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THE FRICTION OF EXPERIENCE: COMMUNITY AND UNDERSTANDING IN THE NOVELS OF CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2000

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

11/09/00
Date

Chair of Examining Committee

1/12/99
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Acknowledgments

With thanks to all those at Mission Control: To Professor William Kelly for being a hard-working advisor, an inspirational mentor and a supportive friend (as well as for being both the toughest and fairest critic I ever had). To all the professors at the CUNY Graduate School who help make it the wonderful center of learning it is. I want to particularly thank the following: Joan Richardson for showing that intellectual passion can and should be a part of scholarship and for that hug after my oral exam. Joseph Wittreich, David Reynolds, Richard McCoy as well as many other members of the English Program faculty made my time there beneficial to me both intellectually and personally. I have no fitting words with which to thank all of the many students at the Graduate School who proved to me that one can have an intellectual community without the petty competitiveness that some have claimed to be an unavoidable part of academic life. My undergraduate work at the Vassar College English Department made my doctoral work possible. I want to thank the wonderful faculty there who inspired me to study American Literature, especially Frank Bergon, Peter Antelyes and Beverly Haviland.

Thanks also to all of the wonderful institutions of research which made this work possible. Their wonderful collections of course would be useless without their generous and hard-working staffs. Thanks first of all to the staff of the Mina Rees

Library at the CUNY Graduate School who manage, with limited financial resources, to get generations of graduate students like me the resources they need. Thanks also to The New York Public Library for use of the collection and for use of the Wertheim Study, to the Bowdoin College Library for allowing me access to their collection of Brown's letters and for permission to quote, to the Magill Library at Haverford College for access to their Quaker Collection, and to the Library Company of Philadelphia for access to their incredible collection.

Gratitude beyond words go to my mother and father for always telling me to "put down that book and go outside to play" and then ignoring when I never did. For helping to support me financially when by all rights I should no longer have needed such support. For always believing in me. To my mother for being the perfect boss for a dissertation-writing graduate student and the perfect mother and friend for just about anyone. To my dad for all of his love and for his always leaving a forwarding address! To Sue for being the ideal wicked step-mother and friend. To Fred for staying by my side through thick and thin, for all of the laughs when things got rough, for tolerating my ever-growing piles of books. To my sister for her love (though she won't admit it) and support, and for making sure I know I'll always just be "little sister." To Bill for being a great husband to my sister and a great father to my nieces, for always being, quiet as you are, the support to them that I know you'll always be. To my nieces Chelsea and Madison for reminding me always that there is more to life

than a degree, for your wit and wisdom, for your hugs and kisses, for just being the smart and beautiful girls I knew you would be. To all of my family, including those I adopted along the way, Jay and Laurie Siegel, Sylvia Siegel, Ethel and Maurice Goldberg, Dawn Hamilton, Naomi and Mike Herman, and Janet Heil (to name only a few), for putting up all these years with cards instead of presents, short visits or no visits at all. For always believing I could do it. For making me laugh. For being the best family anyone could ask for. I wouldn't want to trade in a single one of you. To my mom's friends for keeping her sane when I wasn't, as well as your friendship and support for me, especially: Catherine Ilardi, Gail Resnicoff, Ruth Rothstein, Eileen Danville, Miriam Ludmer, Virginia Newcomb, Eileen Greene, Rosita Saifer, and Victoria Kess.

My friends, like my family, could only have come as an undeserved gift from above. Deep and enduring gratitude goes first of all to Kim Gallelli. For helping me survive elementary school (and junior high, high school, college AND graduate school!) For all the other things we have been able to survive together. I can't possibly express what your friendship has meant to me and how impossible it is to imagine what my life would have been without you. Here's to a future of friendship. To the best dissertation writing group a girl ever had: Christine Hutchins, friend and editor extraordinaire. For your common sense, your intelligence, your compassion and your undying sense of humor. To Aephraim Steinberg, for inspiring this endless

acknowledgements page and for going to Yale. For all of those long letters we wrote each other in college. For being smart and funny and for keeping this particular literature scholar humble about what she doesn't know. To all my other friends, especially Mary-Jo Haronian, Lynn Messina, Jean Darcy, Eileen Suss, Elizabeth Ornstein, Patricia Medina, Angela Bonnette, Heather Ogilvie, Marci Resnicoff and Joanne Harper: I find it difficult to live up to the standards of friendship you set by your own. To every one of the people in the pension department, especially Leonard Mezei, Yaakov Ziskind, Laura Zafonte, Jak Ninyo, Hasani Powell, and Michael Saldana: Thanks for making the "real world" a great place to work. To those at Economic Growth Group, especially David Appel and George Greene, thanks for keeping me on my toes. To those who are missing: Lynn Kadison and Millicent Lemmie. I can only say how much I wish you were here to celebrate with me. To my grandfather Sol who passed away thirty years ago: Thanks for watching over me.

Preface

Charles Brockden Brown is often seen as a man ahead of, or out of step with, his time. Within the context of the works of Royall Tyler, Hannah Webster Foster, and Susanna Rowson, Brown's novels are startlingly modern. Their violent imagery and evident anxieties about interpreting the world speak to our own circumstances and preoccupations. Biographies of Brown, from the earliest, that of his friend William Dunlap, through those of twentieth-century writers such as Arthur Kimball in *Rational Fictions: A Study of Charles Brockden Brown*, David Lee Clark in *Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America*, and, most recently Steven Watts in *The Romance of Real Life: Charles Brockden Brown and the Origins of American Culture*, focus primarily on the way Brown struggled with the world around him. His rejection of law

as a career, his alienation from his Quaker heritage, and his intense and neurotic self-pity are recurrent themes in these works.

While these themes are central to an adequate understanding of the man and his writings, not enough attention has been directed toward the world surrounding, and influencing, the writer at work. Indeed, everything that readers find most difficult about Brown begins to make sense in the context of his surroundings.

The late eighteenth century was generally a bewildering and chaotic time, and particularly so in America. A widespread fear existed that the "revolution of patriarchal authority" (as Jay Fliegelman calls it), had extended beyond the American political rebellion of the seventies and would erupt into every area of life. People felt a decline during the period of ministerial, governmental and parental authority, a "crisis of authority" as Emory Elliot refers to it in *Revolutionary Writers*. The Enlightenment's questioning of tradition and authority led as much to anxiety as to exhilaration. An

increase in the possibilities for personal choice brought an equivalent increase in the possibilities for failure. In America, because opportunities for "upstarts and entrepreneurs" were so great, "those bred and educated in traditional colonial culture" had to compete "for rank and status in the new social order" (Elliot 4). The existence of a "new social order," rather than that of a new political order, was what caused so much social and personal anxiety.

The French Revolution intensified this anxiety. Fliegelman writes:

> The revolutionary events of the decade following the fall of the Bastille radically intensified the fear of corruption of mind and morals so much a part of the predominant Lockean world view and epistemology of the eighteenth century." (*Prodigals* 235)

Tradition's tight rein was loosed; experience became the teacher, and possible corruptor, of morals. Conspiracy theories of the day centered on suspicious, revolutionary foreigners attempting to seduce Americans into

revolutionary action. In America, the foreign became equivalent with the corrupt. The Alien and Sedition Laws were an attempt to "protect the American character from Jacobin seduction" (*Prodigals* 235). These draconian "Alien and Sedition Laws" instituted in 1798, "made it a crime to criticize the federal government, made it more difficult to become a naturalized American citizen, and gave the President the power to deport undesirable aliens" ("Alien and Sedition Laws" Shafritz). As one Representative claimed during the debates over the Laws, they were "intended to stave off . . . 'a conspiracy, a faction leagued with a foreign power to effect a revolution or subjugation of this country'" (Levine 17). The American answer was, as Fliegelman phrases it, "To seal the garden," an impossible attempt to separate America from the problems of the rest of the world. But the world had changed; the "modern age of anxiety" had arrived (*Prodigals* 243). The "conflicts between rationalism and religion, radicalism and reaction" which troubled Brown and his peers, were not foreign infections,

but wholly home-spun dilemmas (Levine 25).

Suspicion was the order of the day, not only of foreigners, but of strangers; increasing mobility meant that communities were no longer able to exclude newcomers. As Russell Nye writes in *The Cultural Life of the New Nation*, "Movement . . . often became an American means of solving (or merely postponing) social problems" (148). Social problems may have been postponed but they were also exacerbated by rising mobility. Communities lacked the will or the means to assimilate many of the outsiders who demanded entry. In a world where "letters of introduction" were still necessary for entrance into society, strangers without connections were met with distrust. Joyce Appleby explains, "Americans . . . had built strong communities, but the dislocations of the revolution and movement on to new land had uprooted many while population growth and immigration acted constantly to undermine their sense of settledness" (52). The physical mobility that Appleby refers to, especially that mobility due to the ready availability of open land,

generated a social mobility almost as disturbing to traditionalists as the physical mobility of the population.

You could much more easily leave your past behind you, change class as easily as you changed your clothes and your accent. In *The Economy of Character*, Deidre Shauna Lynch uses Roderick Random, Tobias Smollett's eponymous hero, as an example of the "generic body," having an "uncanny capacity to fit the clothes that go with the jobs he takes" (106). It is impossible not to think of Arthur Mervyn here, another "generic body," a chameleon who changes shape as he changes clothes. If people tried to read faces like "fleshed-out 'letters of recommendation,'" it was because other previously available signs, signs that had always signified class status, like accents and clothing, had become unreadable(Lynch 30).

In both Europe and America, an intense paranoia arose which centered on the connected issues of sincerity and seduction. Perhaps the face of honesty could, after

all, be faked. Brown's novels emerge from a world in which every well-spoken stranger could be a corrupt and manipulative seducer. As William Godwin-a hero of Brown's-observes in his chapter on sincerity in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice,* "The basest hypocrite passes through life with applause; and the purest character is loaded with unmerited aspersions" (313).

A contagion of skepticism spread from politics to everyday life; appearance and reality seemed to have been sundered. As Jay Fliegelman writes of *Wieland,*

> The book's subtitle, *The Transformation,* refers not only to the transformation of Wieland but a broad historical transformation, the shift from a world that assumed stable forms and fixed relations between appearance and reality and between man and society to a world sensitive to shifting values, deceptive appearances, mixed motives and, most significantly, the tyranny of language over things, rhetoric over language. (*Prodigals* 240)

The eighteenth century was concerned with this sundering

of "appearance and reality" in every area of life; again and again, people asked, "how was one to distinguish the genuine from the false?"

Philosophers who believed this problem of interpretation lay in the misunderstanding or misuse of words sought a "natural," universal language. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, for instance, John Locke devotes one of the four books to the nature and difficulties of language. "Methinks," Locke writes,

> those *who* pretend *seriously* to *search after*, or maintain *Truth*, should think themselves obliged to study, how they might deliver themselves without Obscurity, Doubtfulness, or Equivocation, to which Men's words are naturally liable, if care be not taken. (509)

If such a study was unsuccessful, one could put together a book of "little Draughts and prints," and simply point to pictures of the objects to which one wanted to refer(522).

Locke and other philosophers tried to cleanse communication of contaminants, as politicians tried to

cleanse the body politic of subversives. Others, primarily artists such as Charles Willson Peale and Patience Wright, played with the problem of the blurring of boundaries between truth and fiction with realistic and trompe l'oeil techniques. While Locke tried desperately to prevent the mistaking of one idea for another, the taking of one word for another, artists like Peale and Wright toyed with such mistakes in visual play. Their waxwork figures were meant to be mistaken for real, pleasure not anxiety to be provoked by the failure of our senses.

Where Locke saw a problem to solve, and artists saw a problem with which to play, the Common Sense philosophers saw no problem at all. The ideas of these philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, particularly Adam Smith, Dugald Stewart, Thomas Reid, and James Beattie, quickly spread to England and America. They formulated a philosophy of "common" sense, which sought to articulate the common ground of human understanding. In response to the scepticism of Hume, Reid claimed the existence of

"common principles which are the foundation of all reasoning and of all science. Such common principles seldom admit of direct proof, nor do they need it. Men need not be taught them; for they are such as all men of common understanding know" (57).

The Common Sense philosophers had the best solution to the problem of scepticism, coming closer than any other thinkers to discovering the source of this new scepticism. Yet, they too failed. For the problem arose, not out of the modes of communication, or out of their use, but out of the context within which this communication took place. For what does common sense mean outside of any stable community to share it?

Brown's "epistemological confusion," as I call it, his doubts about what counts as reliable evidence, is the focus of this study. I shall be contextualizing the issues of communication and understanding, both in Brown's work and in his life, as well as in eighteenth-century American culture. To illuminate these issues, I have chosen four eighteenth-century intellectual

discourses-religion, psychology, education, and visual and performative culture--to put into dialectical play with Brown's novels. I have chosen these themes because each reflects the period's anxieties about the loss of communal understandings, and each was a site of intense scrutiny in the culture's search for answers to epistemological dilemmas. While religious, psychological, educational and artistic problems are superficially different as they arise in the novels, they all involve overlapping epistemological problems. Brown uses these themes as a way to question the possibility for accurate human interpretation of events and people.

In my first chapter, I argue that the subject of religion in Brown's novels is inseparable from the question of religious interpretation: If we hear a seemingly inhuman voice, how do we know whether the voice we hear is God's, the Devil's, or our own growing insanity? The focus of this chapter is the relation of enthusiasm in eighteenth-century religion to these questions of human understanding. Enthusiasm, or

"religion found in direct inspiration," posed a special problem for post-Revolutionary communities who already feared they had lost their earlier religious rigor (Lovejoy 2). How were these communities to prevent members from substituting a religion of spiritual immediacy and an individual experience of Grace for a communal religious practice? In particular, I will discuss the role of community in religious interpretation. Community serves as an antidote to a dangerous enthusiasm which allows individual interpretations of scripture and religious experience. The failure of belief in Brown's novels is actually the failure of self-sufficiency.

The question of human understanding in Brown's novels arises in this form: How do we know that what we experience is genuine and not the product of madness or error? And, if we can not with surety understand ourselves, how are we to understand those around us? The difficulties involved in the "reading" of character is a central concern of Brown's and the focus of my second chapter. The importance of sincerity has been frequently

discussed in eighteenth-century studies. I will draw upon notions of sincerity in order to understand the plight of a culture faced with an influx of uninterpretable strangers like *Wieland*'s Carwin. Once again the loss of community plays a central role in problems of interpretation. I will examine Brown's questioning of the possibility of truthful and readable evidence in social experience, and discuss what I see as his solution to the problem of interpersonal trust.

The works of Locke and Rousseau dominated eighteenth-century discourse on education theory. There were three main debates in educational theory, those between the benefits of public versus private education, religious versus secular education, and classical versus English "grammar" education. Locke and Rousseau agreed on many things, including the importance of experience in education and the dangers of the imagination. They are temperamentally very different, however. Locke's ideal education remains close to a traditional course of private education, while Rousseau's involves an extreme romantic individualism. So sure is Rousseau of the essential goodness of mankind, that he

directs the tutor not to "give precepts," but to "let the scholar find them out for himself" (22). Despite their radically different views of what constituted a proper education, both fail on the same issue: the role of community in education. The educational empiricism of Locke and Rousseau neglects a central aspect of experience: the social. When Brown asks, through his novels: How do we educate our children to distinguish truth from falsehood and hence avoid the snares of madness, his answer refutes the individualism of Locke's and Rousseau's philosophies. Brown prefers what I call the "friction of experience" to the isolation of Enlightenment education. I discuss the role of experience in education as it is represented in Brown's novels, particularly in *Arthur Mervyn*. The fates of Brown's characters demonstrate that education, whether public or private, if it neglects social and worldly experience, is worse than useless.

The final discourse, one that weaves through all the others is that of the visual and performative arts. Can

we trust what we see? Can we trust that the acts of those we interact with are not really "acts" in the sense of artifices, of performances? How can we determine the sincerity or genuineness of those around us? Where philosophers, politicians and ministers worried over these problems, the artists and actors of Brown's time manipulated them, creating new forms of realism all the more disturbing to the anxious truth-seekers around them. I am particularly interested in the constant recurrence in Brown's novels of doubling and performance, and how these two ideas connect to eighteenth-century anxieties about the disconnection of public and private life.

These four discourse are at the very heart of the eighteenth-century epistemological crisis. Brown finds within them both the origin of the epistemological problem and its solution. For human understanding in Brown's novels fails each time someone forgets that, as with Archimedes' lever, both achievement and understanding require a ground from which to rise. Brown's novels explore these themes with an intensity that demonstrates

just how personally Brown took the problem and how desperately he longed for a solution.

I owe a great debt to many in eighteenth-century studies, and particularly to those in the ever-burgeoning field of Brown studies. My primary debt is to Jay Fliegelman, who in many ways inspired this project. In both his introduction to the Penguin edition of *Wieland* and in his book *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, he does a superb job of contextualizing Brown's work. The introduction to *Wieland* is his most extensive discussion of Brown, and it engages many of the questions of epistemology and interpretation that interest me. He writes of the eighteenth century anxieties about theater--in words that you will hear echo in my own--"The line between expressing emotion and counterfeiting it was blurred, and with it the line between theatrical performance and natural behavior" ("Introduction" xxxiii). Fliegelman's ability to make connections which illuminate both the texts he is discussing and the culture they are a part of has been a constant inspiration to me (*Declaring* 32-4). Fliegelman's

work, particularly *Declaring Independence*--though it is not about Brown--also introduced me to many of the characters who weave in and out of this dissertation: Johann Kaspar Lavater, David Garrick and Patience Wright are the most important. My hope has been to expand on Fliegelman's project of contextualizing Brown's work within the larger eighteenth-century culture.

I am indebted to Steven Watts' work on Brown as well. Of all of Brown's biographers, Watts advances the most culturally oriented reading of Brown's novels. As he explains his methodology, he "trie[s] to analyze Brown's writings in terms of an interplay of text, context, and self, with each factor recognized as mutually shaping the others" (xvi). His first chapter is an intriguing discussion of the changing culture of eighteenth-century America and the rise of the novel as an American genre. His argument, that Brown's novels and biography reflect "the wrenching development of market relations in the post-Revolutionary decades," is an interesting one. I have tried to move out from his argument, using the same

kind of analysis in my study of other aspects of the culture. While economic changes do transform social relations and artistic values, as Watts and many others have argued, the reverse is also true. And, while Brown perhaps disliked many aspects of his culture, as Watts believes, he was, as I have already suggested, very much a reflection of the culture in which he lived. I will expand on Watts' project by looking at other, neglected, aspects of Brown's culture as they are represented in his novels.

