the healthy thought process as the combination or intermixture of sentient and rational principles (which implied that ideas themselves were mixed products from mixed sites), Erasmus Darwin had asserted that the origin of ideas themselves could not be strictly localized either within or without the body:

> Those trains or tribes of associate motions [i.e., ideas], the introductory links of which consist[] of an irritative motion, are termed irritative associations . . . Circles of associate motions, as well as trains and tribes of them, are liable to be affected by external influences, which consist of ethereal fluids, and which by penetrating the system, act upon it perhaps rather as a causa sine qua non of its movements, than directly as a stimulus; except when they are accumulated in unusual quantity.[70]

Since the Federalist space of both intellectual and physiological nervous influence (morbid and otherwise) crumbled boundaries between interior and exterior, there could be no strict line privileging open over enclosed areas. Franklin's faith in perfect circulation had been terminally infected by the great "Disorganizer" Septon, and one of the first casualties of this lapse was the Federalist idea of the idea, which had

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[70] Zoonomia, Vol. IV, p. 169.

transmogrified from an intellectual bedrock to an excitement-based, paranoia-inducing entity. Since exterior "fact" was made of the same stuff and substance as interior "trains or tribes of associate motions" (i.e., thought), there could henceforth be no easy distinction between unfounded and evidence-based logic. "Trains or tribes" of "irritative associations" governed (or misgoverned) both. As Mervyn notes:

> By this new train of ideas [italics are mine] I was somewhat comforted. I saw the folly of precipitate inferences and the injustice of my atrocious imputations, and acquired some degree of patience in my present state of uncertainty. My heart was lightened of its wonted burthen, and I laboured to invent some harmless explication of the scene that I had witnessed the preceding night.[71]

When, as above, Mervyn has laboriously cogitated himself into the ridiculous notion that Welbeck and Clemenza Lodi might be guiltless, and the guilt all his own,[72] Brown makes a point of fetishizing his reasoning process to the extent that it becomes a metatextual object of parody. "My heart was lightened . . . as I

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[71] AM, p. 58.

[72] Note the trope of the mind that "labor[s] to invent some harmless explication," the mind that thinks as opposed to reacts to impulse. Nervous response is not labored response. One of the first, nearly insurmountable problems of eighteenth-century neuroscientists was the fact that the nervous fluid or juice functions with a speed and immediacy unrivalled by any other system in the body.

labored to invent some harmless explication . . ." The "train of ideas" which could "penetrat[e] the [interior] system" could be just as harmful as the dread, nosology-tramping yellow fever itself. Thus, along with "exclamation," Brown repeatedly employs the trope of "precipitate inference,"[73] those strange and suggestive moments of sudden nervous symmetry between body and cosmos, in which an idea can no longer be structured as a moving vector or "train" (either penetrative, moving from outside to inside the body, or absorptive, that is completely bounded within the body), but as an instantaneous ligature.

Brown's relentless undermining of the language of reason and logic and theory (and consequent privileging of the autonomic language of "suspension," "exclamation" and "precipitate influence") clarifies why he obsessively details, ironizes and parodies Mervyn's outrageous yet perfectly logical conclusions, so opposed to the wisdom of Mervyn's impulse-based understanding:

> Events which, when foreseen, would most ardently have been deprecated, and, when they happened, were accounted in the highest degree luckless, were now seen to be propitious. Hence I inferred the infatuation of despair and the folly of precipitate conclusions.[74]

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[73]Ibid., p. 58.

[74]AM, p. 44.

Note the strict and formalistic quality of his language: "Hence I inferred . . . the folly of precipitate conclusions."[75] The irony here is that the only kind of conclusion that will ever help Mervyn -- and the only kind that will send the plot forward as opposed to sending it in dizzying circles -- will be "precipitate conclusions."

Precipitate conclusions are conclusions not of reason but of impulse, and thus precipitate conclusions induce narrative excitement and narrative circulation. Precipitate conclusions are conclusions of the heart and the stomach and the bloodstream, enteric conclusions (convulsions?) of affection, influence, "exclamation, "inclination," and what Welbeck calls "'instinct'"[76]; in short, precipitate conclusions are autonomic conclusions.[77] And for both Arthur Mervyn the morbid body and Arthur Mervyn the morbid text, the truth -- and maybe even the cure -- is autonomic.

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[75]Ibid.

[76]Ibid.

[77]Exclamation plays a vital role not only in Brown, but later throughout Emerson with his focus on escaping the "indurated hardness" of set routines of thinking; Whitman and his poetic translation of the aboriginal "barbaric yawp"; many of Hawthorne's descriptions, most notably Robin Molineux's final, awful, climactically sympathetic laugh; Poe and his literary science of manipulating impulsive response. What commences with Brockden Brown as a literary/clinical obsession about the relationship between ratiocination and nervous impulse will within a few decades become a paradigmatic American trope.

Chapter 5: Sympathy Unbound

An understanding of sympathetic reflexes and influences within organic bodies was a fundamental of eighteenth-century medical practice. The deep structure of sympathy had been mapped by the greatest clinicians of the day, and the nosologies of Sydenham, Cullen, Sauvages and Pinel were the bases for understanding the physiological dynamics of that single idea of disorder which promulgated itself through encyclopedic tomes of symptom and cure. As Rees noted in his dissertation/critique on the systems of Brown, Cullen, Darwin and Rush, "Sympathy, an expression so much used by almost all medical writers from Hippocrates down, constitutes the sine qua non of [Darwin's medical] theory."[1]

In this chapter I will argue that Brockden Brown gains his status as an originating figure in American literature largely because of his particular relationship with sympathy. It was Brown who relocated and redeemed sympathy by unchaining it from its medical prison house of increasingly unstable lines of efficacy and releasing it into a literary range characterized by unfettered power. No longer confined to specified paths and spatializations, no longer ramified along lines of an arborescent tree, with Brown the concept of nervous sympathy exploded into

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[1]John T. Rees, Remarks on the Medical Theories of Brown, Cullen, Darwin, & Rush (Philadelphia: Robert Carr, 1805), p. 55.

the nineteenth century.

In nervous science, sympathetic and autonomic are virtually synonymous terms. A modern reader, accustomed to the idea of sympathy as a wholly nonscientific entity, must first understand that sympathy was not a high-flown Romantic notion to the conservative Federalist clinician so much as a matter of "practical[]" necessity. It was sympathy that indicated the precise paths by which excitements and torpors circulated throughout the body, unifying the widest variety of seemingly distinct diseases. As Benjamin Rush observed,

> A correct knowledge of sympathies is of great practicality; thus by being acquainted with the sympathy between the head and stomach we may remove puking by bleeding, and a headache by puking; by knowing the sympathy between the stomach and the trachea, we are able to cure cynanche trachealis by a single puke. By knowing the sympathy between the stomach and feet, we are enabled to translate gout from the stomach to the feet. It is useful to know that the stomach sympathizes more with the trachea than with the lungs . . . [And b]y knowing the sympathy between the liver and stomach, we are enabled to cure dyspepsia by removing hepatitis. By knowing the sympathy between the nose and the intestines, we remove the itching of the nose, by dislodging worms from the intestines.[2]

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[2]Benjamin Rush, Lectures on the Mind, pp. 243-4.

A fellow Philadelphian and Manumission Society member, Brown had been introduced to Rush by Elihu Smith, who had studied under him and remained an acolyte and correspondent long after his student days. Undoubtedly the most influential doctor of Federalist America, Rush defies intellectual compartmentalization.[3] A signer of the Declaration of Independence, Rush published material concerning a broad array of topics, including "Directions for Conducting a Newspaper," "An Enquiry into the effects of public punishments upon criminals," "A plan for the establishment of public schools," and one of America's first works on personal hygiene, "Sermons to Gentlemen upon Temperance and Exercise."[4] On its own, such a rich assortment of written work suggests a tremendous potential for disciplinary cross-fertilization; from a figure as public and polemical as Rush, this astounding variety of texts signals a powerful deployment of medical thought into the social, political, educational, and cultural fabric of the young republic.

The concept of a single etiology for all disease was typical of the eighteenth century's theoretical bent, commonly taught in

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[3]Rush was the College of Philadelphia's first professor of chemistry, a member of the American Philosophical Society, and in April of 1777, appointed surgeon-general of what was then known as the "Middle Department" of the Continental army. Internationally renowned, Rush was a close friend of Joseph Priestley's, and one of the major reasons the atmospheric scientist and Unitarian minister emigrated to America in 1794.

[4]Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. XVI, ed. Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), pp. 227-231.

Edinburgh (where Rush, like John Brown, had studied under Cullen), and just as it had led Elihu Smith to his sustained effort to synthesize all epidemic disease under a single rubric of morbidity in "The Plague of Athens," it led Benjamin Rush to view all manner of infections, fevers, cancers, palsies and manias as sympathetic manifestations of his own pet theory.

William Cullen, following Robert Whytt, had taught the paramount importance of the nervous system; but Benjamin Rush privileged arteries over axons. He rejected the cephalocentric hypothesis and spent his life stubbornly insisting upon cardiocentrism and the medical priority of a phenomenon he called capillary tension. To quote his disciple John Rees once again, even "the disease of fever itself . . . consist[ed]" (for Rush) "of the . . . irregular, convulsive, or . . . morbid action of the blood vessels."[5]

Benjamin Rush understood the body as an ocean of blood within which undulated waves of involuntary sympathies. Even though his chosen media of transference (circulation) differed from Cullen's (nervous impulse), in both cases the dynamics of the message was the same, i.e., sympathy. Furthermore, as it was for Benjamin Franklin and Erasmus Darwin, Rush's key to the science of human life depended upon the stabilization or libration of unbalanced circulations. To complicate the matter, Rush sought to synthesize such circulatory notions with excitement-based clinical methods, and thus his theory dovetailed

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[5]Rees, Remarks, p. 68.

with the ideas of John Brown. As Rush's twentieth-century editors synopsized the issue,

> [H]ealth exists when the excitement is evenly distributed throughout the body. Any debility, either local or general, will lead to a relative accumulation of excitability, which can then be set off by a stimulus into an irregular or convulsive motion.[6]

Since the locus of all health was intravenous tension, in cases of excitement, debility or disease the correct intervention consisted of taking conscious, voluntary action to wrest control from what (in a healthy system) should have been a wholly involuntary, sympathetic function.[7] So Rush extracted ounce after ounce of blood to relieve the "suffocated excitement" of his patients, seeking all cures through the release of capillary pressure.[8]

Although obsessed with blood, Rush devoted much of his clinical research to that other wellspring of human excitement, the mind. To Rush, the physiological dynamics of the mind were virtually isomorphic with those of the blood. Fully convinced of

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[6]Lectures on the Mind, pp. 59-60.

[7]Even today, blood pressure is understood to be regulated by the agonistic governors of sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous impulses.

[8]As a result of this gruesome monomania, historians grant Dr. Rush the dubious distinction of bleeding George Washington to death.

the sympathetic relationship between mind and body, Rush has become known as the father of American psychiatry.[9] His fascination with the mentally disturbed is of particular interest to this study. Here, the broad analogy between Brown and Rush has been noted.

> Just as Dr. Benjamin Rush studied mental diseases in the University of Pennsylvania Hospital, so Brown deftly bared strange physical responses observable in delusion and hysteria.[10]

Rush's concept of "natural, and morbid" sympathies and their effects on our mental and physical health was structured by the great twin theoretical paradigms of circulation and digestion. On the most basic level, Rush considered "senses" as "the inlets of ideas." Furthermore, "ideas may be called the aliment of the mind."[11] Right in line with Darwin's theory of "trains or tribes" of "irritative associations,"

> These associations of ideas, like the bodily sympathies, are natural, and morbid; and as disease creates and multiplies sympathies that did not exist in health, so

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[9]Rush was known at the time for his humane treatment of the mentally ill, and the restraining chair he designed, although stylistically improved, is still in use.

[10]Harry R. Warfel, Charles Brockden Brown: American Gothic Novelist (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1949) p. 5.

[11]Lectures on the Mind, p. 244.

> delirium, madness and dreams create a thousand associations of ideas, all unrelated to each other, that do not occur in the healthy state of the mind.[12]

What are the implications of all this for Arthur Mervyn's body? When and where can we discover "disease" creating and multiplying "sympathies that did not exist in health"? Where in Brown's novel can we locate the morbid sympathies of "delirium, madness and dreams"? When does Mervyn's body collapse into the robotic mechanism of strictly ramified impulse, and when does it explode into a flurry of unbounded sympathetic response? In short, how do those narrative strategies we have pinpointed in the previous section (strategies that privilege involuntary impulse and autonomic language) mirror and perhaps even help to resolve the clinical disputes regarding the precise forms and therapeutic functions of sympathy that Brockden Brown and his intellectual set inherited from the late-eighteenth century work of John Brown, Erasmus Darwin, and Benjamin Rush?

One of the many ways Brown indicates Mervyn's status as a center of nervous sympathy is through his tears. Weeping was traditionally ordered among eighteenth-century nosologies of hypochondriac and nervous diseases. Darwin located "Lacrymarum fluxus sympatheticus" or "Sympathetic tears" under the broad, generalized rubric of a "Class IV" disease ("diseases of

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[12]Ibid., pp. 493-4.

association").[13] Darwin further classified "lacrymarum fluxus sympatheticus" as the first of many species of "Genus II" diseases, which were themselves classified as "Ordo I" of "Class IV" diseases, and as such included all diseases of "Increased Associate [that is, sympathetic] Motions" (such as "Flushing of the face after dinner," "Sweat from covering the face in bed," and the common cold). Darwin specifically describes "Sympathetic tears" as "A flow of tears from grief or joy":

> When a flow of tears is produced in grief, it is believed to relieve the violence of it . . . . Painful sensations, when great, excite the faculty of volition; and the person continues voluntarily to call up or perform those ideas, which occasion the painful sensation; that is, the afflicted person becomes so far insane or melancholy; but tears are produced by the sensorial faculty of association, and shew [sic] that the pain is so far relieved as not to excite the excessive power of volition, or insanity, and are therefore a sign of the abatement of the painful state of grief, rather than a cause of that abatement.[14]

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[13] "Sympathetic tears" were specifically mapped as Darwin's first "Species" of "Genus II" diseases (diseases that are "Catenated with Sensitive Motions"), along with disorders such as "Sternutatio a lumine" ("Sneezing from light"), "Risus sardonicus" ("Sardonic smile"), gout, rheumatism, smallpox, mumps, and "Tension of the nipples of lactescent women at sight of the child." Other species of "Genus II" diseases included "Tooth-edge from grating sounds," "Flux of saliva at sight of food," "Tension of the penis in hydrophobia," "Cramp from diarrhoea," and "Swelled testes in gonorrhoea." See Zoonomia, Vol. IV, pp. 159-60.

[14] Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 196-7.

Note how closely Darwin's clinical description coincides with the structure of Mervyn's narratology as noted in the previous section. Tears are a "relie[f]" and an "abatement" because they indicate the suppression of an "excessive power of volition," which left to its own devices would lead to "melancholy" or "insanity." In other words, tears, as exterior sympathetic indicators of interior involuntary response,[15] demonstrate the body's relinquishment of its morbid penchant to drive itself crazy with excessive thought. The clinical structure of tears thus mirrors the impotence of Arthur Mervyn's ratiocinative pathologies over and against his involuntary redemptions. (It is interesting to note here that "Ratiocinatio verbosa," "Verbal reasoning" itself, appeared under the Darwinian category of "Diseases of Volition.")[16]

As a result of such capacity for clinical libration, methods to induce tears are listed as elements of Part III of Zoonomia, the volume in which Darwin lists "The Articles of the Materia Medica, with an account of the Operation of Medicines."[17] Here,

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[15]In the case of tears, the "chain of associated actions" is entirely involuntary:

> [T]he secretion of the lacrymal gland is increased by whatever stimulates the surface of the eye, at the same time the increased abundance of tears stimulates the puncta lacrymalia into greater action; and the fluid thus absorbed stimulates the lacrymal sac, and its nasal duct in the nose into greater action. (Ibid., p. 194)

[16]Ibid., Vol IV., p. 149.

[17]Title page.

tears appear under the broad category of "Secernentia," i.e.,

> [t]hose things which increase the irritative motions, which constitute secretion . . . which are as various as the glands which they stimulate into action.[18]

The depth and breadth of the category of Secernentia under the rubric of Materia Medica indicates that the late eighteenth-century medical practitioner understood as standard clinical procedure numerous methods of sympathetically inciting almost every organ of the body into secretionary throes of involuntary response in order to wage war against "Diseases of Volition," chief among them the ravages of ratiocination.[19]

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[18]Ibid., Vol. III, p. 451. The broad category of "Secernentia" presented here included lists of "Diaphoretics" (sweat-inducing drugs), "Sialagogues" (saliva-inducing drugs), "errhines" (mucus-inducing drugs), "Expectorants," "Diuretics" and other "Cathartics."

[19]Inciting tears appears as the tenth category of "Secernentia":

> The secretion of tears is increased by volatile salts, the vapour of onions, by grief, and joy. (Ibid., p. 452)

And later,

> The secretion of tears is increased either by applying acrid substances to the eye; or acrid vapours, which stimulate the excretory duct of the lacrymal gland; or by applying them to the nostrils, and stimulating the excretory duct of the lacrymal sack . . . (Ibid., p. 468)

And finally,

> Secretion of tears is increased by vapour of sliced onion, of volatile alcali. By pity, or ideas of hopeless distress. (472)

Note how "ideas of hopeless distress" could possess a positive

For example, the cure of the volitionary disease of "Maror"[20] or "Grief," could be approached through a clinical stimulation of tears. Therefore,

> [i]n violent grief, when tears flow, it is esteemed a good symptom; because then the actions caused by sensitive association take the place of those caused by volition; that is, they prevent the voluntary exertions of ideas, or muscular actions, which constitute insanity.[21]

As opposed to our post-modern pursuit of "sanity" and happiness by means of any and all neuropharmacological additions to the materia medica, Federalist tears were revered to the point that when clinically induced, they were understood as a "good symptom" of the body's involuntary, sympathetic systems returning to its rightful position of ascendancy. According to Darwin, there was only one cure more effective than tears:

> In the first hours of grief the method of consolation used by Uncle Toby, in Tristram Shandy, is probably the best; 'he sat down in an arm chair by the bed of his distressed

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clinical purpose.

[20]The philological root of maror leads us to the Hebrew for bitter herbs, a staple of Passover menus. Maror tropes the grief and suffering of the ancient Hebrews in Egypt; as a dish (usually horseradish) it actually incites tears. Thus, within the cross-genre context of eighteenth-century medicine, maror can ironically be understood as both disease and cure.

[21]Zoonomia, Vol. IV, p. 88.

friend, and said nothing.'[22]

The first irony of this textual allusion is that it suggests that saying "nothing" is more helpful than discourse, which obliquely mirrors Mervyn's dumbness at almost every climactic moment of the text. Moreover, the invocation of Sterne clearly privileges retrograde logic and sentimental reaction (not to mention the narratologically digressive) over and against rational and strictly mechanistic approaches. But what perhaps strikes us as most strange about such a literary apparition within a clinical text is that it cannot simply be dismissed as one of Erasmus Darwin's personal quirks. Benjamin Rush, too, employed Sterne as a medical exemplum:

> Laughing is said to encrease [sic] and prolong human life, according to Stern[e]. The common saying of 'Laugh and be fat,' seems to establish its efficacy upon the health and figure of the body. But it is less notorious, that crying in infancy has a wonderful influence upon health and life. It is frequently connected with the first openings of passion. I have seen so many instances of the salutary effects of crying . . .[23]

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[22]Ibid., p. 89.

[23]Lectures on the Mind, pp. 134-5. It is an unsettling yet unavoidable conclusion that Sterne appears here as a literary/clinical antecedent of Norman Cousins.

Both Darwin and Rush seem perfectly unaware of how Sterne's comic critique of his century's theory-driven academicism might apply to themselves. Rush is perfectly content to coopt Sterne's concept of laughter, catenate it with a standard theory of tears and make them both homologous to his own Shandian hobbyhorse, i.e., venesection or the "opening[]" of veins to reduce capillary pressure.

Darwin would have agreed with Rush that the emesis of tears was a form of opening, excretion or Secernentia; but where the two clinicians would have parted was over venesection, which Darwin categorized under the rubric of Sorbentia,

> [t]hose things which increase the irritative motions, which constitute absorption . . . [which] are as various as the absorbent vessels which they stimulate into action.[24]

Sorbentia was "Article IV" of Darwin's taxonomy of Materia Medica, and its eighth form included "Venesection, hunger, thirst, and violent evacuations, [which] increase all absorptions."[25] In short, Darwin understood venesection as a method of increasing a weakened body's power to absorb exterior

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[24]Zoonomia, Part III, p. 472.

[25]Ibid., p. 474. This leads to the conjecture that the bleeding, "hunger" and "thirst" of Edgar Huntly may be understood as clinical factors, indicating that his identification with (or absorption into the maniacal sphere of) Clithero Edny would eventually become too pronounced. As clinical symptoms they form a prognosis for the novel's morbid and disastrous climax, in which Huntly's ratiocinative power becomes tragically subsumed beneath what has become both an omnipotent and vengeful autonomic daimon.

agents of sensory or nervous excitement, while Rush saw venesection as the opposite, a body's release of pent-up, interiorized excitement. Such a pronounced theoretical divergence regarding the most basic structural armature of a medical staple such as venesection not only indicates the extreme pressure established methods of cure were experiencing during these watershed years, but the reaction formation to such anxieties of unresolved conflict, i.e, the fully accepted, clinically "enlightened" idea of mysterious commerce between secretion and absorption. Darwin seemed untroubled by any structurally compromising implications inherent in his flat statement that many drugs possessed a "double effect, and belong either to the class of Secernentia or Sorbentia, according to the dose in which they are exhibited."[26]

The complex (and, at times, logically insupportable) structure of absorption thus flowered into its virtually endless capacity for cross-genre possibilities. On the exteriorized level of "Climate, Soil, [and] Temperature," it could be understood in terms of the terribly ambiguous relationship of Americans to their frontier, an absorptive geography tropically polarized between opportunities for enrichment and the terrifying threat of savagery.[27] On the interior, physiological level ("Diet [and]

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[26]Ibid., p. 454.

[27]As Steven Watts has noted, Brown was from an early age obsessed with maps. (See Romance of Real Life, p. 28). Moreover, geography was just as fascinating to Brown's intellectual set as clinical issues were. Brown, along with his medical intimates Elihu Smith and Samuel Mitchill, were all founding members of the American Mineralogical Society. Indeed, geography and medicine had not yet become separate entities to the Federalist intellectual,

Health"), absorption was both unavoidable and dangerous; yet Sorbentia was also a key to clinical intervention, and thus possessed the capacity to cure human bodies. On the most basic level, to understand the strange, sometimes contradictory laws of absorption was to understand the underpinnings of osmotic commerce, the relationship of what is inner to what is outer.

To the Federalist clinician, bodies were prime examples of dark, mysterious pits, "receptacles of infection"[28] into which miasmatic influence (like Septon's disorganizing principle) could not help but be absorbed. Such absorption within the bodily pit consequently produced a pendulum swing[29] of sympathetic secretions, which, absorbed once again within "various . . . glands", and secreted yet again, created a terrifying trope out of mechanism itself (which had been, since Newton, the bedrock of Enlightenment science). Of particular importance to Brown, the morbid mechanism of disequilibrated absorptions and secretions of excitements played a tremendous role within the various and conflicting late-eighteenth theories of fevers, which reached its crisis point in Federalist America during the 1793 and 1798 yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia and New York. As we have seen, fever not only drove the cross-category literary efforts of

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as the endless inclusion of tables of climatological data in The Medical Repository indicates. The Repository was replete with essays that sought a relationship between climatology and health, most of them written by Mitchill.