The foundation has already been laid for my study of some of these areas by other researchers, most notably Kenneth Joseph Kinslow, R. John Ullmer and Richard Moses, who have written on Brown's Quakerism, Colin Jeffrey Morris, who has studied Brown's relationship with William Dunlap and theatricality, and Ronald A. Knox, who offers useful insights about eighteenth-century enthusiasm. But finally my interest has been with the primary texts of eighteenth-century culture, the works of its philosophers, educators, artists and theologians. My goal has been to

see Brown's novels from within his culture, the problems they reflect from within the discourses that were central to his thinking. My whole project is uniquely focused on the relationship between epistemological confusion in Brown's novels and the breakdown of traditional notions of community. The crisis of suspicion evident in Brown's novels is a manifestation of a deep cultural crisis of faith, for he was neither out of step with nor ahead of his time. Brown's whole culture was at a critical moment; it had to either find new ways of ensuring interpersonal trust or find ways of interacting without such trust. Brown's novels show us a world where trust is gone; like tightrope walkers all of his characters walk the wire, but only those who walk alone walk without a net.

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Grace or Damnation: Interpreting the Religious Voice in Charles Brockden Brown

What does it mean to experience grace? Jonathan Edwards believed that grace was the addition of a sixth sense to our awareness. Like a previously color-blind person experiencing the world in color, the person gifted with grace sees in a way he or she could not have even imagined before. How does one explain color to the color blind? But the experience of grace raises more than religious issues. How can we know what others experience? How can we know the range of colors we can never see, or never see the same? What does "green" mean to you? We point at an object; we name its color; do we see the same "green"? So too, for Charles Brockden Brown, the question of grace, the problem of the hearing of the voice of God,

in his novels is a way of focusing larger questions of the interpretation of experience.

Brown's world was a volatile mix of religious sects and "Great Awakenings." The Second Great Awakening was a not-distant memory; the Third Great Awakening was in the near future. Born into a prominent Quaker family, Brown was well-aware of questions of religious dissent and freedom. His novels are themselves evidence of the religious ferment Jon Butler describes in *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*. "Although eighteenth-century American religious pluralism most likely did not exceed that found throughout Europe as a whole," Butler notes, "by 1760 it probably had no equal in any single European society" (174). And there is hardly a religion to be found in this society that is not found in Brown's novels as well. With their Deists and Illuminati, Jews and German Pietists, Brown's novels evidence all the religious anxieties and tensions of his society. Yet, the presence of religious anxiety seems even more intense in Brown's novels than the religious tensions of the time

warranted. The conspiracy theories of the time--focused particularly on masonry and Catholicism--foreign threats from without, become in the novels conspiracies from within. Brown's characters are attacked from within, from their own psyches and from within their own families. Religious organizations were also frightened more by enemies from within; those clearly outside the faith could easily be ostracized, isolated and attacked. Why do these general cultural anxieties manifest as they do in Brown's work? How does Brown's own religious background contribute to his anxieties about personal religious experience? What was his experience of other faiths? What were his feelings about the rise of Enlightenment religious thinking, the Deism of many of the writers he was reading? I will address these questions before turning to the novels themselves later in this chapter.

Brown was raised a practicing Quaker. The Brown family had been in Pennsylvania since before the arrival of William Penn gave it its name. Despite the prominence of many of the Philadelphia Quakers, or at times even

because of it, the Quakers frequently suffered opprobrium for their dissenting beliefs. With the coming of the American Revolution, the pacifist Quakers were reminded that they were only marginally tolerated by the larger community. The revolutionaries, confronted by Quaker refusal to sign oaths or support war efforts with donations, were enraged by what they saw as Quaker treachery. Quaker merchants' windows were frequently broken; soldiers were more frequently quartered in Quaker homes; oath refusing Quakers were forbidden to practice their trades (Kafer 471). In an event that had immense repercussions for Brockden Brown himself, seven Quaker men were arrested and deported to Virginia, after being held in the local Free Mason Lodge for months. Brown's father Elijah was one of those seven men. The younger Brown was later to write to his friend Joseph Bringhurst, Jr., "Suppose for example I should tell you, that when eleven or twelve years of age I spent twelve hours in each day . . . for 8 months together in a Jail."(Bennett Census #9). Interestingly, he has doubled his actual age at the time

of his father's arrest. He was actually much younger when he suffered the trauma of his father's loss; he was young enough to wonder if his father was gone forever. At the same time as he lost his father to the religious prejudice of his countrymen, he was suffering the shared trauma of wartime. "During the terrifying eight-month period of his father's absence," writes Peter Kafer in "Charles Brockden Brown and Revolutionary Philadelphia: An Imagination in Context", "the six-year-old Charles would on some days have heard the sound of distant musket and cannon fire, as British and American forces skirmished in the vicinity. Sometimes, too, he would have heard the artillery booming throughout the night" (470). In his precarious situation, who could the young Brown have identified with? Who were the irrational enthusiasts: Brown and his Quaker family or their tormenters?

Quakerism is one of many sects labeled "enthusiastic" by more ritualized religions. "Called enthusiasts by established society," explains David S. Lovejoy in *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World: Heresy to*

Revolution, "these several brands of Christians . . . . practiced a personal experimental religion which hinged, they believed, on direct inspiration" (1). Quakerism poses interesting problems for the relationship between individual and communal religious experience. On the one hand, Quakers took Protestant notions of individual interpretation of the Scriptures to the extreme of finding the Scriptures themselves unnecessary. Founder George Fox, for example, "read the Bible only to discover in its pages truths he already knew `experimentally'" (Lovejoy 112). On the other hand, they were a strongly communal people. The Quakers maintained a powerful grip on their community members to the point of excommunication for marriage outside of the faith (an experience Brown was to suffer). Paradoxically, their group worship was as isolated a religious experience a person could have in a roomful of people. Alike, yet alone, Quakers looked for direct inspiration from God. Unlike Protestant text-based sermons, Quakers refused prepared, ritualized worship in favor of unpredictable, spontaneous "prophesying". Quaker

worship often consisted of a roomful of silent people awaiting God's word. If Protestants were people of the [textual] word, the Quakers were people of the [spoken] word. They posed the same problem for their culture as Anne Hutchinson had posed for seventeenth-century New England during the Antinomian controversy: does a religious practitioner obey community control and church ordinances or does she obey the spontaneously given word of God? Hutchinson and fellow "antinomians"--a pejorative term given her group for favoring the spontaneous religious spirit over the written religious law--chose the spontaneously given word, or contemporary prophecy, a judgment that was anathema to the tradition-bound Puritans. This is profoundly a question of speech versus text. Is only the printed religious word--the biblical text--allowable as religious truth, or can we hear God's law, anew each moment, for ourselves?

An anecdote from Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* illuminates many of the issues I've been discussing. In the *Autobiography*, Franklin relates a discussion he had

with Michael Welfare about the problem of written versus spoken religious law. Welfare complained to Franklin that "they [he and his fellow Dunkers] were grievously calumniated by the Zealots of other Persuasions, and charg'd with abominable Principles and Practices to which they were utter Strangers." Franklin's response was that "it might be well to publish the Articles of their Belief and the Rules of their Discipline" to prevent lies about the sect from being spread among outsiders. Welfare's answer highlights the cultural differences between the enthusiasts and their detractors: "[I]f we should once print our Confession of Faith, we should feel ourselves as if bound & confin'd by it" (1416-7). Like the Quakers, the Dunkers believed that God had not yet stopped speaking, they only had to keep listening. This is what the Puritans, since the Synod of 1637--the meeting of orthodox Puritan clergy at which they tried to deal with the Antinomian problem--had been trying to prevent. Error No. 40, according to the Synod, was "Immediate revelation without concurrence with the word" (Lovejoy 76). The

Puritan ministers wanted strict adherence to the biblical laws, and saw the Antinomians as dangerous to public order. The enthusiasts would agree with the letter, but not the spirit of Error No. 40, for their idea of the "word" was a different one. The word was to be here and now, or not at all. In some ways, the situation of 1637 was the same as that of revolutionary Philadelphia. Puritan fears that their rebellion would open the dams of religious freedom were paralleled by revolutionary concerns that, "[a]s protest turned to independence, previously abstract fears that the flight from authority and obedience would turn everything upside down [would become] a reality" (Butler 204). Indeed, as Jay Fliegelman argues in *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800*, the change in family structure in late-eighteenth-century America paralleled the changing political structure. Political revolution was promoted through a rhetoric of the affective family. Fliegelman shows how revolutionaries used this rhetoric against the English, by

labeling "her" an "unnatural" and uncaring parent to justify their "familial" rebellion. Would not other, yet more frightening revolutions be imminent? Seventeenth-century Puritans had argued that enthusiasts were natural rebels; eighteenth-century revolutionaries saw them as traitors and subversives. "Most sectaries," writes Lovejoy, "harbored antimonarchical principles:

> they condemned the magistracy, particularly since it enforced public worship; they refused to take oaths or to go to war--all disloyal practices which could only bring the state to its knees. Subject as enthusiasts were to the motions of the spirit, to their fancy and imagination in all things, would not [thought the Puritans] these lead to the overthrow of the commonwealth? (34)

This taint of subversiveness never left the Quakers, despite their integration within the Philadelphia community. What is most ironic about accusations of "enthusiasm" directed at the Quakers, is that they themselves condemned "enthusiasm" as well as the "fancy

and imagination."

In *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England*, Phyllis Mack, explains the early Quakers' own perception of "enthusiasm", "For seventeenth-century Quakers, `enthusiasm' and `exaltation' were also dirty words, but not because they implied a *loss* of selfhood; on the contrary, they conveyed a sense of self-generated, self-centered, willful energy" (142). They felt that, unlike "willful" enthusiasts, they followed God's lead, not their own. This belief is where Quaker communality becomes so central, as Mack describes it. "If the skeptical outsider," she notes, "found the Quakers' verbal and body language tinged with antinomianism, Quakers themselves felt assured of their essential righteousness because their most ecstatic outbursts took place within the shelter and authority of their own community . . . . Quakerism began, in fact, as a family and neighborhood movement" (157).

One can easily see how the communal side of Quakerism affected Brown's early life. Not only was he surrounded

at worship by fellow Quakers, but his early schooling was at the Friends' Latin School run by Robert Proud, a prominent Quaker scholar. Brown's attendance at a Quaker school is especially significant given how carefully the leaders of the community supervised the Quaker schools. Histories of the school document the patriarchal regulation of school policies. Education was to be as strictly practical as possible and was to guide students' religious development. The *Minutes of the Overseers of Friends Schools* for 1785 (Brown would have been fourteen at the time), worried, "On the Account given of the Visitation to Robert Prouds School, Of the State thereof, it appears necessary that a Conference Should be had with him to support his Authority, for a due Observance of the Rules." It is unclear how Proud felt about this "necessity," but communal leanings won out. The Quakers' individualistic religious practice--requiring an individual's continuous personal relationship with God--was, ironically, highly dependent on communal approval. The Quaker community, for the most part, condemned any

expressions of individualism other than religious revelation. It was for this reason that the individual's imagination was feared and condemned.

In Brown's first speech to the Belles Lettres Club, as reported by William Dunlap in his early *Life* of Brown, he develops a connection between the religious and the fictional imagination. "The enthusiasm of poetry," Brown wrote, "is no less strong and violent than that of religion; they flow in separate channels, but are derived from the self same fountain" (25). Perhaps this is why, in his fictional family history of the Wielands, the famous German poet and religious enthusiasts share the same family roots.

The discrimination aimed at Quaker communities and other enthusiastic sects was part of a larger pattern of religious prejudice. Catholics, Jews and "atheists" were also variably subject to social and legal discrimination. There was a wide-spread anxiety about conspiracies. A recurrent paranoid fantasy during the period was that secret "cabals" of co-religionists were intent on

overthrowing church and state. This fear was magnified by the events of the French Revolution. Masonry, and other, not-so-secret secret societies, were frequent targets of print attacks (like John Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy,* published in 1798). The conspiracy-minded of the eighteenth-century saw a connection between Catholicism and Masonry. This is ironic, since Catholics were not part of the Freemasons, and many even saw Freemasonry as Anti-Catholic. Gothic novelists had used both Catholicism and Masonry to label their villains as secretive, malevolent, and intent on domination--either personal or political. Brown hints at these themes in his tale of Carwin's encounter with a secret society whose members seem to have a mysterious ability to know unknowable parts of his past, and who claim the ability to read his soul.

Anti-Catholicism has been a recurrent theme in American history. In fact, the "threat" of Catholicism was used by some revolutionaries to incite colonial discontent with the English government. Many colonists

saw the Quebec Act of 1774--in which territory was ceded to Quebec by Parliament to protect the religious rights of the territory's Catholics--as a sign of the Government's desire to promote Catholicism and absolutist government. Free Masonry, similarly, was seen as a secretive sect intent on promoting its own beliefs over that of "rational" religion and government. Anti-Masonry reached its eighteenth-century height just as Brown was beginning his literary career, with the publication in 1798 of John Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against all the Religions and Governments of Europe Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies*, a copy of which would have been available to Brown at the Philadelphia Library Company. Robison's anti-Masonry was a form of xenophobia, directed at continentals particularly. He believed continental thinking-which he connected to the free-thinking atheistical Masons-- to be antithetical to good British liberties. This is where anti-Catholic and anti-Mason rhetorics diverge. Catholicism was seen as absolutist,

irrational and hierarchical; Masonry was seen by some as absolutist and cabalist, and by others as revolutionary and atheistical. Apparently, after the Revolution, there were as many people concerned with preventing revolution as were before intent on inciting it. Perhaps the rhetoric of conspiracy was used simply to suit the times: before the Revolution, fear of Catholicism could be used as a threatening rod by the pro-revolution colonists; after the Revolution, these same colonists could use anti-Masonry to maintain and protect the government they had succeeded in establishing.

One paranoid columnist, writing in the same year as the publication of Robison's book, was to connect Masonry and Quakerism. According to Vernon Stauffer in his 1919 study of the conspiracy theory phenomenon in the colonies, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati,* this columnist, calling himself "Trepidus",

> had a mysterious cabal to expose. The people who were vulgarly called "Quakers," but who had assumed the suspicious name of "Friends," were they not

> conspirators? [in Massachusetts Mercury, Nov. 30, 1798, he wrote] "The Illuminati esteem all ecclesiastical establishments profane, irreligious, and tyrannical; so do the Quakers. They hold also the obligations of brotherly love and universal benevolence. The Quakers not only profess these Atheistical principles, but actually reduce them to practice. The Illuminati hold the enormous doctrine of Equality of mankind. So do these Quakers. (263)

"Equality of mankind" is a telling phrase in this context. In the end, Brown and others' concern over enthusiasm is really a series of questions about hierarchy. The question of hierarchy is, in the end, a question of who would control the interpretation of experience. Federalist America feared to put into practice what many of its revolutionary "brothers" had previously preached in theory. Fear of enthusiasm, a term applied to everything from poetry to revolution, represented, in part, the American fear of loosing interpretation's tied hands. It was too late. Brown's novels show what could

happen when the structures which had bound individual and communal interpretation collapsed. An intense cultural anxiety was released, a near-paranoid doubt about the individual's and the society's ability to interpret individual experience.

The varieties of religious belief and unbelief play central roles in all of Brown's novels with the exception of *Arthur Mervyn*. From *Wieland*'s enthusiast murderer to *Ormond*'s enthusiastic atheist, religious belief (or the lack of it) in Brown's world intercedes between the individual and his or her experience of the world. *Ormond*'s Constance Dudley realizes the serious consequences of this relationship of experience and belief in her attempts to free herself from Ormond's malevolent hold. She soon becomes aware

> [t]hat all appeals to his compassion and benevolence would counteract her purpose, since, in these unexampled conformation of this man's mind, these principles were made subservient to his most flagitious designs. Considerations of justice and

> pity were made, by a fatal perverseness of reasoning, champions and bulwarks of his most atrocious mistakes (Ormond 283).

But, while Constance blames Ormond's misuse of her pleading on "a fatal perverseness of reasoning"--in this context clearly referring to Ormond's reasoning rather than reasoning itself--how else could he hear her pleadings but through his own beliefs about the nature of the world? This "fatal perverseness" of reason itself--its dependence on the most individual and personal beliefs or premises--is even more evident in the nature of enthusiastic religion. While the narrator of *Ormond* largely blames Constance's lack of religious education for her vulnerability to her seducer, writing that " [s]he was unguarded in a point, where, if not her whole, yet, doubtless, her principal security and strongest bulwark would have existed" (179), religious belief itself made one vulnerable. Ormond demonstrates this weakness of the religious believer by abusing his ability to mimic and therefore spy with impunity on others' most secret

interactions. In *Wieland*, Carwin also plays on the credulity of many with his mimicry. In almost all of Brown's novels, the superstitiousness of others is exploited by those, like Ormond and Carwin, with unusual talents. Carwin uses his ability to mimic to convince his superstitious father that his deceased wife is speaking to him. Carwin, by using his mother's voice, convinces his father to give him permission to follow his own wishes. Carwin's abuse of his "biloquism" or ventriloquism is partly what leads us to doubt that Wieland's religious experience is genuinely spiritual, rather than a result of Carwin's emotional manipulation. Because the nature of religious experience, particularly the experience of grace or revelation, is necessarily private, we have no way to confirm the validity of such experience in ourselves or in others. The enthusiast's claim was, in fact, that no one could doubt a genuine experience of grace; only those who had themselves experienced it, then, could judge. But who judged the judgement? If I claim a genuine experience of grace and denounce your own similarly-claimed experience

as demonic, false or mad what could you do but fall back on your own unshareable experience as evidence? And of course, if I do not believe in the experiences of grace in the first place, or I believe that they are experienced in an entirely different way than your own claimed grace was experienced, than I can only claim that you are deluded either by yourself or by the devil. We are again back to the question of authority. Enthusiasm is anti-institutional by nature. Ronald A. Knox in *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* returns again and again to this "conflict between the charismatic and the institutional" (7). Enthusiasts often accused others of Arminianism, a reliance on man's works rather than on God's grace. "Legalism," or the institutionalized experience of God, was an oft-criticized tendency.

The relationship between interpretation and cultural institutions is an important one, and one which plays out over and over again in *Wieland.* The novel opens with the story of the elder Wieland's discovery of and obedience to his personal religion, and his eventual mysterious death.

At a low point in his life, poor, alone, tired of his work, he discovers a book which he had previously ignored lying open in his room. Having fallen open on a page declaring "seek and ye shall find," the book, a history of the Camisard sect, gives the lonely Wieland a glimpse of a religion he knows nothing else about. Out of the fragments of this religious knowledge, isolated from any like-minded people, he creates a rigid code for himself. His religious duties, including solitary worship, were dictated, he believed, to him alone. Clara, who narrates the novel, explains, "His own system was embraced not, accurately speaking, because it was the best, but because it had been expressly prescribed to him. Other modes, if practiced by other persons, might be equally acceptable" (13). Believing himself called to preach to the Indians in the colonies, and ultimately unsuccessful in his attempts, Wieland moves to an isolated home near Philadelphia. He prays alone in an open-air gazebo which he builds for himself, and which his children use for social gatherings after his death. His wife isolated from

any religious community, follows the practice of Count Zinzendorf. Isolated in private prayer, they leave their children, Clara and Theodore to develop their own personal religious beliefs. Being of opposite temperaments, the children develop very differently. Theodore becomes Calvinistic and melancholy; Clara more Deistically inclined. The younger Theodore Wieland's already melancholy personality is darkened by the mysterious death of his father, seemingly at the "hand" of supernatural and vindictive forces.