[28]AM, p. 5.

[29]The verbal play on Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" is wholly conscious.

Brockden Brown's closest friend, but became the mastertrope of both Ormond and Mervyn.

Viewed within the mysterious structural commerce of absorption and secretion, the famous conundrum of Arthur Mervyn, "Who and what was Welbeck?"[30] becomes a question that not only interrogates standard literary definitions of character and personality but also historicized clinical notions of involuntary sympathies and influences. In order for the reader to hear "Welbeck's Tale," Mervyn must first be absorbed into the arch-villain's system or sphere of influence; only after he -- and we with him -- have been sucked into this primary level of containment can he be absorbed again by Welbeck's narrative. Absorption thus structures much of the drama of the novel, which stems from the various play of opinions regarding whether or not Mervyn can remain uninfected by the contagious miasmata of Welbeck's awful essence which, like Septon, disorders all it seduces.

As has been suggested, the clinical trope of tears provides one mode of entry into the difficulty of understanding Welbeck's and Mervyn's interrelated case of morbid secretions and absorptions. In fact, a good deal of their relationship revolves around tears. At Welbeck's house for dinner Mervyn feels his "inexplicable melancholy increase[]" until he becomes "weak enough to shed tears."[31] However, opposed to Mervyn's rational conclusion of his "weak[ness]," Federalist clinicians would have

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[30]AM, p. 53.

[31]Ibid., p. 54.

noted healthy osmotic commerce, the unoccluded circulation of outer impulse from inner feeling, a "catenat[ion]" of involuntary "with Sensitive Motions" insuring Mervyn's hold on his sanity.[32] Although Mervyn believes his tears to be a sign of debility, the fact that Mervyn so easily is brought to tears makes him not only an early American example of what would become the archetype of a sentimental hero, but a clinical paradigm of equilibrated sympathy. His "weak[ness]," rendered as a play of his autonomic nervous system, becomes health.

Mervyn's Lacrymarum fluxus sympatheticus as a primary trope of involuntary nervous sympathy is mirrored in different ways throughout this novel. Susan Hadwin offers Mervyn an opportunity for mechanistic dominance, a nonreciprocal, disequilibrated relationship, the kind of morbid manipulation of sympathetic influence that Ormond allows himself to revel in with Helena Cleves. When understood within clinical parameters, Mervyn's rejection of Hadwin in favor of the older and less attractive Ascha Fielding, a rejection that to many readers has seemed improbable, simply underscores and reiterates a nervous sensorium's salubrious insistence on endless circles of energic ebb and flow. Ironically, Mervyn's involuntary, "sentient"

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[32]In a fairly standard gendered reading, such as we find in Philip Gould's Covenant and Republic (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1966), the weeping Mervyn would read as an androgenous Mervyn: "[T]he legacies of republican vigor and Common Sense affection implicitly made androgyny . . . the unspoken logic of early republican manhood" (p. 27). But to consider the man of feeling as occupying a sexual middleground would be to essentialize what was at that historic moment a fluctuating category of nervous response. Such an interpretation is at best proleptic, and at worst anachronistic and patronizing.

impulse towards free-flowing sympathy (as opposed to sharply directionalized, normatively eroticized sympathy) can just as easily be interpreted as a sober, voluntary and "rational" refusal to manipulate.

What happens to Susan's sister, Eliza, under the influence of the villain Wallace, demonstrates the dark mode of Brown's literary deployment of clinical sympathy. Wallace's romantic manipulation and subsequent abandonment of Eliza clearly amount to literary villainy, but what is less obvious is how these actions delineate a clinical structure in strict opposition to Mervyn's mode of nervous commerce. Susan and Eliza as sisters and healthy sympathetic doubles "smiled and . . . wept in unison."[33] They act in perfect nervous sympathy, circulating their "sentient" responses. While Mervyn will not romantically interpose himself between the sisters, Wallace opposes their equilibrated harmony. Even though Eliza is a "soft enthusiast in whose bosom devotion and love glowed with an ardour that has seldom been exceeded," Wallace will not physically return to her, let alone return her passion.

While Wallace's initial manipulative action in this book led to Mervyn being locked up in the Thetford mansion with no clear means of physical escape, it is now his manipulative lack of action that seals Eliza's emotional circulation. Eliza's sentiments, harnessed to a single point, can discover no means of escape. "Wallace's delays" can be read as a nervous occlusion

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[33]AM, p. 94.

that quite literally becomes "fatally injurious to the health of his mistress." And so Eliza eventually devolves into "paroxysms of a furious insanity."[34]

Madness and melancholia due to unrequited passion are nothing new to literature, but Eliza's descent into insanity seems to be particularly relevant to the structure of disequilibrated impulses. Instead of experiencing the cyclic relief of emptying out and then being filled with circulated sympathy, her occlusion from reciprocal "sentien[ce]" becomes the essence of her morbid mental imbalance. Unlike Eliza Hadwin, Mervyn will not until the very end of the second part of this novel fix any specific target for his sympathetic focus. Instead, Mervyn will find widely variegated avenues of release for his nervous energy. Every part and particle of the world warrants his sympathetic absorptions and secretions.

Wallace and Welbeck present nervous mirror images of Mervyn.[35] While Mervyn's sympathetic responses are undistorted windows of his interior state, Wallace and Welbeck are masters of disguise; they possess a preternatural ability to manipulate their sentient responses in a way that morbidly separates the clinical category of the rational and the voluntary from the clinical category of the sentient and the involuntary. As

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[34]Ibid., p. 100.

[35]Brown, obsessed with his characters names, quite consciously mirrored the W's of his villains into the M of his hero. Brown and Smith were both extremely focussed on the most basic aspects of inscription. Following Rush's oft-repeated advice, they created and shared their own shorthand method. And it is intriguing to speculate how "Mervyn" almost perfectly encrypts "nerve."

previously noted, Welbeck thus anticipates and serves as a model for a number of Nathaniel Hawthorne's influence mongers, villains such as Westervelt and Chillingworth and Rappaccini, evil manipulators of sympathetic arts who can both abstract and increase excitement in others for the sake of their own morbid expansion of influence. Unlike the Mervyns of the world, Brown's villains understand the cash value of the Franklinian imperatives regarding conscious harnessing of involuntary impulses. Thus, concomitant with their commitment to influence comes their mastery of all manner of disguise, the ability to portray "symptoms" that are sympathetically unconnected to their true cause.[36] Brown's heroes have a stake in a conscious obscuration of their involuntary impulses, so disguise comes as naturally to Ormond and Carwin as it does to Welbeck.

Informed of his financial ruin, Welbeck declares that

> 'The utmost efforts were demanded to conceal my thoughts . . . . The anguish that preyed upon my heart was endeavoured to be masked by looks of indifference. . . . My mind, however, was the theatre of discord and agony . . . '[37]

For Welbeck, passion for an exterior object of affection only lasts as long as an interior impulse, and has no part in the

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[36]Apotheosized in the "biloquism" of Carwin, the ultimate disguise, which heightens his sympathetic power to manipulate and transparently expand his own desires.

[37]AM, p. 77.

mutuality of affective circulation. It is a strictly personal vector. Welbeck's passion perverts equilibration and subverts mutuality for its own, solipsistic ends. As Welbeck admits to Mervyn: "'The passion [for Clemenza], I now found myself disposed to ascribe chiefly to fortuitous circumstances, to the impulse of gratitude and the exclusion of competitors.'"[38] Passion or nervous excitement that is not circulatory is, by definition, morbid. And it is this imbalance between efflux and influx of sympatheties that defines both John Brown's clinical disorder and Brockden Brown's literary villain.

Welbeck's unequilibrated, masked and consequently morbid intermixture of indolence (the clinical categories of torpor, stupor, atony and "cold fit") and passion (the clinical categories of frenzy, excitement, fever and "hot fit") lead to his financial ruin and death. On the other hand, Mervyn's redemptive body chemistry, although it has imbibed the morbid airs of contagious miasmata, will osmotically transform them into retrograde forms of nutriment. Mervyn is an anti-Septon, but his antiseptic qualities are not machine-like, not a matter of re-ordering and re-organizing, not the mode of clinical practice which had made William Cullen's taxonomic work most vulnerable to John Brown's bitter polemical attacks. Mervyn's cathartic force constitutes a rebirth of order itself, a new order of sympathy. For Mervyn experiences direct, unfixed fluxes of nervous energy from the world directly into his senses (radical Sorbentia), and

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[38]Ibid., p. 75.

from his inner impulses out into the world (untrammeled Secernentia).

How does this absolute unfixedness of sympathetic response manifest itself? One of the most obvious symptoms that indicate the extraodinary activity of Mervyn's absorptive system is his penchant for going into shock. Even more than tears, the involuntary domain of shock prepares the way for a rebirth of sympathetic orders. But the textual irony of employing shock as a textual curative is that it, like tears, inhibits speech. Speech, the example par excellence of textual order, must cease before it can be reborn. Arthur Mervyn is as a consequence just as much about what makes the hero stop speaking as that which makes him speak.

On his way to a cold bath in the middle of the night (one of Rush's prescribed remedies for fever), Mervyn runs across Welbeck exiting Clemenza Lodi's bedroom: "[Welbeck's] emotion seemed to communicate itself, with an electrical rapidity, to my heart. My tongue faltered . . . "[39] The fact that intense emotion occluded language was, like the mechanistic vectoring of sympathy, another given of Federalist physiology. Rush noted "the sympathy of the nerves of the tongue with the whole body."[40] Thus, on the normative level of nervous mechanism, temporary muteness signalled an overwhelming build-up of latent intra-body excitability, in which case the tongue itself might have to be

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[39]Ibid., p. 56.

[40]Lectures on the Mind, p. 265.

administered a cathartic, some external ointment that, once applied, would increase salivation, which was thought to release nervous pressure.

Vocal salivation was nothing less than Elihu Smith's particular point of fascination with mercurial cathartics. He was obsessed with the salubrious effects of "Secernentia," particularly Darwin's category of "Sialagogues, [such] as mercury internally, and pyrethrum externally."[41] To Smith, the loosing of energies from the nerve center of the tongue invariably signalled a psychological climacteric. He expressed some of his findings in a note published in the first volume of The Medical Repository, the first article on mental health that ever appeared in an American medical journal.

"Mary Matthews was admitted into the New-York Hospital, August 16, 1796. . . ."

> 23rd. No material alteration. She had taken no food; has not slept; and . . . her strength is very much diminished. I resolved to try the effect of salivation; hoping that if I could succeed in exciting a powerful action in the absorbent system, it would divert a part of the vital energy from the muscles, and awaken the torpid power of the brain, stomach and bowels. Three drachms of strong mercurial ointment were accordingly rubbed in by the morning of the

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[41] Zoonomia, Vol. III, p. 451.

> 24th. And her gums were now slightly affected. As this soreness of the mouth . . . increased, she grew calm and rational; took food, purging powders of jalap and calomel . . .
>
> 25th. The mercurial frictions were renewed. They excited a gentle salivation, and brought back her reason.[42]

The cathartic of "salivation" brought Matthews "back her reason," i.e., her ability to speak again, to tell coherent stories, to awaken from the throes of mania into normative societal codes behavior. Like Mary Matthews, Mervyn also becomes a victim of what were generally known as paralytic "affections of the mind,"[43] and like an eighteenth-century decorticated frog, often finds himself in a state of shock.[44] Unlike Matthews, however, when Mervyn emerges from these faux-deaths it is not necessarily back to the normative world of narrative behavior:

> I shall omit to describe the shock which a spectacle like this communicated to my unpractised senses. I was nearly as panic-struck and powerless as Welbeck himself. I gazed, without power of speech, . . . at Welbeck; then I

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[42]The article was signed by "E. H. Smith, Physician." See "Case of Mania Successfully Treated by Mercury," The Medical Repository, Volume 1, No. 2, Article VI, pp. 174-6.