Like Brown's Quaker community, the Wieland family is both communal and individualistic. But, unlike the Quakers, the Wielands' worship is both personal and independent of the oversight of others. Theodore and Clara form a community of four adults when Theodore marries Catherine Pleyel and befriends his wife's brother Henry Pleyel. Despite their social interdependence, the foursome's religious and spiritual beliefs remain segregated. Clara moves to a separate house because her isolation there increases her enjoyment of their company.

They share no unity of belief or even common temperaments. Theodore is stern and serious, with a strict sense of justice. Clara is more modern, with a clearly Deistic philosophy. Henry is a light-hearted sceptic, always trying to tease Theodore out of his moodiness. Catherine is a stereotype of delicate womanhood, with an unthinking faith. They can't worship together since they do not believe in the same things. Where the Quakers temper potential antinomianism with community oversight, the Wielands follow the rule of personal revelation to an extreme.

The Wielands' seemingly idyllic community of four (two pairs of brother and sister), enters a nightmare world when Theodore Wieland follows an internal voice commanding him to murder his family. Brown's idea for this episode came from an eighteenth-century account of a man named John Yates. Yates murdered his family believing that he did so "under divine orders" (*Wieland* xxiv). Brown read the report of this event in a 1796 issue of the *Weekly Magazine*. An earlier account of a similar instance,

also quite likely to have been read by Brown, was published in the July 1789 issue of *The American Museum*[1]. According to this 1789 account, a family of eight (four sons and four daughters)--the Dutartres-- had come under the influence of a "strolling Moravian preacher" who had "filled their heads with wild and fantastic ideas" ("Murder Discovered" 82-3). "At length," the article continues, the enthusiasts "came to open visions and revelations" (83). A son-in-law of the family, Peter Rombert proclaimed that he had felt the revelation leading to their commission of murders, "as plain as the wind blowing on his body" (83). Having been condemned for battling the local militia, the family proclaimed, speaking of the clergymen present, "'answer him not a word: who is he, that he should presume to teach them, who had the spirit of God, speaking inwardly to their souls?' --in all they had done, they said they had obeyed the voice of God . . . "(84). It is not a remarkable

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[1] This was the same year, in fact, that the 18-year-old Brown published his first periodical pieces; he would have certainly read this, one of the more prominent periodical efforts of the time.

coincidence, though it is of note, that Wieland's own defense of his actions at his trial is so similar:

> [H]e repelled all invectives by appealing to the deity, and to the tenor of his past life; surely there was truth in this appeal: none but a command from heaven could have swayed his will; and nothing but unerring proof of divine approbation could sustain his mind in it present elevation. (207)

This was exactly what critics of antinomianism had always feared, and what Brown chose to represent: the extremes of individualism and enthusiasm could lead to mayhem and murder. Ronald Knox writes, "History abounds with warnings that the mystic who follows his own 'guidance' without any 'check' from outside may easily mistake the stirrings of his own unconscious self, even the baser of them, for inspirations from on high"(135). What interests me in these incidences, and in responses, such as Knox's, to them, is the lack of "guidance" given to readers about how they should protect themselves from their own base selves. Who would provide the proper guidance? In the

Old Testament we read that God told Abraham, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thy lovest, and get thee into the land of Mo-ri'-ah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" and in return for his offering receives both a blessing and a release from the requested sacrifice (Gen 22:1). In the *New Testament* God is referred to as, "He that spared not his own son" (Rom 8: 32). "FOR THY SAKE," Romans continues, "WE ARE KILLED ALL THE DAY LONG; WE ARE ACCOUNTED AS SHEEP FOR THE SLAUGHTER" (8: 36). Even when Wieland has been temporarily convinced by Carwin's manipulations that his acts were not divinely inspired, he feels that his own loss, his own sacrifice, are proof of his rectitude. "If I erred," he claims, " it was not my judgement that deceived me, but my senses" (256) Clara, after nearly fallen victim to him, a lamb for his sacred sacrifice, describes him as "her heroic brother" (256).

Is Wieland an eighteenth-century Abraham? What does Wieland mean when he says that his senses, not his judgement, deceived him? Obviously, if he had been

ordered by God to sacrifice his family, as Abraham was asked to offer Isaac on the mountain, he would not, by the spirit of the Old and New Testament, be wrong to do so. That is his "judgement": His decision followed clearly from his premises. But he had two premises: 1) If God commands, one obeys and; 2) God commanded. We can argue about his first premise, backing up our position with scripture and theology, philosophy or personal belief. But how are we to argue about his second premise? So, did his senses deceive him? Senses can be deceived. As a ventriloquist can fool our ears into thinking we heard someone where there is no one, so can those who wish to trick us fool our other senses. Senses themselves can be deceptive, leading us, like small children, to see monsters in the shadowy patterns on the walls of our darkened rooms. We often see things because we fear to see them, or see things because we long to see them. The senses can be manipulated by magicians, con men and drugs, legal and illegal. Even if we leave out of our discussion the extremes of mental illness, it is obvious that the

senses are often unreliable. The problem with religious enthusiasm, as we have seen, is that it is dependent on the senses. Enthusiasts' criticisms of other religions often cited their perceived "bloodlessness." These more formalized religions seemed to the enthusiasts to lack passion, the very passion for which the enthusiasts were condemned.

The cases of murderous enthusiasm, from the true stories of the Dutartres and the Yates families, to the fictional account of Theodore Wieland, were only the most egregious examples of what could happen when people followed their "spiritual" instincts. In his 1985 history, *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World: Heresy to Revolution*, David Lovejoy explains the difference, as he sees it, between enthusiasm and antinomianism:

> Enthusiasts' contempt for the law, whether scriptural, ecclesiastic, constitutional, or moral, hinted strongly of perfectionism and antinomianism. Perfectionism was sinlessness, a belief that conversion and grace led to a permanent rooting out

> of sin, leaving believers suffused or flushed with a love of God and his creatures which displaced evil within them. But perfectionism could and sometimes did spill over into antinomianism, since some believers argued that freedom from sin placed them above the demands of the law. Antinomianism was not a sect but a condition. Enthusiasm became antinomianism when it led believers to assume that they were filled with Christ to the point where good works made no difference, and they could do no wrong. (36)

During Brown's own time, this distinction was frequently blurred; antinomianism's and enthusiasm's shared aversion to legalism helps us see why both enthusiasm and antinomianism were considered so dangerous by so many. Good works were relied upon as signs of grace because they were visible. If someone had experienced grace, but did not generate good works as part of their conversion, how could we tell that he or she had really experienced grace as they claimed? Anyone, then, saint or sinner, could

claim grace and refuse to follow any laws but those they claimed were given them by God. To put it another way, if there were no "public" grace, but only "private" grace, how could individuals continue to live in communities, under communal laws? As many historians and theorists have pointed out (Jurgen Habermas and Richard Sennett, for example) the eighteenth century saw the beginning of modern ideas of public and private life. There is a connection in Brown's novels, I believe, between the problem of religious experience I have just explored, and the issue of the division of the public and private spheres. Brown's exploration of the separation of the public and private, in its relation to religious issues, emerges most clearly in *Edgar Huntly*. In this novel, the eponymous hero holds in his possession a collection of letters written to him by his best friend, and fiancee's brother, Waldegrave, since murdered by unknown hands. The letters record the skeptical thoughts of a young Waldegrave, later regretted. Refusing to destroy them, as Waldegrave had requested, Huntly offers to share them with

his fiancee. He is horrified to discover that they are missing, even though they were hidden in a secret drawer in his room.

It is not only in Edgar Allen Poe that mysterious or secret letters get waylaid. Letters stolen or intercepted, like those in *Edgar Huntly*, were a common theme in the eighteenth century, both in fiction and in life. Letters represented, then as now, the relationship between private and public selves. Benjamin Franklin, who embodies for many critics the new "public" man of the eighteenth century, was himself responsible for waylaying a private letter. As Michael Warner tells it, in *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*, "He [Franklin] had obtained by secret means some incriminating letters written by Thomas Hutchinson, then governor of Massachusetts. He had then sent them . . . back to a group of influential men in the colonies, that they might know what Hutchinson had been writing in private about colonial affairs" (91). What does the "Cockpit confrontation," as it was called,

of Hutchinson and Franklin have to do with Edgar Huntly and his own missing letters? More importantly, what do missing and waylaid letters have to do with religious enthusiasm? Fundamental to all of these situations is someone's belief that what is said (or experienced) privately is more authentic than what is publicly written or proclaimed. From their silent prayer services to their refusal to make public oaths, the Quakers' of Brown's memory had valued the private beliefs and experiences of their members over the public rules of the wider community. Not only the Quakers, but other enthusiasts as well had distrusted the authenticity of public professions of faith-or of anything else. The "revelations" of private correspondence which occurred during this period, reveal a similar distrust of public professions in the larger culture.

The issue of privacy which is raised by the reading and sharing of personal correspondence suggests both the positive and negative sides of privacy. On the positive side, the private, as I have discussed, was seen by

Brown's culture, as well as by our own, as more authentic. We reveal ourselves most, from this point of view, when we believe ourselves to be alone, hence Brown's frequent use of keyholes in his novels. Negatively, the private is unreadable, secretive: there is not always a keyhole convenient when we most need one. Private letters, meant to be read only by friends or relations, are the equivalent of keyholes in the eighteenth-century novel. Waldegrave's letters to Huntly are openings into the pasts they would like to protect. Ostensibly meaning to share the letters with his fiancee (and Waldegrave's sister), Huntly unconsciously fears his action and hides them from himself in a sleepwalking trance. Waldegrave's sister has not, after all, been "fortified and prepossessed against the subtleties, with which the being and attributes of the deity have been assailed" (127). Her brother's letters, ostensibly shared with her because they "elucidated [his] character and history," could serve as Huntly recognizes, "to expose [her] to pollution and depravity." Huntly both fears and admires the power of these letters.

Private beliefs are never as feared in history as much as the same beliefs publicly professed or acted upon. Even Anne Hutchinson was punished only for preaching her beliefs, not for the beliefs themselves. But, if these beliefs are kept private and acted upon secretly, we are left with the very situation that many in the eighteenth century feared. Huntly is torn between his fears of the consequences of the revelation of his true beliefs and his desire to open them to his future wife. What is it to have your beliefs on paper? Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the Dunkers, and their fear of committing their religious beliefs to paper, thereby hardening them into permanent "truths" rather than immediate, and changeable, revelations. Waldegrave, unlike the Dunkers, has made the mistake of not concealing, or rather of "publishing" his beliefs to the world. Worse yet, after having written his Deistically and skeptically inclined letters to Huntly, he had moved home. His move home meant, as Huntly tells us, that "the subtle and laborious argumentations which he had formerly produced against religion, and which were

contained in a permanent form, were combatted in transient conversation" (132-3). Huntly places the ephemeral nature of speech in stark contrast to the permanence of writing. Huntly's use of the word "transient" is significant in this context. Just as Franklin's Dunker friend fears the effect of the permanence of writing on his sects' openness to the will of God, Huntly doubts "transient" conversation's ability to counter the ill-effects of the irreligious text. The impermanence of Waldegrave's religious reconversion-its never having been put on paper- - means it is powerless to counter his previous arguments. Having written them out, Waldegrave can never rid himself or the world of his former beliefs. Meant to be kept private, correspondence can escape its context and, like the plague much feared and suffered in Brown's time, infect others. The reader of Waldegrave's letters can not know that their writer had stopped believing what he had written, just as the Dunkers' religious beliefs, had they been written down, would have continued to circulate in text form, regardless of the changing religious practices

of their authors. Though Huntly seeks the lost letters after their mysterious disappearance, he also unconsciously fears finding them. He hides them from himself and the world, fearing their contagiousness. Waldegrave's own antidote to the letters he had disowned disappeared with his murder.

Although they believed in the necessary privacy of spiritual experience, Quakers dubbed their first itinerant preachers, "Publishers of the Truth or 'public' Friends" (Cowing 31). Their "publication" of the truth, even if metaphorical, is much in contradiction with the Quakers' commitment to religious privacy. Indeed, it represents an important split in Quaker theory and practice. Take for example, Quakers' controversial refusal to take oaths. In *The Great Awakening and the American Revolution: Colonial Thought in the 18th Century*, Cedric B. Cowing, writes of this principle:

> A Quaker must refuse to swear an oath of truth or responsibility because this act implies a double standard: that these virtues could be observed only

> on special occasions, whereas a Quaker must be unremittingly truthful and responsible at all times. (32)

In addition, "[t]hose who believed that God and Truth dwelt within could not accept the imposition of an outward form on truth-taking" (36). Whereas the Quakers felt that public profession of honesty was, of necessity, inauthentic, their refusal was read by much of the surrounding community as an intentional separation of themselves from communal rules and understandings. From the Quaker viewpoint, what was the worth of a spoken promise of truth? Either you told the truth, or you did not. One could, after all, promise to tell the truth, take oath after oath, and still lie. From the community viewpoint, oath taking was an understood ritual, a necessary play acting. The August 1790 issue of *The American Museum, or, Universal Magazine*, included a piece on the necessity for oath taking in society. Entitled, "On the sanctity of oaths, and the mischiefs of profaneness," the article exposes the epistemological

tangle which results from Quaker practice. It is worth quoting at length.

> It has been enquired by some, whether oaths would have been necessary, had mankind remained in a state of innocence. But whether they would or not, it is certain that human nature is so corrupt and degenerate, that society cannot subsist, the duties of it cannot be performed, and the advantages of it cannot be obtained, without the sanction of oaths . . . . Certain it is, that without these obligations and solemnities, mankind are so treacherous, so selfish, so malicious, that the most beneficial services would be neglected, the greatest crimes would be perpetrated--fraud, rapine and murder, would reign uncontrolled, unless oaths were superadded to promises, to laws, and to other restraints and obligations, and unless men were compelled to do their duty, and withheld from committing injuries and offences, by other prompters, terrors, and bonds, besides the laws of God, and an inward sense of what

is fit and right. (76)

Ostensibly about oath taking, the article becomes a sermon on law and order. Oaths are obviously not sufficient according to the author, who writes that they must be "superadded to promises, to laws, and to other restraints and obligations." After he has finished writing his list of "prompters, terrors and bonds" necessary to prevent universal mayhem, he doesn't seem to have left much room for the necessity of oaths. So then, why were (and are) oaths so universally required? Why were the Quakers most persecuted for this aspect of their religious beliefs? The answer lies in the idea of community trust. Adam B. Seligman's discussion of the "promise" in *The Problem of Trust* is especially significant in this context. "The promise then," he writes, "is an act of will that invites trust among strangers . . . . It is . . . 'a speech act whereby one alters the moral situation' by incurring new obligations" (Seligman 15; fn. Baier 174). A speech act of this sort constructs the situation it is positing. This is just what the colonists, though they were not

fully aware of it, were trying to do. As Seligman insightfully suggests, "It may even be said that the attempt to found a political community on that basis of mutual promise-keeping was essentially an attempt to construct a new community of belief predicated not on blood, but on belief itself" (15). He calls this attempt "the enduring challenge of modern societies during the past two centuries" (15). The performative act of the oath was a ritual of trust in a community without confidence.

Seligman contrasts trust with confidence. Trust, like faith in God, is a pure act of will, not based on argument or fact. Confidence, on the other hand, is a belief based on factual evidence in someone's, or something's, reliability. Confidence is not possible in situations where there are unknowns. In refusing the ritual display of trust, of faith in man's social institutions, the Quakers were pointing to the dramatic, and hence to them insincere, aspect of the act of oath taking. The Quakers placed their faith in God alone.

Where did this Quaker stand leave Brown? His novels show him as someone who lacks, if not faith in God, the belief in the trustworthiness of Man's professions, based as they are on his fallible mind and senses. Wieland believes he hears God; he kills. Huntly promises to destroy Waldegrave's letters; he does not. If this kind of behavior, shocking and unexpected, is true of those we know and have confidence in, what are we to make of those who we do not even know? Confidence--as Seligman distinguishes it from trust--had become nearly impossible because of the presence of so many strangers. Community, like religion, becomes dependent upon a leap of faith. Both, in the end, are impossible for Brown's characters to make with confidence.

The Evidence of Character and the Character of Evidence: Charles Brockden Brown's Psychology of Knowing

Your cousin Jill has a tendency to lie when in an uncomfortable situation, even about inconsequential things. You know, though, that if you slip a drink into her hand you are likely to get her relaxed enough to talk to you honestly. Your brother, on the other hand, believes in "honesty," even to the point of brutality. He won't lie to you even when you want him to. Your brother's new girlfriend: there is an enigma. She smiles a lot, maybe too much, and you don't know if it is a sign of nervousness, condescension, or friendliness. You don't know whether to trust her, or when.

How do we understand the things we do about the people around us? What do we do when faced with such

enigmas as a brother's new girlfriend, or a new boss? How do we know whom to trust, and when to trust them? There are many answers, depending on our environment, personality, and the particular situation in which we meet someone. New fears about on-line Internet "seductions" bring to light some of the repressed fears of face-to-face meetings. After all, how much more do we know about someone we meet at a new job, at a bar, or in our neighborhood? Our anxieties about the trustworthiness of non-visual interactions points to our dependence on facial expressions and verbal tones in our understanding of each other. How much less careless is someone who meets someone in private after meeting them once in a bar, than someone who does the same after meeting the same person on-line? What special information are we given by meeting someone in person? Think of some of the other factors that make us more likely to increase our trust is someone we have met. The person in the bar always has friends along. More even if the friends are of mixed gender. How about if they tell you where they work or where they live?

What if they live in your neighborhood? What if they make just enough eye contact, but not enough to be creepy? If you share a mutual friend or acquaintance, you are probably led to trust them as at least personal acquaintances. Ask yourself at what point in a relationship you would meet your new friend in a private place, trust them with money, trust them with your children. How many times, though, have we finally decided in favor of trusting someone, and have lived to regret it? How often have we been shocked to discover that someone whose faithfulness has long been taken for granted has betrayed us?