[43]Zoonomia, I, p. 390.

[44]Robert Whytt, the discoverer of the autonomic nervous system, is also credited with the discovery of shock -- how the system will stop after severe trauma, then after five or ten minutes of suspended animation, start up again.

> fixed terrified eyes on the distorted features of the dead.[45]

Again, when Welbeck jumps out of the boat he shares with Mervyn in the middle of the night, Mervyn declares that "I had no time to determine whether this was designed or accidental. Its suddenness deprived me of the power to exert myself for his succour."[46] Mervyn's loss of the ability to control his own voluntary actions or "Sensitive Motions" results in states of catatonic "delirium."[47]

> The transactions of the last three days resembled the monstrous creations of delirium . . . . They exercised a bewildering and stupefying influence on my mind . . . Gradually I recovered the power of arranging my ideas and forming conclusions.[48]

Of course, recovering "the power of arranging . . . ideas and forming conclusions" is not necessarily a good thing for Arthur Mervyn, considering that every "conclusion" he reasons is wrong. But what if this "recovered" "power" is actually an example not of rational power on its own but of rational power wedded to

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[45]AM, p. 64.

[46]Ibid., p. 88.

[47]The fourth "Order" of Cullen's "Neuroses."

[48]Ibid.

sentient or enteric understanding?

Jay Fliegelman has persuasively argued that the disturbingly unfixed potentials inherent within the structure of emotional sympathy were one of the most prominent Federalist foci of anxieties:

> [T]o believe that man could indeed experience another individual's pain, was to do more than facilitate the advent of a new age of compassion. It was to make the human mind and heart vulnerable to a new kind of invasion . . . Sympathy made man vulnerable not only to the misrepresentations of fraudulent beggars and petitioners playing on the automatic moral sense, but to the tyrannical 'disease' of draining excitations and constant feeling and sensation.[49]

In part, the impulse for my work in this dissertation originates as an urge to historicize Fliegelman's insight within the clinical science of this period. Yet the closer I have examined the dynamics of sympathy at this critical moment in its development, the more complicated, threatening and metaphorically rich it has become. Part of this difficulty (and richness) stems from a metatextual parallel: Just as a clever writer can consciously manipulate autonomic response (such as tears, heightened respiration, heartbeat, blood pressure) a clever

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[49]Jay Fliegelman, Prodigals and Pilgrims (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1982), pp. 231-2.

clinician can read, interpret and quite consciously manipulate the autonomic systems of his patient.[50] Furthermore, throughout the work of Brown the concept of sympathy is fraught with masks which disguise, block and mechanistically fix the penetrative powers of absorption and secretion, which double back upon the embedded structural masks, disguises and fixes of writing itself.[51]

> [My tears] excited afresh his surprise and [Welbeck's] sympathy. He renewed his inquiries; my heart was full, but how to disburthen it I knew not. At length, with some difficulty, I expressed my wishes to leave his house and

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[50]Arthur Mervyn provides a model for Stanley Fish's theoretical structure elaborated in terms of the transformative dialectic of the "Good Physician" over and against the purely rhetorical dialectics of the "Bad Physician. See, in particular, the Introduction to Self-Consuming Artifacts (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972).

[51]Sound itself possess a latent capacity for psychological dissimulation and disguise. Ruminating on the sympathetic power of sound, Rush uncannily prefigures what may be literary America's archetypal autonomic exemplum:

> We learn the nature of sounds likewise only by experience. Of this Dr. [Thomas] Reid informs us of a striking proof. He tells us that he was once suddenly terrified as he lay in his bed, and heard a violent thumping which led him to rise more than once . . . and to open his door to see if any body knocked, nor did he discover for some time that the noise he heard was occasioned by the violent palpitation of heart, brought on by fear. The Doctor had never heard that sensation before. (Lectures on the Mind, p. 339.)

The implications of this excerpt run so wide and deep that all of them cannot be given a full treatment here. But at least one obvious question must be raised: Did Edgar Allan Poe, known for his reading of clinical texts, receive inspiration for "The Tell-Tale Heart" from Benjamin Rush, from Thomas Reid, or from both?

return into the country.[52]

Welbeck's "excited" level of "sympathy" leads to Mervyn's cathartic release or "disburthen" of interior pressure. Yet Welbeck's "sympathy" is not an involuntary response to Mervyn's "melancholy," but as soon becomes clear, a manipulative attempt to induce an emotional emesis. Welbeck appears as both doctor and reader here, while Mervyn, grateful that "this man condescended to expostulate with me," appears as a book whose textual "heart" has been "penetrated."[53] Of course, such manipulative "penetrat[ion]" into one of the body's sympathetic cores -- the autonomically pumping heart -- could be redemptive, but like Rush's single-minded venesections, it could also signal grave danger. Perhaps this scene serves as a subtle metatextual warning to readers of this book: Do not rely on the critical power of purely rational theory alone to unmask meanings here. Instead of "reading" like Welbeck (that is, homologically parallel to Rush), perhaps we should learn to "read" like Mervyn.

After the murder of Captain Watson, Mervyn becomes the intra-textual auditor of Welbeck's tale and declares that "every faculty was absorbed."[54] If this is the way we, too, should be yielding our psychological attention to the text, then reading itself has become not so much a rational as a sentient principle,

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[52]AM, p. 54.

[53]Ibid., p. 54.

[54]Ibid., p. 81.

an absorptive/secretive ratio of nervous fluids. Such total absorption into the excitements of a tale can be extremely risky; it can shock our interior systems into torpor, it can force us to emit tears.

Absorptive, Mervynian reader response thus reflects the anxieties of Federalist science on a number of fronts. Brown's description of Mervynian reading alludes not only to current physiological theory and the faculty psychology of the Scottish Common Sense movement, but also to the even newer science of atmospherics, which projected Thomas Willis' "nervous juyce" into a universalized nervous fluid laden with miasmatic influence that could be absorbed through the "airs," climate, and nutriment.[55] All of which suggests a scientistic response to the question that has stymied so many of Brown's interpreters: "Who and what was Wellbeck?"

One of the effects of the complex reification of involuntary systems that occurred at the end of the eighteenth century was the contemporaneous emergence of what was destined to become an archetypal figure in American literature: The totalizing solipsist who, ironically, possesses no identity. Like Welbeck, Arthur Mervyn's brand of osmotic commerce overreaches the

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[55]For Joseph Priestley, absorptive "airs" were carriers of the mysterious phlogistic impulse we "imbibe" with every breath. And even those scientists who argued throughout the pages of The Medical Repository that "phlogiston" was a fiction would have most likely agreed that Lavoisier's "principe oxygine" was a key constituent of that unknown ambient factor, "excitability." No matter which polemical side they took, they knew that the gas absorbed by the lungs was a key constituent of the body's nervous sensorium.

normative realm of his own body's absorptive glands. Like Welbeck, Mervyn breaks barriers and subsumes multitudes within his own sympathetic influence.[56] At the same time, both Welbeck and Mervyn resist efforts to reduce their identities into normative quotients of character and individuation.

As more than one generation of critics has shown, Arthur Mervyn quite literally cannot be penetrated by the textual gaze constructed by Brown. Foucault has observed that "in order to know the truth of the pathological fact [within the medicine of this transitional period] the doctor [had to] abstract the patient."[57] As the quintessential example of hero-as-clinical subject, the "truth" of Arthur Mervyn's character -- like the "truth" of Welbeck's character -- must forever remain invisible, absorbed, abstracted.

The clinical mastertropes of absorption and secretion thus help to explain the textual extravagance of Arthur Mervyn. Neither character development nor narrative coherence nor any other normatively objective criteria of well-made tales governs the action, but sympathy alone blooms unfettered out of the shattered structure. "Excitability" ensues from textual absorption on every level and defines the relationship Brown desires with his reader: To induce -- and even seduce -- sympathy at the expense of character and plot, under any and all textual

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[56]A few decades later, Walt Whitman will forge a poetic identity out of such perforated and subsuming ideas of a self that "contain[s] multitudes."

[57]Birth of the Clinic, p. 8.

conditions.

If the intellectual basis of narrative understanding was, to Brown, "sentient" and thus aligned with the conflicted physiological structures of absorption and secretion, it comes as no surprise that, consequent to Mervyn's own "absorption" into Welbeck's narrative, Mervyn must revise his thinking about thinking: "My understanding was bemazed, and my senses were taught to distrust their own testimony."[58] Sympathy has thus established itself as both the most highly suspect and the only possible ground for Robert Whytt's post-Cartesian epistemology, which consisted of individual physiologies in which "the sentient and rational principle must be acknowledged to be one."

If Mervyn personifies a certain kind of reading as osmotic commerce, then his auditory/absorptive relationship to Welbeck's tale-within-a-tale develops Fliegelman's anxiety of sympathetic influence into a notion of "slave[ry]" often articulated in the diaries of Elihu Smith:

> My faculties seem weighed down, by an universal torpor. How pitiful -- thus to be the slave of physical impotence! In the prime of life, how vigorous, active, alert, & elastic, ought I to be -- instead of being, as I am, the sport of every change of temperature, & variation of atmospheric gravity.[59]

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[58] AM, p. 81.

[59] Diaries, p. 80. The entry is from 24 October 1795.

The essence of Smith's complaint is that his spiritual health is not, as Emerson would put it a few decades later in his own genre-crossing literary/botanical style, "endogenous."[60] Like one of Darwin's specimens from The Botanic Garden, Smith cannot escape being mechanistically enchained by "every change of temperature, & variation of atmospheric gravity."[61]

Phenomena such as the unwilling penetration of "torpor" and "impotence" into bodies, and their subsequent usurpation of "vigor[]" and "elastic[ity]" would become a staple of the Gothic and Romantic ethos of, as Keats would put it, "unwilling sleep."[62] Such usurpation indicated the penetration of a death force into the realm of the living, as opposed to observing a strict boundary between these two categories. What has less generally been noted is that this melding of death into life was an outgrowth of scientistic culture. In particular, the findings of atmospheric science had a grave effect on the modern conception of our bodies: They helped pave the way for the final destruction of single-etiology medical theory.

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[60]"Man is that noble endogenous plant which grows, like the palm, from within, outward." See "Uses of Great Men" in Emerson: Essays and Lectures (New York: Library of America, 1983), p. 616.

[61]Against this backdrop, imagine the vast cultural relief of Thoreau declaring his independence of all exterior influence: "Morning is when I am awake and there is dawn in me." Walden II, 14.

[62]"On Seeing the Elgin Marbles."

As Stephen Nissenbaum has shown, the French clinician Xavier Bichat was well read in America.[63] Bichat discerned that diseases had seats in various tissues, and that the influenced tissues were not simply sympathetic (and thus deterministic, mechanistic) outgrowths of excitement or atonicity, but were in themselves causal localities. This concept of a seat allowed doctors to conceptualize disease as "stages of [a] moving death."

> These [tissual] processes indicate only in an incidental way the fatality of the disease; they speak of the permeability of life by death . . .[64]

Brockden Brown anticipates Bichat's clinical breaking of the sacred vessels that separated the visceral antinomies of life and death. Within Brown's major work the idea of death (like its short-lived clinical stand-in, Septon), begins to emanate from all points on the map, penetrating all systems. At the same time death begins to read not as a final stasis but as the dire dynamism of mechanism, the very same mechanism that had served as nothing less than the bedrock of medical science since Boerhaave.

In Brown, the penetration of morbid influence into bodily vessels ("receptacles of infection") emplots a usurpation of individual autonomy, the process his friend Smith had dubbed

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[63]See Nissenbaum's Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980). Of particular relevance here is his chapter on "The Science of Human Life."

[64]Michel Foucault, Birth of the Clinic, p. 142.

"slave[ry]" to any and all exterior influence. Thus, after burying Captain Watson, Mervyn asserts that, "I was driven . . . by a sort of mechanical impulse."[65] We can recognize this moment as a sympathetic watershed in which the older, Boerhaavian locus of deterministic mechanism as the only legitimate ground for clinical practice becomes dystopic and, quite literally, lifeless:

> I followed my companion in a state of mind not easily described. I had no spirit even to inquire whither he was going. . . . I had acted . . . a servile and mechanical part, and been guided by blind and foreign impulses.[66]

Words, too, become objects of mechanistic and osmosis.

> Now, however, we were entering darksome and murky recesses.
>
> "'Return,' said he, in a tone of command, 'and fetch the light. I will wait for you.'
>
> I obeyed.[67]

There is a catatonic quality to the language employed here, a narcoleptic inevitability of response, as though Welbeck and Mervyn, instead of existing as separate individuals, were neural

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[65] AM, p. 86.

[66] Ibid., p. 86.

[67] Ibid., p. 82.

impulses working in fearful symmetry within a single cell. Mervyn's body has become enchained by the autonomic effluxes of Welbeck.

When Mervyn returns with the light, "Welbeck was discovered in the same place and posture in which he had been left; lifting the corpse and its shroud in his arms he directed me to follow him."[68] Note that this landscape is a dark, enclosed interior in which much of the communication emerges as unspoken imperatives. We are in a silent, darksome landscape of automatic response, a landscape in which language, if it exists at all, emerges not as the freedom of artistic expression but as nervous miasmata wielding the morbid enslavement of Smith's "universal torpor."

Left by himself in a basement after Welbeck has hurried off, Mervyn can only employ the feeble "exertions of [his] reason"[69] to combat his "fears," which "tended to confuse [his] perceptions and bewilder [his] steps."[70] When Mervyn recovers his "power of arranging . . . ideas and forming conclusions", he is uncannily similar to Edgar Huntly awakening in darkness, at the bottom of a pit.

> I rushed towards the entrance with precipitation . . . I was repelled . . . I staggered backward and fell . . . The blow was stunning, and when I recovered my senses . . . a torrent

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[68]Ibid.

[69]Ibid., p. 83.

[70]Ibid., p. 84.

> of blood was gushing from my nostrils. . . . I had lost all distinct notions of my way . . .[71]

Here is the violent birth of the autonomic American, awakening free and "recovered" from taxonomic grids and strictures, emerging blind to feel his "lost . . . way" through a dark cavity, relying not on reason but gut instinct and precipitate responses, paying and being paid with gruesome effluxes of blood. In this new space, all "motions" exist wholly "distinct" from previously mapped orders.

The price of this birth of the impulsive American -- the American to whom feeling is truth and truth feeling, a "state of magnificent and awful feeling"[72] in which the only words that are worth saying are words of sentient impulse -- is high. It is the price of being locked in closets and basements, being lost on a river at night with no oar, your only mate a corpse "still exhibiting the marks of convulsion and agony";[73] the price of introjecting death itself, the ultimate spasmodic impulse.

Mervyn exhibits precisely this form of introjection in the subsequent nervous trope of Watson's eyeball:

> My eye roved fearfully from one object to another. By turns it was fixed upon the murdered person and the murderer. The

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[71]Ibid.

[72]Ibid., p. 87.

[73]Ibid., p. 63.

> narrow cell in which we stood . . . destitute of communication with the external air . . . produced an impression on my fancy which no time will obliterate.
>
> Perhaps my imagination was distempered by terror. . . . Glancing vaguely at the countenance of Watson, my attention was arrested by a convulsive motion in the eye-lids. this motion increased till at length the eyes opened and a glance, languid but wild, was thrown around. Instantly they closed, and the tremulous appearance vanished.
>
> I started from my place and was on the point of uttering some involuntary exclamation.[74]

Within this "narrow cell," the "convulsive" movement of Watson's eyeball both parallels and instigates the "involuntary exclamation" Mervyn is on the verge of uttering but never actually utters. Just as Watson in death has nervous spasms of life, Mervyn in life suffers nervous spasms which suggest the morbidity or deathlike "distemper" of his mind. Mervyn becomes death; he passes through it and lets it pass through him. He never seeks to avoid it; he does not rebel against it but returns to it again and again. And Mervyn's commerce with death creates a new conception of his consciousness, a consciousness radically

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[74] AM, p. 83. The convulsive movement of the eyeball anticipates both Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart" and Judge Pyncheon's death nictitations in The House of the Seven Gables. This image also looks forward to Emerson's "transparent eyeball," the hideous figure made redemptive. Robert Whytt, too, was obsessed with the eyeball as clinical object of discovery, a potent synechdoche for his theory which entwined voluntary and involuntary response. Dilation of the pupils is still known as Whytt's response.

unfixed to established armatures and set orders, a consciousness perpetually reborn.

On the other hand, Welbeck the dread mechanistic manipulator can only experience one kind of sympathetic commerce with an exteriorized other. The victim of morbid excesses of passion, he is himself a mechanistic "'slave [to his own] sensual impulses and voluntary blindness.'"[75] No matter how able he is to absorb others into his sphere and to secrete his nervous efflux out into the atmosphere, Welbeck can only instigate closed circles of influence. The only impulses he can emit are highly restricted and mechanistic in their teleologies, i.e., they are manipulative and egotistical. He can only project what will become occluded, suffocated and morbid catenations of involuntary "with Sensitive Motions."

It comes as no surprise that after the collapse of his financial circulation and subsequent nervous/vocal efflux into a narrative rendition of his own morbid impulses, Welbeck echoes Elihu Smith on his own deterministic enchainment to climactic influence: "'my indolence was a cureless disease.'"[76] He will confess that all his "'artifices'" "'were adapted to gratify [his] ruling passion.'"[77] Welbeck then employs alimentary imagery (the involuntary processes of digestion, as we have seen through Franklin, is one of the strongest literary expressions of the

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[75]Ibid., p. 67.

[76]Ibid., p. 65.

[77]Ibid., p. 72.

autonomic) to underscore the ineluctable processes by which Rush's ideational "aliment of the mind" can transmogrify into its own form of enchainment:

> 'The poison [of passion for Captain Amos Watson's married sister] was too sweet not to be swallowed with avidity by me. Too late I remembered that I was already enslaved by inextricable obligations.'[78]

Since part and parcel of Welbeck's sympathetic disorder is his uncommon ability to disguise his diseased nervous impulses behind the border of his body, the only possible outcome of this occlusive veiling will be an ironic unveiling and powerful venting of such personal "trains or tribes" of morbid, solipsistic passion. Welbeck's disguising and subsequent venting thus present a sinister literary homology for single-etiological power ineluctably working its way through a penetrated body by means of mechanistic sympathy. Thus, while on one level Welbeck's single-vectored mode of osmotic commerce is clearly rooted in the clinical complexities of Rush's, Darwin's and Brown's theories of absorption and secretion, Welbeckian influence is at the same time Brockden Brown's scathing critique not only of the medicine of his best friends but of the medicine that had failed to save his best friend. As Elihu Smith lay dying of yellow fever, his attending physicians (and fellow Repository editors) Mitchill and

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[78]Ibid., p. 73.

Miller tried as a last resort Smith's own interventionist hobbyhorse. They administered a potent mercurial sialagogue. This time, unlike the case of Mary Matthews, salivation failed.

Throughout Brown's major work, the ineluctable mechanisms of single-vectored, arborescent sympathy at best signal the presence of delusive desires, and at worse signal nothing less than demonic psychopathology. The veiled vocal command of Carwin that drives Theodore Wieland to murder is structurally equivalent to Welbeck enslaved by his own passions and treating the universe as his nervous extension. Sympathy bound to the least remnant of the old taxonomies has become far more dire than the clinical aporia hinted at in "The Rhapsodist"; it has become a dark pit of narratological skepticism, a moving death against which only a colossally unleashed autonomic force can successfully compete.

Mervyn, Brown's greatest figuration of borderless nervous osmosis and freely circulative sympathy, can neither veil nor occlude his slightest impulse. Locked in a house, even locked inside a coffin, his occluded excitements transform into passionate overflows. And it is this form of sympathy, sympathy freed of its strictly ramified paths, that serves as this text's redemptive spring.

Thus, Mervyn weeps.

He goes into shock.

Overpowered by absorptive overload, he is struck dumb.

Faced with adversity, Welbeck does just the opposite:

> [h]is eye sparkled; his features expanded into a benign

> serenity; and his wonted reserve gave place to a torrent-like and overflowing elocution.
>
> I marked this change in his deportment with the utmost astonishment.[79]

Welbeck's "torrent-like and overflowing elocution" mimics the pathology of Brown's own cacöethes scribendi with one crucial difference: While Welbeck's discursive mania has as its goal the manipulation of others for his own morbid ends, Brown's serves to alert auditors of potential manipulations. While Welbeck seeks to instill nervous compliance, Brown seeks to instill nervous suspicion. Welbeck admits as much when, spinning his alibi after murdering Captain Watson, he flatly states his "'desire to monopolize all the meditations and affections of [Clemenza].'"[80] Again, Brown indicates that the character who possesses the greatest ability to influence and control others' affective responses will serve as his villain.[81]

"Sympathy transforms," Foucault has noted.

> It alters, but in the direction of identity, so that if its power were not counter-balanced it would reduce the world to a point, to a homogeneous mass, to the featureless form of

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[79]Ibid., p. 55.

[80]Ibid., p. 74.

[81]Most notably with the characterizations of Carwin and Ormond.

the Same.[82]

As we have seen, Welbeck possesses an insatiable need to dominate, influence and "monopolize" the "affections" and sympathies of others. Brown's villains can thus be understood as monomaniacal doctors. They deploy sympathetic vectors that are structurally identical to, but in fact opposed against the supposedly salubrious array of interventions on the verge of medical extinction, that hothouse variety of diaphoretics, sialagogues, errhines and expectorants that now seem so farcically foreign to us. Brown's villains, like Federalist disease, do not release but circumscribe political, social, economic, sexual and physiological circulation.

Thus, a figure like Welbeck would not have been able to resist subsuming Susan Hadwin beneath his sphere -- just as he had done with Clemenza Lodi, or Captain Watson's sister. But Mervyn is a hero not because of his tremendous virtue (which is questionable), not because of his beneficent effect on the world at large (just as questionable), but because he will not allow himself to use his sympathetic power as a binding means of control.

Who and what was Welbeck?

Perhaps Welbeck can be interpreted as the ultimate binding agent, death itself, that spasm slyly awaiting its moment to sublimate within any and all absorbent systems. Yet Mervyn, for

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[82]Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 24.

all of his osmotic openness, absorption, sickness, morbid excitements and torporous melancholia, can just as easily be read as shot through with death. What then, to the turn-of-the-century novelist steeped in the ambiguities of his clinical inheritance, was this strange new death that had suddenly become an omnipresent fixture of life?

Perhaps Welbeck as death-in-life is the binding slavery of mechanism itself structurally rendered as novelistic emplotments of nervous catatonia and disease. In such a case death and Welbeck can both be read as a certain kind of morbid autonomic impulse, that which denies individual autonomy. The "What" of Welbeck is pure impulse shackled to a theoretically pre-determined route, a robotically dystopic mechanism that can only be overcome through the titanic explosions of Mervynian emeses.

If Welbeck tropes shackled autonomic power, then Mervyn tropes sympathy unbound. If Welbeck stands for a soon-to-be outmoded conception of sympathy as Rush's "practical" necessity, then perhaps this dying mode of conceptualization had to be transformed and distilled into a pure state, a literary state (like Septon, the Satanic daimon), in order to be tarred and feathered as villainy itself. If so, then Welbeck does not simply trope mechanistic sympathy but the horrifying spectre of an entire order of scientific understanding on the verge of mental banishment.