Of course, every culture has its own "rules" of trust. In tight-knit communities, small and lacking in mobility, most of these issues are moot. Those in small communities have usually learned who to trust the hard way, by having trusted in the past and been taken advantage of. Better yet, they can know based on someone else's having learned the hard way. The common practice historically of bringing letters of introduction with one

when one traveled, was to carry the feeling of connection outside of one's immediate environment. Of course, this was only possible within the equally small and tight-knit community of the wealthy and elite. What happened in these communities when the social circle widened to the point of near-boundlessness? And what about middle-class communities equally concerned with personal and economic safety, but which by their very nature, were highly mobile?

In the eighteenth century, a time of greatly increased personal and social mobility, many people were understandably obsessed with such questions about the nature of interpersonal trust. Adam Seligman addresses what he calls the change from "confidence" to "trust" in newly mobile societies like Brown's:

> The rather simplistic way we usually envision modernity as a society of "strangers," as one without trust is, therefore, at least in some respects, incorrect. True, there is often (perhaps most of the time) mistrust or lack of trust, but it is also only

> within these social formations that the potential for trust and hence the possibility for its realization may exist. What is naively seen as the trusting nature of premodern societies, is, in fact, nothing but confidence in well-regulated and heavily sanctioned role expectations (of an ascriptive nature).(36-7)

In other words, trust is an issue that arises when "confidence" or the dependence on social control of roles and role-playing is disabled. So, in Seligman's schema, "role" and "character" are clearly distinguished. A "role" is a function which society defines and organizes for allowing and limiting personal action within the society, while the idea of "character" that Seligman articulates is one dependent on a strong element of individualism, allowing for increased personal choice, and representing a greater unpredictability. Consequently, the word "character" came to stand for all of the questions about trust that arose when social controls were weakened because of class and other social changes. It was

a word fraught with anxiety. Simple economics depended on people being able to trust many who they could not expect to bring along letters of introduction from mutual acquaintances. The lack of a central banking system made the necessary acceptance of bank notes a financial hazard. Counterfeiting, though a dangerous enterprise, was temptingly easy. People had to learn character-reading skills, which, unreliable at best, were necessary to their mental well-being, even if it did little to protect their wallets. For a women, an ability to judge the characters of potential suitors was more important even than a merchant's decision to trust a customer with credit. The eighteenth-century woman, almost completely dependent on her husband for her physical, emotional, financial and even moral well being, had to make sure she had not allied herself with a thief, a gambler, or a wife beater. How could she be sure she would not be left, seduced and abandoned, after being promised love and marriage? How could she be sure she would not be left, at some point after her marriage, penniless and pregnant without a

husband to support her? Character came to be distinguished, then, from personality. One could be charming but flighty and unreliable. The former representing one's "personality," and the latter one's "character." In the marriage market, solidity of character became a higher social good than the charm of one's personality. The eighteenth-century novel, right up through Jane Austen's, were replete with giddy girls choosing charming but fickle suitors over the stolid, but seemingly dull men who loved them. Of course, they didn't always live, to regret their choice. But sensibility, as Austen knew, appears so much more charming than sense.

The idea of a unique personality belonging to each person was an odd fit, surely, with the eighteenth century's dependence on community and common sense as a means of resolving crises and differences of opinion. How do individual and common sense work together, if they can do so at all? Other contradictory impulses were present during this time which parallel the paradoxical relationship of individualism and common sense: a new

emphasis on sincerity and emotionalism, on one hand, and a fear of capriciousness and unpredictability, on the other. This paradox is reflected in the difference between character and personality. Was character a result of covering up an individual personality for the sake of common values and the social good, or was character what lay *under* the put-on face of the "polite" social forms? In his delightful social history of eighteenth-century England, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, John Brewer elaborates on this conflict:

> By the 1790s what had once been a steady murmur of criticism about the widespread cult of sensibility had become a vociferous challenge to the very idea itself. Critics condemned sensibility as effeminate, vicious and foreign--Rousseau and Goethe were two of its best-known proponents--and sentimental ideals as self-indulgent and anti-social, threatening to the social and domestic order. Ironically, then, what had been seen in the 1760s and 1770s as a patriotic

> assertion of sincerity against the affectation and foppery of politeness had, in turn, become associated with the unfettered feelings and desires which culture and the refined person were supposed to transcend.(121-2)

How could we trust strangers if we couldn't trust that their social forms were their "real" selves? Books of manners and polite behavior: did they allow "outsiders" to fit in or did they allow them to cover up the ways in which they didn't? Alternately, the well-spoken but impoverished stranger-represented by Carwin in Brown's *Wieland*-confuses our ability to distinguish class. The eighteenth century's answer was to both romanticize strangers and to fear them. The fear led to both social and legal stigmas. Laws against vagrancy, of course, were common through the period, though diminishing in effect. For financial reasons, all strangers could not be dismissed as vagrants, though the laws could be used to good effect when necessary, when the stranger was a bit too strange, or too poor for example.

Many of the problems that arose in relation to spiritual impulses, as we saw in chapter one, appear as well in other aspects of human psychology. The issues of character and trust can not be separated. The nature of a person's character would be a minor issue were we not concerned about the predictability of his or her actions and words; in other words, if we were not concerned with issues of trust. We fear the insane because they are unpredictable and do not conform either to fixed individual characters or to social ones. They can be characterized neither as polite nor as sincere. Having no self-control, controlled-- as many people also saw enthusiasts--by their "inner demons," they do not behave as common sense dictates. In fact, in seeing what we do not hear, in seeing what we do not see, in believing what we do not believe, they give the lie to the idea of a common "sense" which we all hold in common. Strangers, in turn, can not be "predictable" since we have no basis on which to predict future behavior, hence the fear of them common through most cultures and times. It is the nature

of the new to be unpredictable and hence to be feared.

Predictability, especially of character, is what makes evidence evidence. The most important factors that make evidence seem "true" are: 1) its fit with prior experience; 2) its validation by someone you consider an "authority"; 3) its "fit" with the character of the person giving it (related to 2); 4) its being learned of unbeknownst to the others involved (for instance, overheard); 5) the person giving it being out of his or her own control (drunk or sleepwalking, for example) or 6) corroborated by many (a version of common sense). All of these factors are interrelated, as I shall argue.

Our experiences discerning the characters of the people around us in real life is not at all different from those of a jury examining witnesses during a trial. One of the paradoxes of evidence, in court and in everyday life, is that it is often given to us by someone whose character, whose truthfulness, is based itself on evidence. Mise en abyme. In *Blackstone's Commentaries on The Law*, which any eighteenth-century law student would

have studied intensively, is this passage:

> All witnesses of whatever town or country, who have the use of their reason, are to be received and examined, except such as are infamous, or such as are interested in the event of the cause. All others are competent witnesses, though the jury from other circumstances will judge of their credibility. (682)

Hence the title of this chapter: "The Evidence of Character and the Character of Evidence." What does it mean to have a character witness at a trial? An unreliable witness? What is it, in fact, to "witness" a character? What is it for one character to "witness" another? Charles Brockden Brown's characters are all witnesses to these confusions. Puzzled by each other, and even by themselves, they sleepwalk and eavesdrop themselves into and out of any understanding they have of their situations and the people around them. Brown's novels in a very real way are like courtrooms: rather than deciding issues of guilt or innocence, the readers, often unknowing jurors, decide issues of reality and illusion.

In fact, Brown uses the word "testify" at least twelve times in the course of one of his novels, *Wieland*. Many different characters, with varying motivations for lying or telling the truth, present us with evidence. Brown tests the nature of evidence in every possible way. We are given evidence by strangers, by sleepwalkers, and by the insane. The irony, of course, is that all of the characters are strangers to us, even if "known" by others in the novels. It is the very nature of the novel to "trick" us into believing illusions are real, and that people are who they are not. We will need to explore more carefully this paradox of the reality of novelistic illusions, a problem which Brown was quite familiar.

In *Arthur Mervyn*, as in all of Brown's novels, the reader is in the same position as the characters when faced with an enigmatic stranger such as Mervyn. We have no character witness to call to the bench. For a character witness is one who can help demonstrate that an accused man "show[s] character traits inconsistent with the crime charged". We have no "proof of character either

by reputation or by receiving the opinion of persons who are sufficiently familiar with the accused to be able to testify concerning the traits in question" (*Black's Law*). More troubling, perhaps, is that even if we had word of such reputations or opinions, they would come to us from characters equally unknown. Who is Arthur Mervyn? When he charges unwelcome and uninvited into someone's home is he demonstrating an overenthusiastic boyishness, a bumpkinish lack of social graces or a clever manipulation of image? Brown's preparation for a law career was not wasted when he turned his hand to fiction. His novels demonstrate that the twists and turns of truth required by lawyers, the very thing that turned him away from law as a career, are aspects of everyday life. William Dunlap explains Brown's reasons for leaving law:

> He professed that he could not reconcile it with his ideas of morality to become indiscriminately the defender of right or wrong; thereby intimating, if not asserting, that a man must, in the practice of the law, not only deviate from morality, but become

the champion of injustice.(41)

Yet, there are always those who will elegantly present a false argument for the sake of "winning" a case. We will always meet with people who show a different face in different company. Brown wanted to reveal this problem, rather than to aggravate it.

In each of Brown's major novels, a stranger creates interpretive confusion and even panic. These figures must be separated from the many foreigners who appear throughout the same novels. Here I would like to use Richard Sennett's distinction, made in *The Fall of Public Man*, between the "stranger as an unknown" and the stranger as "an alien"(48). The "alien" stranger, or the foreigner, "appears in a landscape where people have enough sense of their own identities to form rules of who belongs and who does not". These strangers are strange in a particular and recognizable way, often stereotyped, e.g. "Frenchmen are snobs" or "Southerners are genteel" . Brown's strangers are unknowns; they function in an environment where no one is quite sure how anyone is

supposed to behave. This is the "modern" world drawn by Seligman, in which clear roles no longer exist, or are rapidly losing their clarity.

In *Wieland*, Carwin epitomizes this sort of stranger. When Henry Pleyel met him in Europe, he had transformed himself into a Spaniard. In Clara Wieland's words, "His garb, aspect and deportment, were wholly Spanish." He had made himself "indistinguishable from a native, when he chose to assumed that character." His transformation had gone so far, Pleyel tells the group, that he had changed his name and converted to Catholicism. Despite the Wielands' ardent analyses of Carwin's character, they "were able," as Clara writes, " for a long time, to gather no satisfactory information. He afforded us no ground on which to build even a plausible conjecture" (82). Although Clara claims there was, "not a gesture, or glance, or accent that was not, in our private assemblies, discussed, and inferences deduced from it," Carwin remains to them "inscrutable" (82, 86). Carwin represents the disembodied voice that causes so much anxiety in Brown's

novels, both literally--in his role as ventriloquist--and figuratively--as the voice without a social body. "He studiously avoided all mention of his past or present situation," Clara explains, "Even the place of his abode in the city he concealed from us" (82).

Despite not knowing "whether his fellowship is tended to good or evil," Clara is seduced by Carwin's voice and his words, significantly referring to them as "singular," "wholly new," and "unexampled," all in one paragraph (87, 59). The voice, like the man, stands alone among others. Clara is surprised and disappointed that the figure of the man is not as majestic as his voice. She is confused by her own feelings: "Strange as it may seem, I could not speedily reconcile myself to this disappointment" (60). The disjunction between the visual and aural is felt but not understood. This disjunction recurs through all of Brown's novels.

Arthur Mervyn too serves as a test-case for the socially disembodied voice. Country-born and self-educated, Mervyn arrives in Philadelphia at the height of

the yellow fever epidemic in 1793. He is uncategorizable in the terms the characters he meets have used to understand each other. Generations of critics have also been unable to pin down Mervyn; to some a "sharper", to others a benevolent friend to mankind, he remains the perfect example in American literature of the new and liminal man who inspires so much anxiety. Taken in by a Dr. Stevens, who saves him from the plague, Mervyn must eventually contest a former neighbor's highly critical account of how he came to leave his father's farm. Confronted with different and radically opposed visions of Mervyn's character, Stevens lacks any measure for the truth except his own faith in Mervyn. He tells a skeptical friend, "If Mervyn has deceived me, there is an end to my confidence in human nature"(236). Here is the unknown stranger, entering a community in crisis. Brown never lets us resolve the differing accounts of Mervyn's past. Ironically, Arthur Mervyn, the archetypal unknown quantity, is himself faced many times in the course of the novel with question of trust. Mervyn has to decide

whether to expose a fraud he has overheard plotted:

> By whom will my single testimony be believed, in opposition to that plausible exterior . . . which Thetford has maintained? To myself it will not be unprofitable. It is a lesson on the principles of human nature; on the delusiveness of appearances; on the perviousness of fraud; and on the power with which nature has invested human beings over the thoughts and actions of each other. (130-1)

He is not surprised by the difficulty people have in trusting him, or by the limitations of human understanding. As he says after being confronted with his neighbors' "version" of his past, "I am not surprized or afflicted at the misconceptions of my neighbors, with relation to my own character. Men must judge from what they see: they must build their conclusions on their knowledge" (325). If his own neighbors misunderstand, what then of strangers? How do human beings behave when confronted with people of whom they have no "knowledge"?

Both of the novels I have discussed, *Wieland* and

Arthur Mervyn, reveal anxieties--though very different ones--around the idea of community. Unexpectedly, *Wieland*'s tight-knit community is shown to be no protection for its members against the madness it contains. The reader of *Arthur Mervyn*, like the characters in it, are left with no criteria by which to judge the sincerity of the accounts of a newcomer to the community. Readers who, in reaction to *Arthur Mervyn*'s plague-ridden setting, believe that the novel symbolizes modern anxiety's birth out of urban uprootedness, must be shocked by the consequences of the Wieland's insularity. In fact, as I shall show, it is their insularity that leaves them vulnerable to the modern world.

The shocking multiple murder in *Wieland*, in which the younger Wieland murders his wife, children and an orphaned girl they had taken in, shows the lengths Brown will go to reveal our vulnerability to others we trust. Theodore Wieland is an educated and "enlightened" man, prone to studying Cicero and other classic literature. How does Theodore Wieland become a madman and a murderer? It is

more than just interesting that his sister Clara, the narrator of the novel describes him thus:

> He deemed it indispensable to examine the ground of his belief, to settle the relation between motive and action, the criterion of merit, and the kinds and properties of evidence. (26)

Later, when he begins to question whether God had truly commanded his actions, he exclaims to Clara, "If I erred, it was not my judgement that deceived me, but my senses" (256). In other words, he believes that if he had truly heard God's command, he would have been justified in his decision to carry out the violent actions he was called to perform. As I noted in the chapter one, how could any practicing Christian, having grown up reading of Abraham's obedience, disagree? So, having examined "the kinds and properties of evidence" what was Wieland to do when his senses told him of God's command? His insanity lies, not in trusting his own judgement, but in his judgement to trust his own senses, another paradox since, as I will soon discuss, he claims to be ready to "question his own

senses" before he will believe Clara Wieland guilty of criminal actions (124). Should one trust one's own senses, or not? Could Wieland have, as Clara believed he could, assume the voice was that of another human, rather than God? Perhaps if he had discussed his experiences with others he would have prevented the tragedy that followed. He, like his father, isolated himself in private worship and religious belief. Clara even refers to her brother as an "enthusiast" at one point in the novel (40). Like other enthusiasts, Wieland creates his own creeds, leaving himself more vulnerable to the consequences of misinterpretations than one who worships in a religious community.

Helvétius, in *De L'Esprit or, Essays On the Mind and its Several Faculties*, tells of "a certain lady, who being caught by her lover in the arms of his rival, obstinately denied the fact of which he had been a witness. How! said he, have you the assurance ------Ah! perfidious creature, cried the lady, it is plain you no longer love me; for you believe your eyes, before all I can say." Could Brown

have been thinking of Helvétius-whom he had read-- when-- in his novel *Wieland*-- he wrote of the ventriloquist Carwin's perjury of Clara Wieland's character? In this instance, Carwin throws his voice and Clara's voice in illicit and criminal dialogue, just beyond where Clara's friend and hoped-for lover Henry Pleyel is passing. When Henry accuses Clara of conspiracy with Carwin, she protests her innocence in vain. It is interesting to note that while the injured lover in Helvétius' tale "believe[s] [his] eyes, before all [she] can say," Pleyel trusts his ears before all else. He was, he claims, too distraught to confront Carwin and Clara in their illicit interlude, and needed no further proof of Clara's depravity. Even Carwin claims to be surprised by Pleyel's reaction: "When I think of your character," he tells Clara,"and of the inferences which this dialogue was intended to suggest, it seems incredible that this delusion should be produced" (240). Wieland's own reaction to the incident contains some important ambiguities.

> Because I have known you from childhood, because a thousand instances have attested your veracity, and because nothing less than my own hearing and vision would convince me, in opposition to her own assertions, that my sister had fallen into wickedness like this. (125)

Earlier he had told Clara, "You speak before a judge who will profit by any pretence to acquit you: who is ready to question his own senses when they plead against you" (124). Leaving aside the legalistic language he uses for a moment, notice the contradictions within his words. On the one hand he claims that "nothing less than my own hearing and vision would convince me" and on the other, he claims himself "ready to question his own senses." Wieland and Pleyel take their places at opposite ends of a spectrum: how much evidence against Clara Wieland is enough evidence to stand against the evidence of her entire past? If she is the "character" they know, how could she have committed the heinous deeds Carwin discusses in his night-time performance? Moreover, what

kind of evidence is acceptable? Clara protests, "Could the long series of my actions and sentiments grant me no exemption from suspicions so foul?" (120). With the disjunction Brown presents between reason and the senses, and among the senses themselves, how is one to judge the truth or falsity of accusations about character? If the closest of friends and relations are faced with these difficult questions, it is not difficult to imagine the greater anxiety caused by the presence of a stranger in these trials of character.

Arthur Mervyn and *Wieland* presents the problem of the stranger in two different lights. *Arthur Mervyn* presents the stranger, Mervyn himself, and asks us to judge him and the tales he tells. In *Wieland*, on the other hand, the stranger disrupts a community, and reveals to this community its own strangeness. While the alien stranger serves to unite a community by highlighting commonality, the unknown stranger deconstructs community by showing how we are always and everywhere alien to each other. What Julia Kristeva writes in *Strangers to Ourselves*, "the

foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder" (1), I believe is true of the alien stranger. The stranger enters, and suddenly we realize how feeble are the foundations of our understanding of each other. We hear a voice; we see a body; yet, we feel an absence and an anxiety arising from the belly of the social body. "From heart pangs to first jabs," writes Kristeva, "the foreigner's face forces us to display the secret manner in which we face the world, stare into all our faces, even the most familial, the most tightly knit communities" (3-4). If we think back to the moment in *Wieland* when Carwin tricks Henry Pleyel into believing the worst of Clara, we can now understand what he has done. The stranger does not destabilize the Wielands' community, rather the stranger, the unknown, has caused them to reveal themselves, to reveal the instability of their apparently stable understanding of each other. "A certain imbalance is necessary," writes Kristeva, "a swaying over some abyss, for a conflict to be

heard." We can not say that the Wielands, in their idyllic enlightened country estate, lack community; what they lack is a faith in that community sufficient to ground their understandings. This lack of faith is represented by Pleyel's casting aside of all of his experience of Clara's virtue, when faced by one invisible nighttime encounter. Carwin's thrown voice could have caused little damage in a relationship more firmly grounded in faith. The Wielands were unable, finally, to deal with the strangers from which they had tried to isolate themselves, including those within.