Mervyn's wholesale loosing of blocked nervous excitements, his thrusting them out of the closed cells of all bodily and textual confinement, allows his liberationist impulses to dilate

throughout his world. Indeed, for the vast majority of his eponymous book, the one thing Mervyn will not do with his endless store of sympathy is allow it to rest for very long in any particularized niche. And so Mervyn's unbound sympathies coalesce into the rudiments of what was to become within a matter of decades a new science of human life. They herald the birth not only of the nineteenth century's, but of our own, contemporary aspirations for utopia as <u>eupepsia</u>.

Epilogue

The human stomach is an organ endued by nature, with the most complex properties of any in the body; and forming a centre of sympathy between our corporeal and mental parts, of more exquisite qualifications than even the brain itself.

-- Thomas Trotter[1]

For a man to follow nature, to live according to physiological laws, or to obey God, is one and the same thing.

-- Thomas L. Nichols, M.D.[2]

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[1]A View of the Nervous Temperament; Being a Practical inquiry into the increasing prevalence, prevention, and treatment of those diseases commonly called nervous, bilious, stomach & liver complaints, indigestion; low spirits, gout, &c. (Troy, NY: Wright, Goodenow, & Stockwell, 1808), p. 207.

[2]Esoteric Anthropology (Port Chester, NY: n.p., 1853), p. 12.

Bosom-Serpents: The Origins of American Gastrosophy

My hope for the preceding pages is that they have presented a reasonable case for a new way of looking at the sudden emergence of Charles Brockden Brown as America's first professional writer: That his novelistic mania of 1798-1800, his self-diagnosed case of cacöethes scribendi, cannot be comprehended without an appreciation of how such literary achievement arose from a background of medical irreconcilabilities. The following epilogue suggests that a medical/literary conjunction became paradigmatic to a wide variety of early- and mid-nineteenth century American authors, and thus an intrinsic yet generally unrealized factor contributing to the American Renaissance. Although I will concentrate on Nathaniel Hawthorne in these final pages, similar medical structures and sublimations might be identified within the novels, poems and essays of a wide variety of authors, chief among them Washington Irving, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The tenure of the above-mentioned authors witnessed a new stage in the development of American culture, a stage in which physiologically interventionist forces became culturally assimilated and physical health, "the science of human life," first assumed the form familiar to us today. The unbounded excitements and chaos of Jacksonian America witnessed the advent of a new kind of American intellectual, men and women who

identified themselves as prophets of an "harmonic or equilibrated movement of society,"[3] a "movement" that found its homological bedrock within the structure of individual human bodies, typified by what had since the age of Franklin served as the ultimate trope for autonomic power, the involuntary processes of digestion. This new species of cross-genre intellectual went by the name of "gastrosopher."

"The science of gastrosophy," asserted Marx Edgeworth Lazarus,

> will place epicurism in strict alliance with honor and the love of glory.
>
> Of all our enjoyments, eating being the first, the last, and the most frequent pleasure of man, it ought to be the principal agent of wisdom in the future harmony . . .
>
> A skilful [sic] gastrosophist, also expert in the functions of culture and medical hygiene, will be revered as an oracle of supreme wisdom.[4]

Poe, Whitman, Emerson and Hawthorne all wrote from such a "culture . . . [of] medical hygiene," an aesthetic/philosophical mix in which rhetorical figures were as a matter of course linked

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[3]Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, Passional Hygiene and Natural Medicine; Embracing the Harmonies of Man with His Planet (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1852), p. 81.

[4]Ibid., p. 81. The title of this section of Passional Hygiene is "Honor due to Gastrosophy."

to the structure of physiological science and "gastrohygiene."[5] Lazarus' fellow gastrosopher James Wilkinson insisted,

> A living anatomy . . . gives us the abstractions of which human life presents the concrete substances; and the science of the present inner man consists in tallying the world . . . with the organic frame . . . and translating the one into the other. It does not, however, consist in reasoning upon language, but in treating language as one among organic things, dipping it in the blood-streams, and setting it piece for piece against flesh.[6]

The flesh fashioned discursive form, just as the body encompassed the mind. As James Johnson noted in his "Essay on Indigestion,"

> I am convinced that many strange antipathies, disgusts, caprices of temper, and eccentricities, which are considered solely as obliquities of the <u>intellect</u>, have their source in <u>corporeal</u> disorder.[7]

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[5]Ibid., p. 84.

[6]<u>The Human Body & Its Connection with Man</u> (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1851), p. 219.

[7]"An Essay on Indigestion" (Philadelphia: Nathan Kite, 1831), p. 23. All accidentals are as in the original.

Employing an arborescent logic reminiscent of Rush, Johnson asserted that a "morbid sensibility" of the stomach could "induce a host of affections in remote part of the body."[8] The epigastric process thus transumed Federalist polemics of cardiocentric versus cephalocentric systems to attain its role of mediator between what would remain outside and what might be allowed to enter the body. As such a transformative center and sympathetic source of language "dipp[ed] . . . in the blood-streams," digestion assumed the power of a tropological engine:

> . . . [T]he stomach . . . cause[s] all the organic substances conveyed to them which are capable of transformation to assume new forms.[9]

On one level Jacksonian America fostered the creation of a modern model of medical inquiry, more invested in empirical evidence than theoretical divination, and witnessed the retreat of clinical discovery into the specialized niches and ghettoes we now generally associate with scientific progress.[10] At the same time Federalist physiology's antiquated remnants, the

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[8]Ibid., p. 22.

[9]Justus Freiherr von Liebig, Organic Chemistry in Its Application to Agriculture and Physiology (London: Taylor & Walton, 1840), p. 349.

[10]During these years an American military doctor, William Beaumont, actually did beat English and Continental scientists in the race to uncover and describe the biochemical processes of digestion. His landmark work passed virtually unnoted by the gastrosophers.

scientifically dated notion of structurally equilibrated circulations and sympathies, flowered into a rich pseudo-scientific potential for homology throughout the cultural life of the nineteenth century.[11] Of course, like so much else in ante-bellum America, the intellectual/corporeal quotients of the gastrosophers achieved their heyday fractured into warring schools and strongly delineated polemical sides.

American gastrosophy of the mid-nineteenth century can be essentialized into two camps, the first echoing Mervynian modes of unencumbered introjections and unbounded sympathetic commerce with the world, "perfect digestion['s]" osmotic capability for a redemptive and even a somewhat anagogic "conversion of dead into living matter."[12] The most dominant example of this perceptual episteme was the system of Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, which articulated a concept of cosmic unification, a "harmony" in which the "passions" were to be equilibrated into perfect circles of absorption and secretion. Such an obession with collapsing the borders between that which lay outside and that which resided within the body, articulated in his book Passional Hygiene, led in an age of temperance to the following kind of argument in favor of drinking wine. According to Lazarus, the fruit of the vine did not demonstrate a theoretical correspondence so much as a "material correspondence . . . [to] the passion of friendship":

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[11]The category of "pseudo-science" is itself somewhat misleading. Perhaps "cross-genre science" would provide a more precise, if awkward terminology.

[12]James Johnson, p. 24.

> The vine reveals this to every eye conversant with vegetable physiognomy, in its twining attachments and numberless tendrils which turn themselves to embrace every object in contact.[13]

One one level, such an argument seems nothing more than a logical extension of Erasmus Darwin's anthropomorphic poeticizing of the sexual lives of plants in "The Botanic Garden." But Lazarus' vision depends upon the acceptance of a wholly new analytic category, "vegetable physiognomy"; and it was just this acceptance of a free and unencumbered "embrace," "correspondence" or "passional" isomorphism between the "internal and external nervous systems"[14] of man and nature that defined one side of American gastrosophical culture.

On the other hand, Sylvester Graham insisted on leashing or harnessing such passional intercourse and on assuming strict voluntary control of all involuntary processes. His gospel of bodily closure and mechanistic dietary hermeticism indicated an extreme level of paranoia and skepticism about what lurked within an exterior world rife with threatening miasmata.

> 'Whatever pleases the palate, must agree with the stomach and nourish the body!' This lying proverb is older

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[13]Lazarus, p. 28.

[14]Ibid., p. 84.

> than the Christian Religion, and has sent millions of human beings thro' years of misery to an early grave. . . . But let it ever be remembered that the palate may be educated to any thing . . .[15]

Therefore,

> Make your stomach the healthful minister of the body, and not the whole body the mere locomotive appendage of your stomach. Treat your stomach like a well governed child; carefully find out what is best for it, as the digestive organ of your body, and then teach it to conform to your regimen, and soon its habitude will become what is commonly called nature.[16]

One could conceivably map Whitman's ecstatic poetry of absorption along Lazarus' side of this dialectic. In contrast, Thoreau, a follower of a Grahamite regime while at Walden, clearly sympathized with Graham's notion of a highly controlled and constricted "organic economy," and gave a transcendent voice to his gastrosophical diatribe against the "artificial stomach[s]"[17] of that mass of men wallowing in "shameful feasts," "eating

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[15]Lewis Cornaro. Discourses on a Sober and Temperate Life. Ed., with introduction and notes by Sylvester Graham (New York: Mahlon Day, 1833), p. 31.

[16]Ibid., p. 53.

[17]Ibid., pp. 31 and 34.

promiscuously,"[18] and, as a consequence, living lives of quiet, dyspeptic desperation.

However, such easily bifurcated maps do not do justice to the complexities of gastrosophy's most highly rendered literary transfigurations. "I have not the melancholy ambition to beplaster your life with rules and doctrines, or to stretch you on the procustean bed of my ism,"[19] declared Lazarus, echoing Emersonian doctrines of self-reliance. Yet a case could be made for Emerson as an anti-gastrosophist (or, to employ a Freudian dynamic, an intellectual so threatened by gastrosophical discourse he had no choice but overt denial): "If a man should consider the nicety of the passage of a piece of bread down his throat, he would starve."[20]

In fact, gastrosophical discourse was so capacious, so widely disseminated and exoteric to the culture at large that Lazarus himself could lodge a complaint against his own mode of literary expression in language virtually identical to Emerson's:

> We have been nearly bored to death for the last fifteen years, with prosy moralities about health, and the dragchain of duty has been hitched on to the simplest office of life, until what shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed, have come to be the all-

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[18]Ibid., pp. 19 and xii.

[19]Lazarus, p. iii.

[20]"Experience," p. 478.

> absorbing meditations and discussions of a large class of cabbage-headed philosophers . . .[21]

The very inescapability of gastrosophy brings us to the case of Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose obsessively evasive literary style places him as perhaps the strongest mid-century inheritor of Brockden Brown's literary/clinical structure of aporia, suspicion, and skepticism regarding the "all-absorbing meditations" of influence mongers and solipsistic penetrators.

Hawthorne was clearly fascinated with clinical practice. Just as it was to Arthur Dimmesdale, perhaps his greatest rendition of medical victimhood, science to Hawthorne was

> a window . . . thrown open, admitting a freer atmosphere into the close and stifled study. . . . But the air was too fresh and chill to be long breathed, with comfort.[22]

Here, Chillingworth's conversation appears as an atmospheric trope, a familiar guise to any student of Federalist science. Of course, intrinsic to the ironies of such freely circulating physiological matter was the Septonic undercurrent of ineluctable morbid influence, ideas too "chill to be long breathed, with comfort." Science is seductive and liberating -- but also a cause for tremendous anxiety.

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[21]Lazarus, p. iii.

[22]The Scarlet Letter (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 1995), p. 184.

Like Brockden Brown, Hawthorne was intimately familiar with the ravages of yellow fever. Ten years after the death of Elihu Smith, Hawthorne's father died of the same disease. And both men had direct experiences with the clinical vagaries of nervous disease. In fact, the Boston mesmerist Cornelia Park's treatment of Sophia Hawthorne, while prefiguring Chillingworth's satanic manipulations and penetrations into "The Interior of a Heart," was directly adapted into Westervelt's morally bankrupt mesmeric control over Priscilla in The Blithedale Romance.

Years before the publication of The Scarlet Letter it had been Hawthorne's idea "To symbolize moral or spiritual disease by disease of the body."[23] Such rootedness of moral symbolism in physiology was the essence of gastrosophical thought. In The Human Body and Its Connection to Man, John Wilkinson comments on the "series of moral parallels the current physical doctrine would suggest,"[24] and subsequently allegorizes a number of character types based on the physiological synechdoche of, once again, the interior of a heart:

> Hearts that are fourfold prisons, each a solitary cell, where the felon-neighbors feel each other thumping, but have no intercourse! Hearts whose food consists in their own regurgitations! Hearts in short which are bloodless,

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[23]SC, p. 347. The quote is from Hawthorne's Notebooks, 27 October 1841, and presented in the Broadview edition's "Appendix F."

[24]Wilkinson, p. 217.

lifeless, sympathyless . . .[25]

Almost a decade earlier, with the publication of "Egotism; or, The Bosom-Serpent," Hawthorne had endowed such physiological homologies with a local habitation and a name, appending the following clinical footnote to his tale:

> The physical fact, to which it is here attempted to give a moral signification, has been known to occur in more than one instance.[26]

And so the early-nineteenth-century's obsession with "dyspeptic affections"[27] and the gastronomic viscera that wound its way through the body reached one of its most heightened levels of moral homology in Hawthorne's character, Roderick Elliston, "'the man with a snake in his bosom!'"[28] Elliston displays all the clinical symptoms of dyspepsia, or "those diseases commonly called nervous, bilious, stomach & liver complaints; indigestion; low spirits, gout, &c."[29] His "figure

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[25]Wilkinson, pp. 217.

[26]Selected Tales and Sketches (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 279.

[27]John James, M.D. "An Essay on Indigestion" in The Philadelphia Journal of the Medical and Physical Sciences. Ed. N. Chapman, M.D. Volume IX (Philadelphia: H.C. Carey & I. Lea, 1824), p. 21.

[28]"Egotism," p. 279.

[29]Trotter, A View of the Nervous Temperament, title page.

[is] of a lean man, of unwholesome look."[30] "[H]is complexion had a greenish tinge over its sickly white."[31]

Dyspepsia was, above all, a nervous disease, and the epigrastric canal was understood to be central to nervous health. Yet such irregularity of the "electro-nervous fluid"[32] that sympathetically governed (or misgoverned) all the body's involuntary processes was, oddly enough, understood by the clinicians of the time to have become particularly prevalent as a morbid condition only in relatively recent years. Thomas Trotter noted,

> The last century has been remarkable for the increase of a class of diseases, but little known in former times, and what had slightly engaged the study of physicians prior to that period. They have been designated in common language, by the terms, nervous, spasmodick, bilious, indigestion, stomach complaints, low spirits, vapours, &c.[33]

A typical gastrosophical essay devoted to the suddenly perceived urgency of clinically describing "protracted indigestion" disinterred a two-hundred-year-old Boerhaavian mechanistic model by proclaiming that in cases of dyspepsia, "it

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[30]"Egotism," p. 279.

[31]Ibid., p. 280.

[32]John Dods, The Philosophy of Electrical Psychology (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1854), p. 169.

[33]Trotter, p. xi.

is common for various parts of the system to be brought into a state of sympathetic diseased action."[34] Such an assumption of Boerhaavian models in the Federalist period would have met with a glut of commentary and criticism from fellow clinicians; but all gastrosophers, from Graham to Lazarus, took the sympathetic primacy of the stomach for granted. Diet and digestion, the loci of autonomic control most amenable to conscious domination, had become the American obsession it has remained to this day.

Moreover, what makes James's scientifically anachronistic insight purely Jacksonian is its subsequent focus on the most intimate aspects of individual psychology, a certain mode of clinical emphasis that resonates most deeply with the literary style we have come to associate with Hawthorne:

> [N]o language is capable of conveying the degree of horror and misery under which [the dyspeptic patient] labours, his apprehension pictures every thing in the blackest colours -- his mind, bereaved of its former tranquility, is the seat of fears and forebodings, feeling a distrust or want of confidence in his best friends -- he becomes the creature of torture from the slightest and most trivial causes -- his days are literally days of pain, and his nights, nights of anguish.[35]

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[34]John James, p. 3.

[35]James, p. 4.

Since, as Orson Fowler put it, "it is on the nervous system and brain that dyspepsia exerts its most deleterious influences,"[36] Roderick Elliston's epigastric disorder engenders "indubitable tokens of insanity."[37] Yet, in order to structure the dynamics of how this "deleterious influence[]" deploys itself within Elliston's most intimate nervous/psychological matrix of morbid sympathies, the nineteenth-century literary figure (like the nineteenth-century clinician) had no choice but to revisit a Federalist clinical problematic, i.e., the logical conundrums of what had since the medical priority of Darwin, Cullen, Brown and Rush been known as the mysterious actions of retrograde motion:

> There exists an interchange of morbid excitement, which propogates [sic] disease in the system, and frequently confounds causes with effects, and effects with causes.[38]

Once again, the furious Federalist polemics surrounding the ironies of physiology had, with the death of the old systems, cemented this once-battered discourse into a cross-genre mode so powerful and stable that a modern reader may be wholly unaware of its extreme logical inconsistency: Instead of eating, the dyspeptic is eaten. And thus Elliston's "convulsive[]"[39]

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[36]Physiology, Animal and Mental (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1847), p. 388.

[37]"Egotism," p. 284.

[38]John James, p. 12.

[39]Ibid., p. 282.

alimentary refrain: "'It gnaws me! It gnaws me!'"[40]

As a disease of retrograde nervous impulse, dyspepsia indicated sympathy gone awry. For the stomach was "the grand link or chain" of the "great sympathetick"[41].

> [T]hose causes which induce nervous disorders through the body, affect first the digestive and assimilating powers; and are from them reflected on the nervous system, whence commences a train of inverted sympathies and false perceptions . . .[42]

And thus Elliston feels the "poison throughout [his] body and soul, converting everything to sourness and bitterness."[43]

A good half of "Egotism" consists of medical exposition, Hawthorne's rendering of the "necessary information" or clinical background "of Roderick's disease" which Herkimer "succeeded in obtaining" from an unnamed yet "eminent medical gentleman."[44] This extended clinical digression becomes for Hawthorne (as it had been for Brockden Brown since "The Rhapsodist") a metatextual device, allowing him to link his voice to the problematized authority of an unseen, unnamed clinical narrator who speaks

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[40]Ibid., p. 280.

[41]Trotter, p. 209.

[42]Ibid., p. 205.

[43]"Egotism," p. 285.

[44]Ibid., p. 281.

through -- yet at one remove from -- Hawthorne's named narrative stand-in, Herkimer. It comes as no surprise that through the voice of this "medical gentleman" we learn that Elliston's "symptoms" caused "endless perplexity,"[45] the very ambiguities of which Hawthorne was so focussed on heightening into literary expression.

Although Hawthorne has worked to achieve subtle metatextual intimacy (if not temporary narrative unity) with clinical authority, he is equally invested in retaining his distance. Just as Brockden Brown's late stories turned medical aporia into parody (e.g., "Omar and Fatima"), part and parcel of Hawthorne's defense mechanism against gastrosophical domination consists of ridicule:

> [I]t must not be concealed that more than one elderly gentleman, the victim of good cheer and slothful habits, magisterially pronounced the secret of [Elliston's disease] to be Dyspepsia![46]

But Hawthorne, like Emerson,[47] feels compelled to go farther than

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[45]Ibid., p. 281.

[46]Ibid., p. 282. Also note Hawthorne's gastrosophical parody of the "Permanent Inspector" of "The Custom-House": "I have heard him smack his lips over dinners, every guest at which, except himself, had long been food for worms," (p. 88).

[47]In "Experience," Emerson's attitudes towards gastrosophy range from ridicule:

> I knew a witty physician who found theology in the biliary duct, and used to affirm that if there was disease in the liver, the man became a Calvinist, and if that organ was

ridicule to separate himself from his culture's regnant discourse, sublimating a very real hostility that in The Scarlet Letter he was more able to modulate:

> After a time, it became known that Elliston was in the habit of resorting to all the noted quacks that infested the city, or whom money would tempt to journey thither from a distance.[48]

Such a strong element of condemnation is somewhat unusual for Hawthorne, and once again demonstrates his tremendously conflicted attitude. For doesn't the fiction by its own prefatory admission serve as Hawthorne's own attempt to allegorize the physical into the moral? Isn't Hawthorne himself playing the role

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sound, he became a Unitarian. (474)

To transumption:

> The fine young people despise life, but in me, and in such as with me are free from dyspepsia, and to whom a day is sound and solid good, it is a great excess of politeness to look scornful and to cry for company. (479)

To scorn:

> [Nature's] darlings, the great, the strong, the beautiful, are not children of our law, do not come out of the Sunday School, nor weigh their food . . . (481)

But, invariably, he remains indebted:

> Our love of the real draws us to permanence, but health of body consists in circulation . . . (476)

All quotes, Library of America edition.

[48]Ibid., pp. 282-3.

of the moral diagnostician? And doesn't Hawthorne coopt a term from one of these "noted quacks," who diagnoses a "Snake in his stomach!"[49]

Of course, while the diagnosis of "The Bosom-Serpent" has been granted a certain measure of authority as Hawthorne's title, the supposed source of this metaphorically rich diagnosis offered a "cure" that was nothing but "a sham," "some stupefying drug, which nearly caused the death of the patient."[50] Hawthorne subsequently mocks a host of other materia medica that formed the basis of cathartic medicine:

> [T]he venomous pest appeared to operate as an antidote against all other poisons. The physicians tried to suffocate the fiend with tobacco-smoke. He breathed it as freely as if it were his native atmosphere. Again, they drugged their patient with opium, and drenched him with intoxicating liquors, hoping that the snake might thus be reduced to stupor, and perhaps be ejected from the stomach.[51]

All to no avail. What then are we to make of this omnipotent "pest,"[52] this "odious reptile" within, this "thing alive"[53] whose

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[49]Ibid., p. 283.

[50]Ibid., p. 283.

[51]Ibid., p. 290.

[52]It is interesting to note that "pest" was a favorite term of both Elihu Smith and Brockden Brown for disease, particularly yellow fever.

tremendous vitality Hawthorne felt equally bound to privilege and ridicule?

The nadir of Elliston's dyspepsia corresponds to the height of his "egotism," and the hero is left "before a looking glass, with his mouth wide open," mesmerized by his own epigastric region. A gastrosophical archetype, Elliston has become "an egotist by the necessity of his nature."[54] Like his culture at large, Elliston could endlessly contemplate the wondrous horror of his own interior, his system of "absorbent mouths" which possessed "that universal sympathy of the nervous system."[55] And thus, his "egotism" unleashed into a morbid absorption of all unto itself, he enters an "asylum"[56] for lunatics.

Ironically, Elliston as literary trope has only conformed to the structure laid out by the gastrosophers, particularly John Wilkinson's dictum of allowing his "living anatomy" to provide "the abstractions of which human life presents the concrete substances."[57] Elliston has essentialized himself to his own stomach, which was not a diminution so much as a retrograde expansion. For the stomach was sovereign, to Lazarus nothing less than the "central organ and sovereign of life":

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[53]"Egotism," p. 283.

[54]Thomas Nichols, Esoteric Anthropology (Port Chester, NY: n.p., 1853), p. 10.

[55]John James, pp. 10 and 18.

[56]"Egotism," p. 290.

[57]Wilkinson, p. 219.