In thinking about the differing consequences of the protagonists' actions in *Arthur Mervyn, Wieland,* and *Edgar Huntly,* I came to an important conclusion. Brown was quite clear in his motives while writing the novels, explaining in the introduction to *Wieland* that he "aims at the illustration of some important branches of the moral constitution of man" (3). Considering his moral purpose in writing, he must have meant the reader to learn from his novels' conclusions. Why do two of his novels end

tragically--*Wieland* and *Edgar Huntly*-and one end with happiness and success--*Arthur Mervyn*? I realized that the differences lie in the relationships of the protagonists of the three novels with the public and the private. Clara Wieland and her family most clearly of the characters in Brown's novels, turn the public private. They isolate themselves on their estate and worship privately. Wieland withstands Pleyel's pleas to travel to Europe to claim ancestral land, refusing to risk his current happiness and seeming tranquility. Clara refer to the family as a community, though they are only four adults (68). Discussing the pleasure added to their lives by Pleyel's return to the colonies, Clara notes, "how much happiness depends on society" (28). The introduction of a fourth person into their lives creates a society as far as Clara is concerned. The naivete caused by their isolation is obvious from their relationship with Carwin. Clara notes that "whether his fellowship tended to good or to evil" was "uncertain" to them, yet they allow him into their lives (87). Because of their inexperience, the

family is vulnerable both to the manipulations of strangers and to the flights of their imaginations. As Clara explains, "solitude imposes least restraint upon the fancy" (98). Another difference between the events in *Wieland* and *Arthur Mervyn* is related to this abuse of the imagination: the reaction of Clara and Arthur to their dreams.

Arthur Mervyn, at the time of his engagement to Achsa Fielding, dreams of being confronted by her--believed to be deceased--husband. After relating his dream to his fiancee, he soothes her anxiety with the words "why you surely place no confidence in dreams" (429). In contrast, Clara places much confidence in her dreams. Looking back on a nightmare she had about her brother, she calls it an "omen" (100). Clara's private nightmares become her reality; Arthur dismisses his nightmare and marries his heiress. Public reality interests Arthur more than dreams. He wants to experience the world for bad or for good. He tells Mrs. Wentworth that he doesn't regret knowing Welbeck, because "it has done away a part of my

ignorance of the world in which I live" (341). He desperately wants to know, and wantonly peers through keyholes and enters homes without knocking. He refers to the "perilous precincts of private property," but for whom are they perilous? Curiosity is one of his most often used words; he appreciates suspiciousness on the part of others. He may appear "simple" and "innocent" (344, 347), yet he is far less naive than the "enlightened" Clara. His curiosity, his limitless desire for experience, generates his success. He is the exemplar of free-market man: seeing himself as currency he increases his value by constant circulation in society (Tompkins).

In *Arthur Mervyn*, Dr. Stevens' and our attempt to interpret Arthur Mervyn is representative of all human relationships. "To worry or to smile, " writes Julia Kristeva, "such is the choice when we are assailed by the strange; our decision depends on how familiar we are with our own ghosts" (191). Paralyzed by the ghostly strangeness of communication, Brown and his characters can only worry. I believe that Dr. Stevens represents the

beginnings of the pragmatic new man. Knowing he has no other basis for trust than a decision to believe, he creates a new, more inclusive community. He takes a leap of faith, as we all must do living in a world of strangers, that communication is possible. For where there is no faith, there is no communication.

Trust must be in place before trust can happen. This is the paradox revealed by Brown's novels. To borrow a phrase from Benedict Anderson's work on nationalism, we must create "imagined communities" before real ones can occur. And, as I will claim, modernity has created a situation in which imagined communities are often the only ones that exist. Because of social and physical mobility, few communities are small and stable enough to develop social ties based on first-hand experience. As I argued, the promise or oath represents the necessity of imagination in the development of trust and community. The oath creates the trust of which it is the sign. Modern life made oath-taking an obsession; one reason, as we have seen, why Brown's family, as oath-refusing

Quakers, experienced discrimination. The well-known truthfulness and upright reliability of the Quakers as a group could only have aggravated outsiders' anger. If refusing to take an oath was not a sign of dishonesty, why should taking one be necessary? The Quakers were refusing to play the game, refusing to help build the necessary illusion.

The rule of law runs along similar self-fulfilling lines: why would we follow laws unless we were assured that others would follow them as well (think of being at a red light with no one around for miles)? Laws create an environment of lawfulness, though one which is easily disrupted. We must never believe that we are the only ones following laws (or keeping promises). Societies where civil law has broken down show us what can happen when the fictionality of imagined community is revealed. How do societies create the illusion of community that maintain law and order? Here we would do well to think of New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's campaign against graffiti. Graffiti is one of the things that harms the illusion of

commonality and community in a neighborhood. Giuliani recognizes that the foundation of law is civil society, and that victimless crimes represent the destruction of this foundation.

A careful reading of Brown's novels is a painful experience. He destroys any hope that community and trust are anything but imaginary. Trust is a necessary but not sufficient cause for trust. The new pragmatic man must take a step into the dark.

"A Guarded Education"?: Experience and Education in the Writings of Charles Brockden Brown

Questions of education, like questions of religion, are inseparable from questions of epistemology. How do we know? How do we experience truth? Is truth a matter of group or individual experience (or both)? As I argued in chapter one, religious enthusiasm emphasizes the individual experience of truth over that of communal interpretation. One would imagine that a society grounded in Protestant theology would value an education of the private individual over that of any public self. Yet, when one reads the early texts of education theory in the post-war colonies, it is clear that this assumption is false. Fears of social fragmentation far outweighed concerns about cultural usurpation of the individual. I will first

examine how these fears of social fracture were expressed by eighteenth-century educational theorists. Then, in an analysis of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke, I will show the strands of individualism remaining in educational theory throughout this rise of the "Public" as a social entity. I believe that the joining of public and private in educational theory as well as in Brown's novels can be signified by the trope of experience.

In *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783,* Lawrence Cremin writes of "[Benjamin] Franklin's fear that the English would ultimately be Germanized" (32). Franklin's fear of the Germans was enlarged because many of them were well-to-do landowners, and hence could vote (Brown *Strength* 42). The plan Franklin developed for the education of these particular immigrants was therefore politically motivated. In a letter, Franklin writes that the formal instruction of the poor scholars he forsees being educated by his proposed free school "should be calculated rather to make them good citizens than what is called good scholars" (Brown

Strength 43). Franklin's reaction to the influx of new German immigrants was one which would be familiar to his twentieth-century descendants: He pushed for English-only schools and English-literacy requirements. It is clear from this reaction that in addition to fearing an ignorant voting public, Franklin feared cultural dilution. This anxiety was not an unusual or unnatural one for Colonial thinkers. No population in the world, after all, was receiving so many and so diverse a group of immigrants. More important, of course, was the fear that there was no culture to dilute. The answer frequently given to both problems, that of cultural diversity and that of cultural uncertainty, was the same: uniform public education.

In 1786, when Brown was 15 years old, Benjamin Rush published his essay, "A Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools . . . Thoughts upon the Mode of Education Proper to a Republic, etc." Rush's philosophy combined Lockean sensational psychology and Scottish Common Sense philosophy (Reinier 158). It is "impossible," Rush writes in his most Lockean vein, "[to] preserve the mind

in childhood and youth a perfect blank," and this makes his educational plan a necessity (11). Crime, to Rush, is a result of poor education. "[T]heir vices and punishments," he writes of imprisoned criminals, "are the fatal consequences of the want of a proper education in early life" (Rush "A Plan" 7). For this reason, he believes that everyone should be taxed to cover the expense of a free public education, even those without children. "Every member of the community," he writes, "is interested in the propagation of virtue and knowledge in the state" (6). In the end, the community will save money by funding education and not having to bear the expense of "bolts and locks" and "unprincipled and idle boys" (6). His discussion of the importance of a uniform public education for citizens of a republic is a more benevolent version of Franklin's. As he writes:

> [Y]oung men who have trodden the paths of science together, or have joined in the same sports . . . generally feel, through life, such ties to each other as add greatly to the obligations of mutual

benevolence.

> I conceive the education of our youth in this country to be peculiarly necessary in Pennsylvania while our citizens are composed of the natives of so many different kingdoms in Europe. Our schools of learning, by producing one general and uniform system of education, will render the mass of people more homogeneous and thereby fit them more easily for uniform and peaceable government. (10)

Public schooling, as Rush describes it, is necessary not simply for the cultivation of an enlightened voting public. It is charged with the creation of community from diversity. Rush's ideal community requires a homogeneity of the masses. Note Rush's language in this passage: the group to be educated is "the mass of people." His wording leaves the possibility open for a more varied education for the children of the elite. Not all educational theorists wanted to promote "homogeneity," of course, and not all believed that the homogeneity of the public schools was one they wanted to promote. But,

nevertheless, the idea Rush advanced of using public education to create a unified public was an important one during the late eighteenth century. As Richard D. Brown writes in *The Strength of a People: The Idea of an Informed Citizenry in America, 1650-1870*, "In the colonies' multicultural setting, where the broad distribution of property provided a major political voice for the vulgar citizenry, schooling often appeared to be the best means to furnish suitable political education" (43).

Tellingly, I have twice come across the same anecdote used in two different essays about education. The first was in Rush's essay, quoted above and the second, in Noah Webster's "On the Education of Youth in America," published in 1790. Webster, probably borrowing from Rush's earlier essay, must have felt the anecdote particularly significant. Both tell the story of the Lacedamonians, who refuse to surrender fifty of their children as hostages. Instead, in Rush's words, the enemy army was offered "double the number of their adult

citizens, whose habits and prejudices could not be shaken by residing in a foreign country" (Rush 1786 10; Webster 73). Locke's influence is clearly evident in both essays. It is children, not adults, whose experience should be "guarded" (we will return to that word later). As relatively "blank slates" in the Lockean world view, children must be kept from foreign or malign influences. They must be shaped for citizenship in their home country and protected from experiences of vice and immorality. "Every person of common observation," Webster writes, "will grant that most men prefer the manners and government of that country where they are educated" (Webster 72). But, according to Webster, systems of education are specific to systems of government (75). A democratic government must provide a democratic form of education. Nationalism, like morality, is a matter of training, not genetics or geography. In his essay, "Thoughts upon the Political Situation of the United States of America" [1788], James Sullivan argues more vehemently than Webster, that "Those things which are most

laudable in one country, are most detestable in another" (Hansen 87,88). As Allen Oscar Hansen writes in his discussion of James Sullivan's educational proposal, "Viewing the contrasts of morals and customs in the various countries, he was assured that 'Education forms the man.' An adult is a solid mass of "habits and prejudices"; evident here is a renewed awareness, based, like that of the ancient Greeks, on travel, that our beliefs are less facts than "habits and prejudices." As we have seen, foreignness can be confined mentally and geographically, and hence is not feared. That strange food is what "Frenchmen" eat. That strange language is what "Frenchmen" speak. For children, the whole world is strange and yet not. For, children, according to Locke, are "Travellers newly arrived in a strange Country, of which they know nothing" (*Some Thoughts* 54). Children can not be foreign, for they are not as yet nationalized. Their worlds can be neither foreign nor familiar until we make them so. Public education, the Lacedamonians would have agreed, must therefore be guarded from "foreign"

influence, if we are to decide what "foreign" is to mean at all.

Of course, the above argument assumes the role of education is that of enculturation. At first it may seem simplistic to ask "why should we educate children?," but of course there were and are many different answers to that question. Two answers to this question are most often given: one, to perfect the individual and two, to mold a person into a member of a community. This difference in motivation usually parallels a difference in means. Mass education, after all, is supposed to provide a homogeneous experience, not an individualized one. It is paradoxical then, that two of the most important educational theorists of Brown's century, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, wrote of their own preference for private over public education. Their choices of public or private education are related to their understandings of the "whys" of education. As we would expect, neither was thinking first and foremost of the importance of community; certainly neither of these two strong

individualists was thinking of the necessity of conformity. Both in fact feared what their hypothetical pupils would learn outside of the protection of their own homes.

Two facts are central to our reading and understanding of eighteenth-century American educational theory: that the preeminent influences were those of Rousseau and Locke and that every prominent thinker of the time felt the call to educational theory. It is in fact difficult to think of any prominent intellectual who did not write an essay on American education. And, as Jacqueline S. Reinier points out in "Rearing the Republican Child: Attitudes and Practices in Post-Revolutionary Philadelphia," "[T]he literature available to them largely reflected the educational ideas of John Locke" (150). Though Locke's empiricism was in the air Brown breathed, Rousseau was the most significant and self-conscious influence on his views on education. According to Steven Watts, Rousseau's novels (one of which--*Émile*-was an educational tract) were one of Brown's

two "greatest intellectual inspirations"(31).

Some Thoughts Upon Education, Locke's much-read treatise on education, explains the tutor's dilemma as follows:

> If I keep him always at home, he will be in danger to be my young Master; and if I send him abroad, how is it possible to keep him from the Contagion of Rudeness and Vice, which is every where in Fashion? In my House he will perhaps be more innocent, but more ignorant too of the World; wanting there Change of Company, and being us'd constantly to the same Faces, he will, when he comes abroad, be a sheepish or conceited creature. (45-6)

He finally decides that as "Virtue is harder to be got, than a Knowledge of the World; and if lost in a young Man, is seldom recover'd," he will keep his young charge safe at home. The idea of "worldliness" was a fraught one for fathers and mothers in post-Revolutionary America. On the one hand, a veneer of experience is a necessary front in business and politics (and a protection from others' own

worldliness), yet on the other hand, how does the parent or tutor filter this experience so that the child is kept morally innocent while gaining his or her worldly knowledge? Locke's answer is to build what he calls a "Fence against the World" for a student in the form of the tutor's gentle guidance (50). The irony, of course, is that the tutor must "know the world well" as Locke says, in order to introduce his pupil selectively into it (71). "A Governor," he continues, "should teach his Scholar to guess at and beware of the Designs of Men he hath to do with, neither with too much Suspicion, not too much Confidence" (71). There is a deep naivete in Locke's belief that a tutor can achieve this delicate balance. While Charles Brockden Brown would have appreciated Locke's understanding that education should enable a child to "discern what lies at the Bottom under . . . appearances," I believe he would have scoffed at the notion that such an ability could be gained locked in one's home. Jean Jacques Rousseau, in his novel of one boy's education, *Émile*, goes to an even greater extreme

than Locke of privileging the private in education.

Unlike Locke, Rousseau is not at all conflicted about the pull of worldly experience, and entirely rejects its necessity for his charge's education. As he proclaims early in *Émile*, "the charms of home are the best antidote to vice" (15). He would have been horrified at the patriot's desire to "homogenize" children for the purpose of creating a republican community. In fact, he writes that "the public institute does not and cannot exist, for there is neither country nor patriot" (9). This extreme individualism--rejecting the notion of national or patriotic duty--obviously leads to a very different kind of education than that hoped for by the founders: an education that would create that very sense of national and patriotic duty Rousseau rejected. For him, there is no "society" only a solitary man--Émile and a solitary woman-Sophie. They are his Adam and Eve. Education's role is to allow their "innate principle of justice and virtue" to remain uncorrupted by outside forces.

Like the Quakers, Rousseau and Locke believed in a

"guarded" education, one in which the child is protected from worldly experience. This, of course, was contradictory to the dominant empiricism of the eighteenth-century. The new scientific imagination placed an emphasis on primary experience. But there is yet another contradiction here. For, after all, both Locke and Rousseau reject book learning (we will return to this issue soon) in favor of the experience of nature. But there lies the answer: they reject both social experience and book learning in favor of natural, i.e. "Nature," experience. As Rousseau explains it:

> Since everything that comes into the human mind enters through the gates of sense, man's first reason is the reason of sense experience. It is this that first serves as the foundation for the reason of the intelligence; our first teachers in natural philosophy are our feet, hands, and eyes. To substitute books for them does not teach us to reason, it teaches us to use the reason of others rather than our own; it teaches us to believe much

and know little. (*Émile* 106-7)

There is a streak of antinomianism in such a philosophy. Brown's Quaker community would have put the same importance on experience of this kind over and above that of the "Book," just as Rousseau does. During the period, a tension developed between text and experience, imagination and the practical that reminds one of the two schools of Brown's own youth, and to which I will return later in the chapter. Brown's novels not only reflect this tension, they enact it. What is the education proper to a republic? Do we homogenize or individualize our children? Post-Revolution, the need for homogeneity was dramatized by its very absence. Do we form children's opinions or allow them to form their own? "To form a nation," wrote James Sullivan, "there must be a public opinion" (88). Note the use of the article "a," a usage we no longer see. Think of the improbability, the impossibility of that. It was surely unlikely that such "a" public opinion would be formed, could be formed by a system of private education.

Having grown up during the post-Revolutionary debates about the need for an educated citizenry, Charles Brockden Brown would have been familiar with the arguments in favor of free public education. Yet, even for those who accepted the need for free public education for poor citizens, there sometimes existed a real indecision about the benefits of private versus public education for those who could afford to choose. Brown's novels explore a range of educational possibilities; from *Wieland's* version of a Lockean home-schooled family to *Arthur Mervyn's* emphasis on worldly experience, he responds to the educational theory of his day.

Mid-century Philadelphia, according to Lawrence Cremin, "became something of a testing ground for a broader range of educational theories and proposals" (378). Though, as Jacqueline S. Reinier points out in her essay on eighteenth-century American child rearing, "the literature available to them largely reflected the educational ideas of John Locke" (150). While Brown, as he came to adulthood, would have learned of all these

theories through his wide circle of intellectual friendships and his intense reading, his own formal schooling was quite parochial. Writing of the Friends' Latin School, where Brown attended, Jean S. Straub notes that

> The responsibilities of the masters were expected to extend well beyond teaching. They were to also see that their scholars attended meeting on Thursdays and Sundays, and were to accompany them and to keep order. (446-7)

While he was a student at this Latin School, during Robert Proud's tenure there, Brown's education would have been the "guarded" one referred to by historians of Quaker education, in which the student was offered "protection from the corrupting influences of the world" (Moses 17; Cremin 305). Ironically, a classical education such as the one Brown experienced was itself seen as one of those corrupting influences. One overseer claimed in strident terms that "the study of Latin violated Quaker teachings by 'debauching their offspring with the rubbish of

Paganism'" (Straub 453). Classical learning, then, was not only unnecessary (and therefore frivolous--a shibboleth to the Quakers), but also harmful in its influence.