> [E]very impression made on its mucous surface is radiated through our internal and external nervous systems, and equally controls our self-feeling and our expression of ourselves in magnetic influence on others.[58]

As Trotter insisted, within "the circle of nervous communication . . . the stomach is the centre."[59]

Yet the "malady" of dyspepsia, as was evident to the gastrosophers themelseves, was a "Proteus."[60] In the midst of what seems to a modern reader as the horribly ironic constriction of epigastric sovereignity, Elliston articulates a double irony by commenting that it is the bosom-serpent, for better or worse, that enables his preternatural potential for sympathy. "'You . . . have none in your bosom,'" Roderick informs Herkimer, "'and therefore, cannot sympathize with the rest of the world.'"[61] Elliston, whose sympathies are morbidly over-active, parasitic, hysterical and hypochondriac, paradoxically presents a model in strict opposition to Hawthorne's ultimate dystopic figures, men like Gervayse Hastings of "The Christmas Banquet," (a tale narrated by Elliston himself, now "cured," and a writer) who are altogether anasethetized and atonic, unable to feel the slightest nervous excitement or impulse, much less nervous "upgushings and

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[58]Lazarus, p. 84. Italics are from the original.

[59]Trotter, p. 208.

[60]James Johnson, p. 13.

[61]"Egotism," p. 292.

outpourings" from their "stagnant heart[s]."[62] Such a psychological impossibility -- the egotist as sympath -- can only be untangled through the retrograde structures gastrosophy inherited from a medical science that, once collapsed, had not disappeared but proliferated into cross-genre avenues. Only thus can we account for the serpent's "double nature, and a life within a life."[63]

As spatial homology (so crucial to the Lazarus/Graham controversy), the bosom-serpent negotiates inwardness and solipsism with its retrograde potential for exterior sympathetic vectors or influences. As such, Elliston's epigastric disorder can be understood to be structurally equivalent to Brockden Brown's villainous characterizations of single-vectored or bound sympathy. It is not only on the interior but on the exterior level that "[t]he snake in his bosom seemed the symbol of a monstrous egotism."[64] The "bosom-serpent" (like the transformative process of digestion itself) collapses normative boundary lines separating inner from outer realms. Thus, even a detail as inconsequential as Elliston's walk mirrors his inner,

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[62]"The Christmas Banquet," in Ibid., pp. 307 and 303. Here is a latent critique of Graham's gastrosophical system, the underside of his utopia of hard-working, gluten-munching, anaesthetized celibates. The Venetian nobleman Luigi Cornaro, whose work Graham re-introduced to the American public, proudly stated that because of his great temperance,

> Neither . . . the death of grandchildren and other relations and friends make any impression on me, but for a moment or two; and then it is over. (Graham, p. 132)

[63]"Egotism," p. 284.

[64]Ibid., p. 284.

"chylopoetick"[65] morbidity: "[Elliston] seemed to imitate the motion of a snake; for, instead of walking straight forward with open front, he undulated along the pavement in a curved line."[66] Inner becomes outer on the level of diagnosis, too:

> So here was the monstrous secret, ejected from its lurking-place into public view, in all its horrible deformity. The mystery was out; but not so the bosom-serpent.[67]

Most disturbing of all, Elliston's inner morbidity enables a penetrative Welbeckian vision, a mesmeric x-ray that strips humanity of all its conscious disguises:

> Whether insane or not, he showed so keen a perception of frailty, error, and vice, that many persons gave him credit for being possessed not merely with a serpent, but with an actual fiend, who imparted this evil faculty of recognizing whatever was ugliest in man's heart.[68]

Elliston possesses "the most acute and penetrating glance"[69] into the innermost recesses of any interlocutor.

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[65]Trotter, p. 81.

[66]"Egotism," p. 279.

[67]Ibid., p. 283.

[68]Ibid., p. 285.

[69]Ibid., p. 281.

> [A] hissing sound was heard . . . in Roderick Elliston's breast. . . . [A]n answering hiss came from the vitals of the shipmaster, as if a snake were actually lurking there, and had been aroused by the call of its brother-reptile.[70]

The sympathetic snake thus takes dominion everywhere, inside and outside Elliston's own body, morbidly penetrating and sympathetically inciting other bodies into horrific involuntary responses.[71] Thus, the end of Hawthorne's tale is not at all satisfying. The narrative relinquishment of such a pervasive mode of sympathy to a sympathy constricted to the saccharine outgushings of romantic love (the normative essentialization of sympathy that today serves as a principal definition of the term) is clearly a nervous deus ex machina.

> 'Rosina!' cried he, in broken and passionate tones, but with nothing of the wild wail that had haunted his voice so long. 'Forgive! Forgive!'
>
> Her happy tears bedewed his face.[72]

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[70]Ibid., p. 288.

[71]Here, the snake becomes structurally similar to the sympathetic power of the "Minister's Black Veil."

[72]Ibid., p. 293.

We are left with the sense that the body, our "dim interior,"[73] has not so much been redeemed as ironized. And yet this enfleshed irony, too, found its home in gastrosophy; for at the same time that the epigastric region was serving as a final cultural bastion against the growing exterior chaos of the ante-bellum North, it was also being mercilessly ripped open, becoming public, available to be "read" by any and all, sympathetic or not:

> Hence God has caused the inherent character of every living being and thing to gush out through every organ of the body, and every avenue of the soul; and also created in both brute and man a character-reading faculty, to take intuitive cognizance of the mental operations.[74]

In such a culture of bodily transparency, Hawthorne's obsessive complication of text might serve a salvific function: It allowed the interior of a heart to remain interior, encrypted and unreadable even while "gush[ing] out."

By 1850, Hawthorne's novelistic focus on parallel structuring between morality and disease went hand in hand with his most successful deployment not only of textual ambiguity and aporia but of enfleshed paradox. In The Scarlet Letter,

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[73]The Scarlet Letter, henceforth to be referred to as SL, p. 189.

[74]Orson Fowler, Illustrated Self-Instructor in Phrenology and Physiology (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1840), p. 33.

Hawthorne's highest level of irony, verging on sarcasm, is reserved for the "Doctor of Physic," the "sagacious, experienced, benevolent, old physician, with his concord of paternal and reverential love for the young pastor."[75] This "Leech," the "medical adviser of the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale" appears to be totally familiar "with the ponderous and imposing machinery of antique physic."[76]

> So Roger Chillingworth -- the man of skill, the kind and friendly physician -- strove to go deep into his patient's bosom, delving among his principles, prying into his recollections, and probing every thing with a cautious touch, like a treasure-seeker in a dark cavern. . . . A man burdened with a secret should especially avoid the intimacy of his physician.[77]

On one level, such an overt vilification of the physician seems to overlap with Grahamite urges to keep the "bosom" hermetically enclosed, safeguarded against the seductions of absorption and penetration. And Hawthorne does demonstrate a certain level of ambivalence towards "affinity" and "intimacy," those elements that allow every circulatory "ebb and flow of the minister's life-tide [to] pass under the eye of his anxious and attached

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[75]SL, pp. 182 and 186.

[76]Ibid., p. 180.

[77]Ibid., p. 184.

physician."[78] This species of paranoia may descend in part from a scientific archeology of deterministic, arborescent sympathy.

> There is a sympathy that will make me conscious of him. I shall see him tremble. I shall feel myself shudder, suddenly and unawares. Sooner or later, he must needs be mine![79]

Thus, Chillingworth's "quest"[80] always parallels a morbid, single-vectored line of disease, an "inquest"[81] for which his materia medica, his "drugs of potency" emanate from "the grave-yard, here at hand."[82] He is "like a sexton delving into a grave, possibly in quest of a jewel that had been buried on the dead man's bosom."[83] By the aid of such morbid "black devices,"[84]

> . . . not merely the external presence, but the very inmost soul of [Dimmesdale] seemed to be brought out before [Chillingworth's] eyes, so that he could see and comprehend its every movement. He became, thenceforth, not a spectator only, but a chief actor, in the poor minister's interior

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[78]Ibid., p. 185.

[79]Ibid., p. 141.

[80]Ibid., p. 190.

[81]Ibid., p. 141.

[82]Ibid., p. 190.

[83]Ibid., p. 189.

[84]Ibid., p. 199.

> world. He could play upon him as he chose. Would he arouse him with a throb of agony? The victim was for ever on the rack; it needed only to know the spring that controlled the engine; -- and the physician knew it well![85]

Here, Hawthorne has placed the "interior" mechanism of "bad sympathies"[86] under the direct, exterior agency of the clinician in his darkest transfiguration, the evil manipulator -- which can now be read as torturer. Yet the horrific spectre of mechanistic sadism remains inextricably tied to the redemptive hope for a clinically manipulated emesis as effective catharsis.

Thus, throughout The Scarlet Letter, penetration not only functions as a death force, it possesses salubrious possibilities. Witness the curative quality of Hester's publically viewable "A" over and against the morbid sickness inherent in Dimmesdale's buried and disguised "A," which can only be removed with a final nervous "convulsive motion."[87] As Dimmesdale himself notes in one of his more sober moments, "after . . . an outpouring, O, what a relief have I witnessed . . ."[88] And what is Dimmesdale's final sermon if not a secretion of pure sympathy as the ultimate form of communally experienced spiritual relief? Dimmesdale's election day sermon is his final emesis, and

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[85]Ibid.

[86]Ibid., p. 200.

[87]Ibid., p. 303.

[88]Ibid., p. 191.

what he emits are pentecostal "words of flame,"[89] rarified sympathy unbound by cathedral walls and the ambiguous strictures of words themselves:

> Muffled as the sound was by its passage through the church-walls, Hester Prynne listened with such intentness, and sympathized so intimately, that the sermon had throughout a meaning for her, entirely apart from its indistinguishable words.[90]

Dimmesdale's occlusion of his naturally outgushing "A"[91] accelerated by Chillingworth's mechanistic torture of clinical surveillance thus combine to create a potent retrograde engine. Just as Roderick Elliston's obsessive solipsism provided the retrograde force behind his sympathetic powers, Dimmesdale's sensitivity and sympathy experience a radical increase in both absorptive and secretive potential. Dimmesdale thus mirrors the structure that governed Arthur Mervyn's absorptive excitements when most occluded:

> But this very burden it was, that gave him sympathies so intimate with the sinful brotherhood of mankind; so that his

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[89]Ibid., p. 297.

[90]Ibid., p. 292.

[91]Does it actually sublimate into a circulative occlusion, a bloody mark on his flesh? "[I]t were irreverent to describe that revelation" (303).

heart vibrated in unison with theirs . . .[92]

Retrograde motion (the inheritance of Brunonian and Darwinian paradigms) has transcended both the egotism of individual desires for solipsistic penetration and the aporias of clinical occlusion and secretion to align with a spiritual, anagogic desire for pure communication. The synechdoche of Dimmesdale's harmonically "vibrat[ing]" "heart" now assumes the uncanny if familiar form of American Transcendentalism, in which normative structural boundaries become subsumed by new languages of universal consciousness.

Elihu Smith's sublime hopes for the clinically interventionist powers of the tongue had finally been realized. Hawthorne's ambivalent cooption of gastrosophical discourse transformed the salivating organ into a new kind of "Tongue of Flame."[93] For as every gastrosopher understood, the body was not simply a tropological vehicle, but each individual's privatized site of physiological pentecost.

The old sympathy, fully digested by gastrosophy, could now nourish a new hope for sentient understanding. And so, the body autonomic came to marshal sublime stanzas of American mythopoesis:

The thin red jellies within you or within me, the bones

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[92]Ibid., p. 201.

[93]Ibid., p. 201.

and the marrow in the bones . . .

O I say these are not the parts and poems of the body

only, but of the soul,

O I say now these are the soul![94]

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[94]Walt Whitman, "I Sing the Body Electric," Whitman: Poetry and Prose (New York: The Library of America, 1982), p. 258.

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