The contrast in public and private, English and classical education, is seen in microcosm in the building that housed Brown's school. The English school run by John Todd, Sr. was held in the same structure as Proud's Latin School (both run by the Philadelphia Quaker community). The class difference between the schools, and the conflicts that thereby arose between the students of the two schools, are unmistakable. Indeed, the boys from the two schools were so prone to get into fist fights and shouting matches, that the Latin School had to be moved to a different part of the building, so that the two groups would not meet going to and from classes ("Minutes of Overseers Meetings, 1771-1792" 181-2}. In his history of the school, Walter R. Myers argues that it was only class-based influence that kept the Latin School open. He writes:

Quaker objections to the teaching of classical

> languages and literature were apparently not consistent. Individual Overseers may have complained, and occasionally a teacher of other subjects objected, but the Latin School remained and prospered largely because its graduates were the intellectual elite of the community, proud of their school, and powerful enough to exert influence. (29)

While schoolteacher Proud was a gentle and dignified intellectual who hated having to teach, Todd was a bully and "masterly flogger" (as described by one of his pupils). The divide between the two groups could not have been more stark. Proud's students were known to play affectionate pranks on him, yet had a deep respect shown by their calling him their "dominie." Todd was feared by students and admired by parents who believed in strong discipline (Myers 30). Yet both schools and both schoolteachers were Quaker. Both schools were carefully observed by the Overseers. Within the Quaker community, of course, there were other conflicts, not over the value of different types of education, but over the value of

education itself. Quaker public education, in fact, can almost be seen as an oxymoron. As I noted in chapter one, enthusiasts like the Quakers do not believe in "book" learning at all. In Phyllis Mack's words, "Not only was intellectual activity a dangerous pastime that encouraged the sin of pride and the idolatry of the Anglican priests; it was also simply irrelevant to the existential experience Quakers sought" (143). A classical education was particularly frowned upon because of its emphasis on "useless" knowledge. English schools were begun in response to criticism of such classically based education. These schools, like the one run by John Todd, responded, "to the growing commercial interests of the middle class, [and] were designed to give a practical and vocational education that would prepare young people for the new occupations that were attracting more and more persons" (Butts & Cremin 124). Brown's early education was therefore a lesson in the problems facing those wanting to unify public education: which education would it be? And would Brown, having witnessed first-hand the bullying of

John Todd and the resulting roughness of his students, not have sympathized with those who would rather keep their children at home to be privately tutored? What would Brown, as a child of the elite, have felt about the "masses," represented for him by John Todd and his students? These questions were all part of the educational debates that raged in the eighteenth century; Brown's answers to these debates are evident in a close reading of his novels.

The Wielands and the male characters of *Edgar Huntly* all represent the failure of upper-class private education. "He was immersed in all the vices that grown out of opulence and mistaken education," so Clithero Edny describes his patroness' son to Edgar Huntly. The lady had chosen to educate Clithero with her son. "I enjoyed equally with him, all the essential benefits of education. There were certain accomplishments, from which I was excluded, from the belief that they were unsuitable to my rank and station" (37). Yet his education leads him to "thirst" for independence. Each child becomes what

someone has feared: One becomes a decadent product of wealth, the other, democracy unleashed into madness. In the novel, Clithero attempts to kill his patroness, out of a misguided belief that he is saving her from a worse fate. In *Wieland,* the privately educated Theodore Wieland murders his family, believing that God has told him to do so. The real test of belief in a democracy, of course, is the rubbing up of your ideas against the ideas of others. Led to trust their own thoughts by an isolated and privileged education, they do not test their beliefs in any way, empirically or otherwise. Whose education survives the test of Brown's fiction?

The Wielands' education was given, as Clara Wieland writes, away from "the corruption and tyranny of colleges and boarding-schools" (22). They are given a Lockean education, echoed in Clara's claim that her narrative will "exemplify the force of early impressions, and show, the immeasurable evils that flow from an erroneous or imperfect discipline" (5). Yet this education clearly fails them in a crisis. The entrance of Carwin, the

mysterious stranger, signals the beginnings of this crisis. After the strange incident in which Clara's brother believes he hears his wife call to him, though she is elsewhere at the time, the family attempts to understand how it could have happened. While Theodore Carwin "maintained the probability of celestial interference," Henry Pleyel "scrupled not to deny faith to any testimony but that of his senses" (85-6). Though each has a radically different intellectual temperament, neither is capable of solving the puzzle. The answer of course is not only right in front of them, but is offered up to them by the Carwin himself. He boldly takes part in the debate, knowing that the answer to their query lies in his own power of mimicry and ventriloquism. "[T]he power of mimickry [sic] was very common," he tells the family, "The city was near at hand, and thousands might there exist whose powers and purposes might easily explain whatever was mysterious in this transaction" (86). But while the mind of Theodore Wieland is "enriched by science and literature," it is parched of human experience. By

isolating themselves in the countryside, the Wielands have cut themselves off from those "thousands," the experience of whom might have taught them how to deal with Carwin's trickery.

Theodore Wieland, after parsing Cicero, murders his family. Clithero Edny, taken in by a wealthy patroness, educated as if he were her own son, tries to kill her. Clara Wieland, driven nearly mad by her ordeal, leaves the states for Europe, abandoning the democratic dream. Only Arthur Mervyn, of all Brown's characters, ends his narrative in a better place than he began. While many of those around him have suffered, lost fortunes, or died from the plague, Mervyn has married an heiress and, thanks to his patron Dr. Stevens, will soon be a doctor. How was Arthur Mervyn's education different from that of the others? If we take this novel's point of view seriously, as I believe Brown meant us to, we will see it leads us to the education of experience. Looking through keyholes, staring at the faces of the women with whom he converses, Arthur takes his education as he finds it--in the world.

One of the earliest debates in *Arthur Mervyn* about Arthur Mervyn's character takes place around the issue of his education. Mrs. Althorpe, a native of Mervyn's birthplace, comes to Dr. Stevens' home to tell him what she knows of Mervyn's background. According to her tale, Mervyn spent most of his days wandering in the nearby woods, avoiding farm work. Stevens is surprised and asks,"But, surely . . . he had some object of pursuit. Perhaps he was addicted to books" (222). "Far from it," she replied, "On the contrary, his aversion to school was as great as his hatred of the plow" (222). Still trying to find a positive take on this version of Mervyn's youth, Stevens asks if perhaps he simply was an independent spirit, one who preferred to read on his own rather than under a "pedagogue and his rod" (222). Clearly, Stevens is speaking here with Brown's voice. Is it not Brown himself whom Stevens is describing when he pictures Mervyn as one of those "boys endowed with great curiosity and aptitude for learning, who never could endure set tasks" (222)? Is John Todd Brown's model for the "pedagogue and

his rod"? This independent boy is not Mervyn, though, according to his neighbor.

One day, as she describes it, she found him knitting a stocking, "a whimsical employment for a young active man" (223). Were she a man, she proclaims to Mervyn, "*I* should rather work in my field or study my book" (223). Mervyn's reply is intriguing, "You see, though a man, I use your privilege, and prefer knitting yarn to threshing my brain with a book or the barn-floor with a flail" (223). A woman, he claims, is lucky to be able to "pursue that which costs least labor and demands most skill" (223). He agrees with her that he has an "old and a violent antipathy . . . to anything like a school" (224). Neither brute labor nor forced study are acceptable to Arthur Mervyn. So far, this sounds very much like the education of a young Émile, except for the absence of a tutor's guiding hand. The emphasis on skilled labor, the dislike of book learning, and the wanderings in nature are all part of Rousseau's strategy of education as demonstrated in *Émile* (*Émile* 192,95,256).

When confronted with Mrs. Althorpe's narrative, Mervyn surprises the Stevens by agreeing with much of what she has told them. Of course, his interpretation of his actions differs greatly from hers. Mervyn's explanation of his attitude toward education is worth quoting in full here:

> It is true that I hated school; that I sought occasions of absence, and finally, on being struck by the master, determined to enter his presence no more. I loved to leap, to run, to swim, to climb trees, and to clamber up rocks, to shroud myself in thickets, and stroll among woods, to obey the impulse of the moment, and to prate or be silent, just as my humor prompted me. All this I loved more than to go to and fro in the same path, and at stated hours, to look off and on a book, to read just as much, and of such a kind, to stand up and be seated, just as another thought proper to direct. I hated to be classed, cribbed, rebuked and feruled at the pleasure of one, who, as it seemed to me knew no guide in his rewards

> but caprice, and no prompter in his punishments but passion (326).

If we return for a moment to Brown's own education, it is clear that his own schoolteacher, Robert Proud, does not fit Mervyn's picture of a tyrannical and ignorant schoolteacher. But was this not chance? In his history of the William Penn Charter School (the original of Brown's school), Walter R. Myers notes that Todd was popular with the parents and directors of the school. He writes, "Todd's pedagogical reputation was excellent, even Overseers approved tacitly of his stern discipline, and parents crowded his classroom with their children. The mere threat of his stick was sufficient to quell obstreperous behavior and wandering minds" ("Beginnings and Growth" 30). Brown couldn't have been ignorant of his luck in being born into an educated and privileged family. Mervyn's schoolmaster, like John Todd, was far more typical of the late eighteenth century than the austere and intellectual Robert Proud. The creation of a mass public demanded the conformity of individual children to a

chosen standard. Many felt that the preparation of children would require stern discipline and sometimes ruthless tactics. But what kind of child did this education create?

If the private education of the elite created the monsters of *Wieland*, *Ormond*, and *Edgar Huntly*, the public education of the masses creates louts (Philip Hadwin, Wallace) or gullible innocents (Mr. Hadwin). What little we see of the "public" in Brown's novels mostly consists of people taking advantage of others, and those they are taking advantage of. If we reject both versions of education, as I expect Brown wants us to, with what form of education are we left? To look at *Arthur Mervyn* as a Bildungsroman, as a novel of a young man's development, is to see the interaction of man and world (of Arthur and eighteenth-century Philadelphia) as an education in and of itself.

After learning of Eliza Hadwin's loss of her small fortune, disappointing his hopes of a comfortable marriage, Mervyn finds himself once again on the road.

Not to be discouraged, Mervyn proclaims to his audience, "Every sense was the inlet of pleasure, because it was the avenue of knowledge; and my soul brooded over the world of ideas"(298). The one characteristic that marks Mervyn throughout the novel is curiosity. The word itself, or variations of it, is used over forty times during the book, mostly by Mervyn himself. Whatever horrors he may experience, he always finds life interesting and the occasion of further thought. After learning of Thetford's dishonesty, and his attempt to defraud Welbeck, Mervyn decides that whatever happens, "To myself it will not be unprofitable. It is a lesson on the principles of human nature; on the delusiveness of appearances; on the perviousness of fraud; and on the power with which nature has invested human beings over the thoughts and actions of each other" (130-1). When Mrs. Wentworth refers to Mervyn's acquaintance with Welbeck as "unfortunate," Mervyn reacts almost violently:

> Unfortunate! Dear Madam! How unfortunate? It has done away a part of my ignorance of the world in

> which I live. It has led me to the situation in which I am now placed . . . . My knowledge of Welbeck has been useful to me. It has enabled me to be useful to others. I look back upon that allotment of my destiny which first led me to his door, with gratitude and pleasure. (341-2)

As far as he is concerned, any experience is a good experience. For him, as for Rousseau, the world is a book. Of Émile, Rousseau writes, "[H]is whole environment is the book from which he unconsciously enriches his memory, till his judgment is able to profit by it" (90). The difference is that for Rousseau, the only environments a child should be exposed to are the family and the natural world. But what if, as it is for Arthur Mervyn, one's family consists of an ignorant and gullible man such as the elder Mervyn? And if one's world consists only of trees and grass, how does one learn how to deal with living, breathing, and often treacherous human beings? Arthur Mervyn answers all of these questions by striking out into the world.

Mervyn doesn't neglect book-learning; but, importantly, the only book we see him reading during the novel is the manuscript history of the House of Visconti, the supposed ancestors of a plague victim whom Mervyn stops to assist. The tale, as Mervyn narrates it, involves a political struggle in which the protagonist (the ancestor) gains assistance from a band of outlaws thanks to hidden treasure he discovers in his hideaway. The narrative parallels, of course, Mervyn's own. Both stories maintain the value of pragmatism in success; both men are saved at some point by outlaws or con men; both men discover hidden treasure (Arthur, ironically, inside this very book), which they feel free to use as they see fit. Morals in this interpretation are a matter of circumstance: the ends justify the means. As our narrator explains,

> Good intentions, unaided by knowledge, will, perhaps produce more injury than benefit, and therefore, knowledge must be gained, but the acquisition is not momentary; is not bestowed unasked and untoil'd for:

> meanwhile, we must not be unactive because we are ignorant. (309)

This is an interestingly circular argument. We must act on good intentions in order to gain the experience necessary to act well and properly on these same good intentions. Yet, the argument is true, even if circular, and is classically pragmatic. "Our good purposes," really must, "hurry to performance, whether our knowledge be greater or less" (309), unless we are to die of paralysis. Brown's use of the word "performance" here is interesting, as performance implies an audience. Mervyn views people in private: reading secret manuscripts and eyeing them through keyholes, but his performances are all for an audience. He constantly builds his knowledge of human beings. He reads, not nature, but human nature. "There is no book in which I read with more pleasure," Mervyn writes after an encounter with his future bride, Achsa Fielding, "than the face of a woman" (386). He acts, without thinking, on the knowledge he has acquired. He takes what he learns, and acts again. Mervyn's

descriptions of himself confirm this understanding of his behavior. Early in his relationship with the Stevens family, while still ill with the plague, he describes himself as "destitute of all scholastic instruction" (7). Later, he says of himself that he is "an unpracticed simpleton," that he has had a "limited and rustic education" and refers to his "defective education" and "limited views" (7, 50, 279). How are we to reconcile this with his claim to be "well instructed in Latin" (113)? It is obvious that a real education for Arthur Mervyn does not consist in the study of Latin. All of his defective education will be rectified, in Mervyn's view, by worldly experience. If the city is not, as Jane Tompkins claims, where "true virtue resides" for Brown, it is where real democratic experience is to be had.

To others, Mervyn often appears to be a bumbler or a maniac, for he doesn't behave according to convention. His values are also often opposed to convention, but they are consistent with his behavior. What he values more than other things are experience and honesty. These are

what he values in a woman as well, though the society around him values in a woman the exact opposites: inexperience and discretion. He, in the end, rejects the more-than-filial love of the young Eliza Hadwin because he could not learn from her as he could from the mature Achsa Fielding. As Jane Tompkins puts it: "She [Eliza Hadwin] is like an unminted coin: a person who has not yet gone into circulation . . . . People, no less than money and information, must be circulated in order for a society to prosper" (*Sensational Designs* 81). People, no less than money, must also be honest. The dishonest Carwin is the foil to Mervyn's honest bumpkin made good. Brown's unfinished novel, *Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist*, reveals why Mervyn's honesty is as important to his success as his worldly experience.

There are many parallels between Mervyn and Carwin, which make the differences between them all the more significant. Both are sons of ignorant farmers, and neither envies those who have experienced the "drudgery of colleges" (*Carwin* 295). Like Mervyn, Carwin believes that

education should not be confined to the reading of books; "books alone" he argues, "were insufficient to impart knowledge: that man must be examined with our own eyes to make us acquainted with their nature" (311). Most of the differences and the similarities between the two young men's attitudes to the world are evident from the opening of Carwin's narrative, when he describes himself, much like Mervyn, as intensely curious:

> My thirst of knowledge was augmented in proportion as it was supplied with gratification. The more I heard or read, the more restless and unconquerable my curiosity became. My senses were perpetually alive to novelty, my fancy teemed with visions of the future, and my attention fastened upon every thing mysterious or unknown. (281)

In the last two clauses of this sentence, Carwin's description of himself veers away from Mervyn's own self-description. Carwin is curious about the people in the world around him, but he is also far more prone than Mervyn to fits of fancy. This is exactly where he goes

awry. Carwin lets his dreams and fantasies control him to the point where he will lie to satisfy his desires and his curiosity. Perhaps this is why he sees his curiosity as "perverse and pernicious," while Mervyn glories in his own curiosity (286).

The uncontrolled imagination is the demon of eighteenth-century thought. On one hand, imagination was believed to make a person unable to differentiate reality from fantasy, leading him or her either to madness or to compulsive dishonesty. On the other hand, imagination could create an unquenchable ambition for achieving unrealistic goals. David Hume draws the common connection between insanity, dishonesty and the imagination when he writes with great passion that:

> a lively imagination very often degenerates into madness or folly, and bears it a great resemblance in its operations; so they influence the judgment after the same manner, and produce belief from the very same principles. When the imagination, from any extraordinary ferment of the blood and spirits,

> acquires such a vivacity as disorders all its powers and faculties, there is no means of distinguishing betwixt truth and falsehood. (172)

While Hume worries over imagination's effect on our mind, Rousseau emphasizes the role the imagination can play in our unhappiness: by expanding our ambitions it can cause needless suffering and dissatisfaction. What we can't imagine, we can't dream of attaining. "The world of reality has its bounds, the world of imagination is boundless," he writes in *Émile* (52). After living in the world of our imagination, we can begin to feel constrained by the reality around us, whereas we had previously not noticed its limitations. Or, alternatively, we can begin to live in our imaginary world, acting as if fiction were reality, just as compulsive liars can sometimes begin to believe their own lies. It is just this compulsiveness associated with both lies and fantasies that Rousseau and other eighteenth-century thinkers fear.

"Nothing could be more injurous than a lie," Carwin says, adding that its worst effect is that it "grows into

a habit" (284). So, many people thought, did an uncontrolled imagination lead to the inability to distinguish between truth and falsehood. As our knowledge of people, once gained through reading, must be put up to the test of experience, so must our imagination be constantly disciplined with the test of reality. Only experience of reality can lead to understanding the reality of experience. Lying and the imagination are both a kind of forgery or counterfeiting of experience.

Brown writes endlessly in his personal letters about his own imagination. Writing to his friend Joseph Bringhurst he describes his own as "a wild, undisciplined, untractable imagination" (MS Bowdoin. Bennett Census #10). "How miserable should I be," he later writes to Bringhurst, "were I not rescued from the tedious or distressful present, by the aid of an excursive imagination" (MS Bowdoin. Bennett Census #20)? Brown must have realized at some point in his life that his constant "rescue" of himself from the "tedious or distressful" present had led him to an inability to deal with reality.

Mervyn might momentarily fancy himself the husband of his patron's [apparently] wealthy daughter, but he quickly returns to earth. "This tumult of delicious thoughts in some time subsided and gave way to images relative to my present situation. My curiosity was awake. As yet I had seen little of the city" (55). The city becomes a cure for madness even as those in it die of the plague. I do not think it is a coincidence that counterfeit money, like that Welbeck pretends to have made, can circulate from hand to hand, taking lives as it goes (leaving "a legacy of persecution and death" as Welbeck exclaims) (198). Just so, lies spread, and, just as bad money drives out good, so lies drive out truths. Education's role in this world of counterfeit money and voices and truths is to exchange our innocence for experience and to teach our private selves public ways. Mervyn manages the paradoxical, achieving an individualized education available to the masses: the education of the explorer of the city and all of its private recesses. Starting out fortuneless and ignorant of the ways of the world, he

takes experience as he finds it, without expectations or regrets. He is empirical man, testing his fortune in the world.

The Waxwork Culture:

Realism and Theatricality in the Eighteenth Century

In his history of the American Theater, the first ever published, Brown's friend and biographer William Dunlap repeated an anecdote he had heard about the Revolutionary War. Frequently during the war, British officers and loyalists had put on theater productions, despite colonial prohibitions against the performance of plays. During one of these performances, as Dunlap tells it, "a serjeant [sic] entered and announced the fact" that rebels had attacked the English lines. "The audience" continues Dunlap, "supposing that his words . . . belonged to the farce, applauded the natural acting of the man" (39). On Charles Willson Peale's stage, his Museum, on the other hand, an opposing drama would frequently occur.

Obsessed with trompe l'oeil, Peale created a waxwork version of himself working. Hiding behind a curtain, he would mischievously watch as visitors arrived, spied the artist at work, and slipped out to avoid disturbing him. Like wax warmed in one's hands, in an infinitely malleable culture those around you can take startling and novel forms.

Anecdotes, whether true or apocryphal, reveal the interests, anxieties and obsessions of a culture. What a culture finds worth repeating, after all, is what it really finds important, whatever its professions about true value. American culture in the eighteenth century was both fascinated and appalled by the rising realism of its visual and performative arts. Both currents, the Americans' pleasure in their flourishing arts and their fear of their powers, run strongly through the culture.

Charles Brockden Brown was not only part of this visual culture, but closely allied with one of the central figures in its making, William Dunlap. A student of the painter Benjamin West as well as a playwright,

Dunlap wrote his histories of the theater and the visual arts from the perspective of a participant. His teacher, Benjamin West, is known for his nurturing of the American arts, mentoring most, if not all, of the great young artists of his day. West, through William Dunlap, serves as our first point of connection between Charles Brockden Brown and eighteenth-century American art.

Although he lived in England, where he served as royal painter to King George, Benjamin West managed to train a whole generation of American painters, including William Dunlap. In his *Death of General Wolfe*, West initially offended his viewers by painting Wolfe in contemporary clothing, rather than the Roman costumes traditionally used to portray heroes (Flexner *Light* 20; Harris 14). West justified his choice as would a historian, "I want to mark the date, the place, and the parties engaged in the event. . . . If instead of the facts of the transaction, I represent classical fictions how shall I be understood by posterity?" (Flexner *Light* 19). West sought not romance but truth. West wanted his

paintings to represent what viewers would have seen had they been present at the events he represented. His viewers were shocked because their sensibilities were trained to see nobility and grandeur as ahistorical, separable from the facts of individual existence. His students would continue his tradition of offending patrons with brutal honesty and piercing vision.

The painter Gilbert Stuart, now mainly remembered for his endlessly reproduced portrait of George Washington, was a student of West. Like his teacher, Stuart relentlessly sought the truth of what he saw in front of him, making his sitters wash off their makeup and disarray their hair before he would paint them (Flexner *America's Old Masters* 301). While, as James Thomas Flexner notes, "painting in England was still a social art," Stuart and many other American painters there and at home wanted to paint the "real" man and woman, the one beneath the social self (Flexner *America's Old Masters* 270). Whereas painters had always been expected to paint "roles" as much as people, Gilbert Stuart and his fellow realists wanted

to focus on the people themselves. His painting of Washington is not idealized or ahistorical, as paintings of leaders were supposed to be, but represents Washington as Stuart saw him. "I will follow no master," Stuart proclaimed, "I wish to find out what nature is for myself, and see her with my own eyes" (Flexner *America's Old Masters* 261). This realism was sometimes, of course, unflattering to the sitters. In one story, Stuart's brutal and antisocial honesty is evident:

> When an important gentleman, who had improved himself by marrying a rich and homely widow, objected that Stuart's portrait of the lady did not make her beautiful, the painter cried, "What damn business is this of a portrait painter! You bring him a potato and expect he will paint a peach." (Flexner *America's Old Masters* 292)

So dependent as they were on patronage, painters were very much expected to make a potato into a peach, as well as to make the death of an eighteenth-century hero into an ancient Roman tragedy. But most American painters, born

far from European collections of classical art, did not begin their careers with a grounding in the traditional European understanding of the role of the artist; they had no choice but to turn to nature for inspiration. "Outside of several old masters scattered about in the older Eastern cities," writes Neil Harris in *The Artist in American Society*, "the Colonies contained almost no examples of European painting" (12). As West himself explains it (demonstrating the proclivity Americans have always had for turning their weaknesses into strengths), "My having no other assistance but what I drew from nature, grounded me in the knowledge of nature, while had I come to Europe sooner in life, I should have known nothing but the recipes of masters" (Flexner *Light* 52). West's style of painting, based on the "knowledge of nature," reaches a pinnacle in the work of another one of his students, Charles Willson Peale, who founded his Museum on the principles, if not the practice, of natural taxonomy. The anecdote above, in which Peale fools observers into believing a wax figure is himself, is one

of many stories of Peale's delight in visual trickery. Not content with recreating the image of man, Peale attempted to reconstruct "the world in miniature" (Flexner *Light* 99).

The most famous story of Peale's delight in trompe l'oeil painting, is the one in which George Washington waves to a painting of two of Peale's sons on a staircase (Flexner *Light* 102-3). Peale called his visual jokes, "deceptions." More than any other artist of his time, he was obsessed with visual realism. He invented new forms of taxidermy to ensure that the stuffed animals in his museum were as lifelike as possible. He "distributed ducks 'on Artificial ponds, some Birds and Beasts on trees and some Birds suspended as flying'"(Schwartz 81). Peale's Museum was very popular, appealing to the eighteenth-century fascination with natural taxonomy. Many people, including Charles Brockden Brown's best friend Joseph Bringhurst, Jr. and Bringhurst's father, took out yearly subscriptions, allowing them to frequently visit the museum. Peale took American realistic art into

three dimensions with his taxidermy, dioramas and wax figures.

Popular both at home and abroad, wax figures of the famous and infamous drew huge crowds. Madame Tussaud is the name that comes to most peoples' minds when they think of waxworks, but a young Quaker widow named Patience Wright was the most famous American representative of this art, showing both in America and in England.

Patience Wright, like Benjamin West (and Charles Brockden Brown), was born into a religion which condemned "graven images." While West was seemingly born to art--his talent arrived so early that the Quaker elders thought he had been given a gift by God, and was left to paint in peace--Wright sculpted in order to support herself and her children after she was widowed. Her art was even maternal. Vividly described by those who had witnessed her working, Wright would warm the wax in her hands between her thighs, sculpting out of sight beneath her apron (Sellars 4). Even without a model, working from memory, Wright could create a new being in wax. Her

waxworks were seen in both America and England; William Dunlap was one visitor to her show.

Wright was only one of many wax sculptors working during Brown's life time. People's fascination with wax figures, then and now, walks the line between fear and pleasure. Anyone who has seen a well-conceived wax figure, knows the eery feelings one can evoke. As Charles Coleman Sellars writes in his biography of Patience Wright, "Realism can go too far. The face watching one from its glass case could bring a shudder, touch a nameless apprehension, shadowy, elemental" (5). The dark side of the creation of the double is evident beneath a humorous anecdote, told by Sellars in the Wright biography. While John James Heidegger, one of the managers of the Haymarket opera house, was drunk, some ladies had a wax mask made of his face. At a performance attended by King George II, when he raised his arm to signal the beginning of "God Save the King," the Heidegger "pretender" wearing the mask of his face, gave the orders for the playing of "Over de Vater to Charley," that is, as

Sellars writes, "to Bonnie Prince Charley, the young Stuart Pretender whose Scots clansmen had but lately been defeated at Culloden" (48). The confusion that followed the confrontation of the two "Heideggers" was a happy one; yet, underneath the humor is the real and present threat of sedition. "Pretenders" were after all real, both to the throne and to the Heideggers of the world. Someone, though tongue-in-cheek, had made a traitor of Heidegger; Someone else, though defeated, had tried to make a King of himself. Who was who in this world of waxwork figures and pretenders to the throne?

The figure of the double, the doppelgänger, is a common one in eighteenth-century European Gothic fiction, as well as in the novels of Charles Brockden Brown. In *Culture of the Copy*, Hillel Schwartz addresses this fascination with doubling:

> Historian J.H. van den Berg, noticing the preoccupation with Doubles and plural existences during the 1790s and again during the 1890s, has suggested that images of a divided existence--of

> Dopplegängers and Doubles, the subconscious--become most compelling when family relationships are most upset, workers most estranged from their work. (81)

The interest of the culture, almost lurid at times, in paintings with eyes that followed you as you passed them, wax figures with human hair and etched-in muscles, and stuffed birds so real that they fly overhead in the museum they inhabit, expresses at least in part a desire to still a world moving too fast to watch, in order to get a careful look at it. The desire is also a reflection of a fear that we and those around us have become too many selves to track. Both of these fears are reflected in Brockden Brown's novels.

If *Wieland* is predominantly about aural trickery, *Arthur Mervyn* is predominantly a novel about the failure of sight. Welbeck initially takes in Mervyn after he is startled by his resemblance to Vincentio Lodi, the brother of Clemenza Lodi, the young charge he has seduced. When Mervyn is a young boy, his mother takes in an ill stranger, Clavering, who is later, in the form of a self-

portrait, to play another role in the novel. Of Clavering, Mervyn tells Dr. Stevens, "My mother loved the youth because he was amiable and unfortunate, and chiefly because she fancied a very powerful resemblance between his countenance and mine" (27). Long after Clavering's death, his self-portrait is to take on a life of its own; after Mervyn loses it, it ends up in the hands of one of Clavering's relatives, Mrs. Wentworth. After having disappeared, Clavering returns to her as a ghostly double of unknown origin. If everyone looks alike, as it sometimes seems in Brown's novels, how are we to distinguish friend from foe?

Even inanimate things become dangerously doubled. Mervyn finds money in a book that Welbeck got from Vincentio Lodi before he died. Welbeck's money (or is it the Lodis'?) is at first thought by Mervyn to be real, then forged, then real again. Welbeck switches his story again and again, trying to lure the money away from Mervyn. Which money is it? Real or forged, if it is believed by others to be forged, we can be hanged for the

possession of it. Traitor or not, if you are believed to support the Pretender, you can be hanged for your disloyalty. This is one of the many dangers of the double. Our other selves split off from us and behave in ways we can't control.

The doubles of *Arthur Mervyn* are often simply freaks of nature, lookalikes, harmless waxwork versions of Mervyn with his boyish charms. The more dangerous double is the one who can alter him or herself at will, first being one person and then another. The actor is a chameleon, whether on stage or in the drawing room, he threatens constantly to overturn our trust in the predictability of human behavior and the stability of the self. If Charles Brockden Brown's lookalikes are reflections of a subconscious sense of psychic incoherence, his ventriloquists and deceivers are reflections of a growing social fragmentation. The eighteenth-century American fear of theater, leading to long-lasting bans on the performances of plays and the construction of playhouses, stemmed from a belief in the contagiousness of

performance, as much as, if not more than, from a Puritan belief in the dangerous nature of luxury and play. As Jean-Christophe Agnew explains it in *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750*, "[The actor's] extraordinary plasticity offered a living lesson in the mechanics of social mobility and assimilation" (122). The actor's "plasticity" threatened the society's ever more tenuous sense of social reality. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, one of theater's most virulent critics, believed that theater took the worst vices of society and made them virtues. As Jonas Barish writes in *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice*, according to Rousseau, the theater "takes the ceremonial politeness of which social life is composed and makes it a model to be copied instead of a vice to be shunned" (258). But theater was changing during the eighteenth century, turning, as was society, away from the "ceremonial politeness" Barish refers to, to a more natural, romantic vision of social interaction. Ironically, it was the loss of "ceremonial" social roles which intensified fears about the contagion of the

theater.

The theater in the eighteenth century was, like painting and sculpture, the site of a new realism. The focus of this realism was the acting and directing style of David Garrick, whose "influence and reputation extended through France, Germany, Italy, and even to the very borders of the civilized western world, Russia" (Burnim 29). As with West's painting style, Garrick's acting mode came to America through his many disciples, including Thomas Wignell, a member of Lewis Hallam's famous troupe (Hornblow 25). As Benjamin West deformalized painting, removing the romantic garb and extravagant gestures of previous historical paintings, David Garrick deformalized theater, naturalizing speech and gesture. As Kalman A. Burnim writes in his biography of David Garrick,

> Unquestionably Garrick's most significant contributions to the development of a 'natural' style were his rendering of lines in a more conversational tone . . . and the elimination of the excessive mannerisms of movement and gesture. (59)

Garrick the director also made his contributions to the new realism, in part by banishing spectators from the stage starting in 1762. No longer "part" of the performance, viewers could avoid seeing the heavy stage makeup of the actors, and could more easily imagine a middle-aged Juliet as a young virgin girl.

The previous formalism of the stage, like the social formality of the "real" world around it, was largely a protective gesture. "Manners," writes Agnew, "were extravagant precisely because they were intended to be taken not as the private symbols of spontaneous personal feelings but as the public signs of obligatory social responses" (154). Whereas the repetitive and mannered forms of previous drama had reassured audiences that reality was clear and understandable, the new realism revealed the truly protean nature of human form and expression. Kalman A. Burnim cites Hannah More, who having seen Garrick playing both Hamlet and Drugger (a comic role) within a few weeks' time, writes, "Had I not seen him in both, I should have thought it as possible for

Milton to have written 'Hudibras,' and Butler 'Paradise Lost,' as for one man to have played *Hamlet* and *Drugger* with such excellence" (175). It is obvious that for More, for Milton to write 'Hudibras' is to not be Milton anymore. Just so, Garrick can become other than himself at any moment. Fraught with tension though this transformation could be in England, in the Colonies it was far more disturbing. As Agnew argues:

> Flanked on one side by a staggeringly boundless wilderness and on the other by a similarly boundless world market, colonists sought to reduce their own sense of marginality, of liminality, by sharpening the visible boundaries of their own social and spiritual identities. (152)

The constant efforts to bring theatrical performances to American cities met such strong resistance precisely because of these weakened boundaries. The new theater revealed "how deeply theatrical" identity already was (Agnew 62). The theater was such a threat because the culture's ability to interpret individual character was

already in such disarray that it could stand no further confusion.

Quaker Philadelphia, during Brown's youth and young adulthood, was an important site of conflict over the role of theater in society. In 1759, a law was passed in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, banning the performance of plays in the Colony (Hornblow 24). The theater wasn't again legalized until 1789, and even then licensing was required (Brigham 21-2). According to David R. Brigham, author of *Public Culture in the Early Republic: Peale's Museum and Its Audience*, it wasn't until "the Post-Revolutionary transfer of legislative power away from the Quakers" that the theater could be legalized in the state (21-2). Quaker belief in "the redundancy of signs" led to a proscription of "the habits and manners that metropolitan polite society required" as well as of the arts of painting and theater, the eye "being single to the Lord" (Pointon 407). Ever the iconoclast, Brown attended plays, including those written by his friend William Dunlap, and wrote reviews of performances for

periodicals. Yet the Quaker aversion to drama was deeply ingrained in him, appearing as a dislike of social hypocrisy and imposture.

The friendship of Charles Brockden Brown and William Dunlap was often sorely tested by Brown's refusal to abide by social niceties. Ironically, it was often around the subject of one of Dunlap's plays that Brown's refusal to perform most damaged their friendship. Colin Jeffrey Morris, in his unpublished dissertation, *Virtuosity and Theatricality: A Study of William Dunlap and Charles Brockden Brown*, studies the relationship of the two artists. In his discussion of the effect of Brown's "honesty," in this instance in a letter Brown wrote to Dunlap after seeing one of his plays, Morris writes, "Despite its announcement of a friend's reserve, then, Brown's letter made clear in just a few deft strokes of the pen precisely what it claimed to be keeping private; its author's utter disdain for Dunlap's play" (164-5).

Dunlap was not the only person to suffer under Brown's obstreperousness. In meetings of the Friendly

Club, a group of intellectual young men of which Brown was sporadically a part, he was "alternately 'silent' and 'disputatious'" (Morris 163). Part of the reason for Brown's evident discomfort in the meetings, according to Colin Jeffrey Morris, was the presence of four lawyers, members of the Club (161). In his diary, Brown wrote of one instance in which one of the lawyers, James Kent, gave him "a severe castigation for the crimes of disputatiousness and dogmatism" (Morris 162). Sarcastically he noted in his journal that he "Hope[d] to profit by the lesson that he taught me" (Morris 162). Like his character Arthur Mervyn, Brown felt that "apologies, circuities and innuendoes . . . are feeble and perverse refinements, unworthy of an honest purpose and an erect spirit" (299). His novels are an attempt to document the dangers of a society which lived otherwise.

Brown's novels are not unusual in their use of theatrical language. Eighteenth-century literature is saturated with "the language of stage and scene" (Agnew 55). Henry Fielding in *Tom Jones*, writes that "some words

proper to the theatre . . . are now indiscriminately and literally spoken of both [stage and life]" (Agnew 158-9). Agnew explains this use of theatrical language as the result of the "radical disjuncture between 'gesture' and 'influence,' between public and private" (160). Only the theater seemed to express this division. The frequent recurrence in *Wieland* of the word "scene" (*Wieland* 25,31,39,109), for example, denotes Clara Wieland's proclivity for framing reality as theater. Richard Sennett describes this blurring of life and theater in *The Fall of Public Man*,

> Belief in the theater. . .like belief in a stranger, is a matter of taking the immediate encounter as the limit of knowable reality. In both, external knowledge on the part of the audience is not involved, in the city by necessity, in the theater by fiat. (40)

Whereas Arthur Mervyn refuses to take the "immediate encounter as the limit of knowable reality," peeking through keyholes at the private reality beyond the public

doors, the Wielands demonstrate a remarkable inability to distinguish public faces from private acts.

Wieland is in part a demonstration of the contagion of the theater. At the beginning of Clara Wieland's narrative, she notes in passing that "My ancestor [Wieland] may be considered as the founder of the German Theatre" (7). Her brother Theodore, in turn, reads Cicero, not simply to understand his meaning but to, "discover the gestures and cadences with which they ought to be delivered" (27). Later in the novel, Clara is rehearsing a part she is to perform in a family production of a new German play when she begins to fantasize about walking home with Henry Pleyel after the performance the following day. She sets the scene as a romantic drama, the backdrop being "[an] airy expanse . . . without a speck" (90), in front of which Pleyel will declare his love for her. The reality that follows is a shock to her. For Pleyel, too, has witnessed a drama; he takes Carwin's performance of Clara's voice as real, and accuses her of many crimes of the heart and soul. So confused they are

between reality and performance, that they don't see what is in front of their eyes. A complete unknown to them just weeks before, they still take Carwin into their small community. When strange events begin to occur, they somehow never connect these with the stranger in their midst. How can this happen?

Carwin is chameleon man; like David Garrick, he can become anyone he desires to be. This analogy is not simply fanciful. Kalman Burnim cites Denis Diderot's description of Garrick at work:

> So protean a performer was David Garrick that he could put his head between two folding doors and in the course of five or six seconds alter his expression "successfully from wild delight to temperate pleasure, from this to tranquility, from tranquility to surprise, from surprise to blank astonishment, from that to sorrow, from sorrow to the air of one overwhelmed, from that to fright, from fright to horror, and thence . . . up again to the point from which he started." (37)

Compare this description to Clara's description of Carwin, when she catches him in the act of ventriloquism:

> through this aperture was an head thrust and drawn back with so much swiftness, that the immediate conviction was, that thus much of a form, ordinarily invisible, had been unshrowded . . . Every muscle [of his face] was tense; the forehead and brows were drawn into vehement expression; the lips were stretched as in the act of shrieking . . . . This face was well suited to a being whose performances exceeded the standard of humanity, and yet its features were akin to those I had seen before . . . Yet affinities were few and unconspicuous, and were lost amidst the blaze of opposite qualities. (168)

Both descriptions reveal the man as waxwork figure, malleable to a frightening extreme. Carwin has in fact played multiple roles: Pleyel, as noted, first met him in Europe in the guise of a "Spaniard." Yet, Carwin's previous guises do not make the family suspicious of his "persona," at least not enough for them to suspect him of

wrong doing when strange events begin to happen around them. How odd then that Pleyel proceeds to take one of Carwin's performances for Clara's reality. He takes life for theater and theater for life.

Arthur Mervyn is Brown's other chameleon character. Throughout the course of the novel, we see him through other people's eyes variously as a country bumpkin, a self-righteous fool, a conspirator and an intelligent and amiable young man. But, if we take the novel seriously, we will accept that it doesn't really matter which he is at all. Mervyn does not *mistake* life for theater or theater for life, as do Pleyel and the Wielands, rather he refuses to separate the two at all.

"Appearances are wonderfully influenced by dress," Arthur Mervyn remarks, writing of his transformation after meeting Welbeck (48). Dressed in someone else's expensive clothes, Mervyn can hardly recognize himself. He learns both that appearances can be changed and that we have only appearances to go by. After carefully observing the behavior of his new mentor, Welbeck, Mervyn is surprised

by how different he is in different contexts. While he is reserved and somber in private, in company, Welbeck is full of energy: "His eyes sparkled; his features expanded into a benign serenity; and his wonted reserve gave place to a torrent-like and overflowing elocution" (68). "So great was [this change]," remarks Mervyn, "that I could hardly persuade myself that it was the same person" (68). Instead of becoming fearful or suspicious, Mervyn reacts, as he reacts to almost every experience, with an overarching curiosity (68). He lives prepared to accept the reality of theater. When he meets his future wife, Achsa Fielding, in what he thinks is a house of prostitution, and says to her, "I was born to be deceived, and the semblance of modesty is readily assumed. Under this veil, perhaps, lurk a tainted heart and depraved appetites. Is it so?," it is clear that he is ready for either to be true. He somehow manages to be on his guard and unguarded at the same moment. He reads his future wife's face, always prepared for it to be a misreading.

Johann Casper Lavater's *Physiognomy* was published in

1790 in Philadelphia (Fliegelman *Wieland* xxxii). The author's goal, as he described it in the book is "to devise general, assignable, communicable signs of the powers of mind; or, in general, the internal faculties of man, and to apply them with certainty, and facility, to all cases" (139). The "semblance of modesty" which Mervyn attributes to Achsa Fielding (cited above) is an example of physiognomic reading, the reading of psychic truths in human features and gestures. Lavater's book had previously gained currency in Europe; its physiognomic language had entered the vocabulary, especially that of contemporary novelists. The book's popularity in America is evident from its appearance excerpted in magazines, magazines which Brown would have read and for some of which he had written. In the March 1788 issue of *The Columbian Magazine, or Monthly Miscellany*, for instance, published when Brown was seventeen, a brief explanation of Lavater's project was printed, the codifying (and therefore decoding) of human gesture and expression, and sample pictures of physiognomic "types" ("Portraits" 144-

5). The language of Lavater's physiognomy reverbates throughout Brown's novels. The words "lineaments," "marks," "tokens," used almost obsessively by Brown, are part of the semiotics of facial readings. The face and body become a book on which are stamped the "characters" of human character and psychology. Lavater, who believed one could "read" character visually, claimed that for this very reason, "character," as the public expression of our public selves, could be falsified. It is ironically only those who know how to read the "truth" of faces who can lie believably. As he writes,

> The art of dissimulation itself, which is adduced as so insuperable an objection to the truth of physiognomy, is founded upon physiognomy. Why does the hypocrite assume the appearance of an honest man, but because that he is convinced, though not perhaps from any systematic reflection, that all eyes are acquainted with the characteristic marks of honesty. (17)

While he claims that this "science" uncovers "the

relation that exists between visible and invisible, the perceptible and the imperceptible," by his own admission it may reveal this relation, but we cannot read it. The "look" of honesty may appear on the faces of the dishonest. The invisible, revealed, remains invisible to us. We can only read the "marks of honesty"; we cannot read their honesty. When Dr. Stevens' friend, Mr. Wortley, says to him of Arthur Mervyn, "It was time . . . that your confidence in smooth features and fluent accents should have ended long ago" (237), it is in contradiction to Dr. Stevens' intense belief in the honesty of Mervyn's "performance." Stevens can either believe his physiognomic reading of Mervyn, or believe in no one ever again. Mervyn's own beliefs about the accuracy of physiognomical readings (which I believe are Brown's as well) lie in a pragmatic middle between Wortley's cynicism and Stevens' gullibility.

After rescuing Susan Hadwin's fiancé, the dislikable Wallace, from plague-ridden Philadelphia, Mervyn considers further action. He has realized the unworthiness of

Wallace, and is unsure whether or not to warn Susan of it. He writes,

> Depravity and folly must assume the guise of virtue before it can claim her affection. This disguise might be maintained for a time, but its detection must inevitably come, and the sooner this detection takes place the more beneficial it must prove. (259)

Detection will "inevitably come" because the deceiver's actions will eventually belie his put-on character. Susan Hadwin does not need to see Wallace's true character for herself, in order to realize his deception; she needs only for someone she trusts to reveal it to her. Isolated in her country home, Susan Hadwin, like the Wieland's, loses the benefits of social circulation. Mervyn circulates through the novel, gaining knowledge both for himself and others, without ever surrendering completely to the performances of those he meets.

When Mervyn recounts his relationship with Betty Lawrence, the young woman his father marries, he is revealing his ability to observe the world like an

anthropologist or biologist, "I watched her while she practiced all her tricks and blandishments, just as I regarded a similar deportment in the *animal salax ignavumque* who inhabits the stye" (331). Mervyn feels disgust at Betty Lawrence's attempts to seduce him, which he tries to "suppress," keeping his scientific distance as he "pursue[s] [his] observations" (331). That distance is necessary for true understanding, for, as Brown writes in *Ormond*, "Human approbation or censure, can never be exempt from injustice, because limited perceptions debar us from a thorough knowledge of any actions and motives but our own" (262). Mervyn recognizes the inevitable injustice of appearances, saying of his neighbors' judgement of his character that "they examined what was exposed to their view," and that for them *not* to have judged by appearances would have been inhuman.

Deidre Shauna Lynch writes in *The Economy of Character* of writers' turn in the late eighteenth century away from the "overloading of countenances" (26-7). Whereas before this change, novelists would regularly

summarize a character through "exoteric, visible information [like] a birthmark or a ring," the new strategy was to focus on the private and the hidden from public view (26-7). A critical point was reached in the eighteenth century, writes Lynch, "when the conventions regulating the economy of characters and countenances had to be emphatically displayed" and this was "also the point of their disarticulation" (27). Nobility of character, for instance, which could previously have been represented by the birthmark Lynch mentions, now would be represented only by a character's private behavior.

Perhaps we should distinguish "character" from "personality," character being what we display for others, and personality being who we are to ourselves. If Mervyn looks through so many keyholes and barges into so many homes, it is because of his recognition of the hiddenness of this personal self behind closed doors. We are most ourselves, as we know those selves, when we are alone. A split arose between public and private which made the reading of character especially fraught. "The practice of

reading character," writes Lynch,

> changed when it came to serve as a means for self-culture and, congruently, a means of confronting the problem posed by this ebullient commercial society--the problem of the promiscuous circulation and universal exchangeability that eroded the differences defining the self and its belongings. (132)

The rise of sincerity as a social value is inseparable from this widening gap between the social and the private self. People needed, more and more, to be assured that what they saw was the reality of the person with whom they were interacting. Brown saw the impossibility, the wishfulness, of this hope for reassurance. The more frantically the culture tried to "read" the human world, the more chameleon-like this world became.

Lavater's project was only one of many attempts to decode the semiotics of the human character. The rise of the self-help book, those texts designed to help newcomers to the burgeoning middle class adapt to the behavior and beliefs of the class, were in a sense physiognomies of

class. How do well-to-do people walk, talk, dress and carry themselves? If the "new theater showed . . . how precarious social identity was . . . and therefore how deeply theatrical it was," would not the rising focus on self-education intensify this feeling of theatricality? The two changes, the developing realism of the theater and the rise of self-culture, are of course related. As Jay Fliegelman explains in *Declaring Independence*, "Deeply influenced by the new naturalistic acting style introduced on the English stage by Garrick . . . the oratorical manuals of the period were often indistinguishable from acting manuals" (81). Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric* recognizes this entanglement, while attempting unsuccessfully to avoid its consequences:

> His gestures and motions ought to carry that kind of expression which nature has dictated to him; and, unless this be the case, it is impossible, by means of any study, to avoid their appearing stiff and forced.
>
> However, although nature must be the groundwork,

> I admit, that there is room in this matter for study and art. (375)

Nature "dictates" one's "gestures and motions"; they do not arise naturally. That is the distinction. In other words, certain ideas would "naturally" evoke certain gestures and tones of voice, so we should use them, whether or not we feel the emotions leading to these gestures.

"All error," writes Lavater, "originates in the deficiencies of language, the want of peculiar and characteristic signs" (135). The eighteenth century desperately sought these signs, describing them in an attempt to stabilize social intercourse. But in being codified, these signs become movable, performable, interchangeable, teachable. They become unmoored from their "nature." As Richard Sennett notes, "Public markings were losing distinctive forms" (20). One of the symbolic moments in the century which represents this loss is Benjamin Franklin's image, in his autobiography, of the young Benjamin pushing a wheelbarrow through the streets

in order to impress the community with his diligence. As he explains, it is not enough that he *is* diligent, his diligence must be visible, coded with a public form (73). Physiognomic thought, like the study of manners, was an attempt to separate out "excisable qualities" which could then be "endowed with a meaning and a value irrespective of the individual context in which they inhered" (Stafford *Good Looking* 91). Brown, like Arthur Mervyn, recognizes that there is no meaning or value separate from "individual context." This is why Mervyn collects experience, visual and otherwise, gathering the range of "individual contexts" which will aid in his constant reading of the world. As Deidre Shauna Lynch writes:

> Worth accrues to the gentleman-in-the-making in proportion as, launched on a Grand Tour of some sort, he samples the world's variety and familiarizes himself with a range of social conditions and degrees. The reader's surrogate, he is to collect the characters of experience as he scrutinizes the characters of others. His touring is the device by

> which the author generates examples--the discrete cognitive images, the "pictures" of the passions, and so forth, that were the very stuff of knowledge in a culture that modeled the process of knowing atomistically. (81)

Lynch questions when this gathering self, the drawings on the Lockean blank slate becomes complete(85). The answer of course is that he or she is never complete, and never unified either. A person changes through the process of learning and experiencing. The wax is molded and remolded; it remains the same but its appearance is ever changing. Like *Ormond*'s character Madame de Leyva, we are "perpetually assuming new forms" (203). The ephemeral self needs to be seen as it passes rapidly through your vision. It will reveal itself, whether through a keyhole or in a sleepwalker's unconscious actions, as in *Edgar Huntly*, but you must catch it quickly before a new self takes its place.

Conclusion

In a 1791 article, "On the Evils of an habitual deviation from Truth," the anonymous author writes,

> To prove, in the most forcible manner, the necessity of truth, let us, but for a moment, suppose a society of liars--A society of liars! --I beg pardon for the expression--It could not exist; since we are told, that even the very devils tell truth to each other; otherwise that community would suffer all the horrors of anarchy; and hell be doubly hell" (29).

The author's exclamation, "Even the very devils tell truth to each other," has been spoken in varying versions throughout history. The code of thieves is one version with which we are probably all familiar. We all seem to instinctively understand the need for honor among thieves

even as we note its irony. Not even evil can be accomplished without a measure of cooperation among the perpetrators. What the author of this piece is pointing to is the necessary grounding of any society's existence in the honesty of its members, or at least in a belief in this honesty.

One of the many paradoxes that Charles Brockden Brown confronts in his novels is that people's interpretations of the world are dependent on their trust in the interpretive stability of the people and the world around them, and that this trust is in turn dependent on a fallible interpretation of these same people and this same world. Thieves must trust their fellow thieves, even as they witness each others' less than trustworthy behavior. The psychological, educational, artistic and religious themes in Brown's novels demonstrate the human dependence on this same necessary yet groundless trust that is the basis of "thieves' honor." We can not, but must, assume the sanity, trustworthiness and logic of most of the people around us as well as of ourselves. We must believe

the truthfulness and accuracy of the majority of what we see, hear and feel. There is no evidence but fallible evidence. We live, like Brown's characters, between the Scylla of no belief and the Charybdis of false belief.

Adam B. Seligman notes that trust, as opposed to confidence, actually assumes an "opaqueness of [the] other's intentions and calculations" (43). While confidence relies on the "calculable attributes of role fulfillment," trust comes into play only when roles become unclear. You are confident that a firefighter will eventually arrive to put out a fire at your home; you trust--or don't--that neighbors will come to your assistance in the meantime. Trust, being inherently a matter of faith, is therefore far more fragile than confidence. You trust that most people are not lying to you. You trust that most people around you are sane. You trust that people more or less see the same world that you do. At times when this illusion is broken, when the ordinary world's faithfulness to your idea of it comes apart, the impact is devastating. What is happening as I

write, in the wake of the Columbine massacre, in which two seemingly ordinary high school students walked around their school systematically shooting teachers and classmates, is an example of how fragile trust is. In schools all across the country, this tragic event is influencing daily life. Suddenly every child with a duffle bag is a potential killer. Was Brown affected in this way by the accounts of murder he had read before he wrote *Wieland*? Did he suddenly see the murderous potential in each of us? Brown's work helps us understand not only the culture of the 1790's but that of our own. During both decades deep changes were surfacing in the cultures, resulting in psychic instabilities and cultural anxieties reflected in popular culture. Changes were occurring in how people could expect to make a living, raise a family or interact with the people around them. We all try to establish emotional stability in the face of massive change by holding on to small yet meaningful "truths" that we call common sense. As Dr. Stevens needs to believe the truth he reads in Mervyn's

face, so we each confront the world with our own stubborn beliefs, the ones that keep us sane.

Brown recognized people's need to trust in the world around them, even as he recognized the fragility of this trust. Brown's novels are witnesses to the fact that social bonds, as well as the reliability of our interpretations, grow stronger the more they are multiplied. This is the root of Common Sense thinking, that trust grows with the repetition of our experiences, even if that repetition is experienced by others than ourselves. To borrow an image from Thomas Reid,

> Such evidence may be compared to a rope made up of many slender filaments twisted together. The rope has strength more than sufficient to bear the stress laid upon it, though no one of the filaments of which it is composed would be sufficient for that purpose. (Hookway 114)

This rope-like nature of experience is exactly what the Wielands' reject. They refuse the bonds of social trust and each member of the family, like the isolated filaments

in Reid's image, is broken one by one by the stresses of interpretation.

Proper judgement, according to Brown is a mixture of scepticism and common sense pragmatism; Arthur Mervyn serves as his ideal man. Brown believed, like the thinkers of the European Enlightenment, that "the distortions of the solitary mind could be removed by universal testimony just as the mad astronomer in *Rasselas* is restored to sanity by returning to society" (Dussinger 12). But one had to be willing to take other people's testimony into consideration, no matter how it differed from one's own. Scepticism should be applied generally, not only towards outsiders. One of the most famous of sceptics, Helvétius, advised that we should each say to ourselves, "'Nobody escapes from error, and am I alone infallible? may I not be deceived in those very things which I maintain with the greatest fanaticism?' (109)" He adds:

> If men had this idea habitually present to their minds, they would be more on their guard against

> vanity, more attentive to the objections of their adversaries, and better prepared to perceive the force of truth: they would be more mild; more enclined to toleration, and doubtless would have a less high opinion of their own wisdom. (109)

Mervyn, with his constant reiteration of his own ignorance, is one of Helvétius' wise fools, willing to put all they hold dear into doubt for the sake of truth.

If they sometimes err too much on the side of received wisdom, institutions serve as foils for the interpretations of those individuals who refuse to adopt Helvétius' advice. *Arthur Mervyn* is about how individuals can survive and thrive in a world of interpretive confusion; *Wieland* is about how to control those who don't. As Shirley Samuels writes in "*Wieland*: Alien and Infidel":

> One of *Wieland*'s functions as a tutelary tract might be to prepare the way for the notion that institutions are a necessary supplement to the family. Without the formal institutions of education,

> religion, "benevolent societies," orphanages, or prisons, the new republic would be susceptible to the chaos unleashed within the Wieland family. (53)

The Wielands' substitute family and friendship for community and institution. Instead of increasing the number of filaments of experience, they lessen them. They isolate themselves in so small a world that their own interpretations become the world. Arthur Mervyn, with his bumbling ways and impetuous curiosity, has expanded his world to include everyone and everything that comes in his path. If "even the very devils tell truth to each other," than perhaps we should begin our search for truth--Brown would have us believe--by listening to each other.

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