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THE CRAFT OF CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN'S FICTION

by

James Richard Russo

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
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1979

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I hereby recommend that this dissertation prepared under my direction
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SIGNED: James R. Ross
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ABSTRACT

Charles Brockden Brown was not the hasty, careless writer he is so frequently characterized as being. The inconsistencies, improbabilities, and contradictions which riddle his novels are the result of unreliable narrators who lie, sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally, to the reader. All of Brown's novels have this feature (the unreliable narrator) in common.

In Wieland, the story is told by a madwoman, Clara Wieland, who is unable to face an ugly truth about herself—that she is "polluted" by the loss of her virginity. This pivotal fact she conceals from both herself and the reader by blaming everything that occurs in the novel on her convenient scapegoat, Carwin (whose confession is related to us through her). In each of the novel's major scenes, it can be demonstrated that Clara loses touch with reality and reports as fact that which cannot possibly be true. Brown's sources for Wieland, as well as the way in which he makes use of them, support such a reading.

Similarly, Constantia Dudley's narrative in Ormond is a complex fabric of semi-plausible lies. The difference in comparison to Wieland is that Constantia is a conscious liar whose untruths are designed to conceal that she is a profligate, a forger, and a murderer. The notorious inconsistencies in the characters of Martinette, Helena Cleves, and (most significantly) Ormond himself are due to deliberate narrative lies that the attentive reader can trace through every major scene.
Arthur Mervyn is the story of one man's con game. In this, the most complex of Brown's novels, the narrator is not even who he claims to be, but rather a clever impostor. The novel is carefully layered, narratives embedded within narratives, each one providing evidence that contradicts what the man who calls himself Arthur Mervyn is telling us. Although no character in the novel sees through the imposture, Brown, through conflicting testimony of numerous other characters provides the reader with the information necessary to unmask the narrator as a seducer, a forger, and a murderer.

Edgar Huntly is a psychological study of two men who are "unknown to themselves." The evidence of both the text and Brown's sources (Skywalk and "Somnambulism") suggests that the narrator himself is the murderer of his friend Waldegrave. Thus Edgar's search for the murderer and his mysterious relationship with his double, Clithero Edny, make Huntly a novel of self-discovery. The twin narratives of Edgar and Clithero demonstrate that both men are driven by dark, hidden motives that they themselves do not understand.

Brown's lesser known novels, Clara Howard, Jane Talbot, and Stephen Calvert also exhibit the characteristic unreliable narrator. In Calvert, the title character conceals from the reader the true nature of his relationship with the profligate Clelia Neville. Philip Stanley in Clara Howard is guilty of seduction and an attempted swindle, both of which he attempts to conceal. In Jane Talbot both principal characters lie in order to conceal Jane's marital infidelity.
Brown's insistence upon writing such "hidden" fictions, in which the reader is at the mercy of a narrator who will not or cannot tell the truth may have been grounded in his belief that men and the world they inhabit may be a sham. Brown's illness, his tendency to berate himself, his habitual, morbid self-analysis, his unfounded suspicions that his closest friends secretly despised him, and perhaps, as Elihu Hubbard Smith suspected, a secret in his own past, may all have played a role in determining that belief and the kind of fiction Brown chose to write. At any rate, Brown, like Hawthorne, seems to have concluded that Truth could only be approached through indirection.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In "Charles Brockden Brown: A Bibliographical Essay," Paul Witherington states that in one respect Brown criticism has been remarkably consistent.¹ Nearly all critics, he admits, agree that Brown's "structures were loose and inconsistent,"² and that his "narrative technique has been generally derided."³ This has been ever since William Dunlap, Brown's friend and biographer, suggested that this novelist was naturally careless and given to writing hasty, confused narratives.⁴ While Brown may continue for the purpose of literary criticism to be considered a second-rate writer, one cannot help but notice that such a relegation is largely based on repeated allegations that his novels suffer from incoherent narratives, unintegrated subplots, awkward shifts in points of view, and inconsistent characters. Larzer Ziff, in discussing Wieland, calls Brown a "hasty, careless writer," who preferred a deus ex machina ending to the alternative of


²Ibid., p. 171.

³Ibid.

careful rereading and revision. Similarly, Paul Rogers claims that it would be unreasonable to expect coherence from Brown, whose forte was "improvisation"; according to Rogers the very fruits of Ormond are the result of the author's carelessness and haste. Arthur Mervyn, Brown's most complex narrative, has drawn the most fire in this regard. Its numerous shifts in point of view and the resulting layered effect of the narrative, which contains tales within tales within tales, have long baffled readers, who, quite naturally, if erroneously, placed the blame for their bewilderment on Brown's ineptness. Even Edgar Huntly, the simplest and most straightforward of Brown's major novels has not escaped the general calumny, although recent criticism has acknowledged the symbolic relationship between the narratives of Clithero Edny and Edgar Huntly. However, not even the critics who defend Brown's structure and narrative technique in particular instances, and argue that as a result he was perhaps not quite as bad an artist as generally supposed, would venture to defend his work as a whole. No critic has yet suggested that Brown was a competent craftsman. Yet this is precisely the conclusion of this study. It will be my contention that Brown's narratives are seldom incoherent, almost never inconsistent, and in terms of narrative technique, the most sophisticated novels of his day. I hope to dispel

the generally accepted thesis of Warner Berthoff that Brown was less an artist than a philosopher who merely used his fiction as a testing ground for ideas. ⁸

Obviously, there is more involved here than is usually referred to as a "reassessment." The present writer is all too aware that attacking the foundations of several generations of respected, intelligent Brown criticism may be viewed a temerity by some, but the evidence clearly suggests that most previous criticism is founded on the fallacy that if seeming inconsistencies in narrative and character are apparent and the story appears to be invaded by incongruities, the author was therefore careless. Such reasoning may hold true for third person narratives, but certainly it does not hold for first person ones where the narrator, part of the author's fiction, may himself be responsible for inconsistencies and incongruities. This fundamental fallacy has been sustained over the years by curious circular logic. When Brown's narratives reveal inconsistencies and incongruities, we infer, as Dunlap did, that he wrote in haste, without revision. Once this idea has been promulgated, it becomes easy to use the inference to explain the original incongruities. And so on. Interestingly enough, Dunlap's original inference concerning Brown's carelessness is little more than that, for although the two were friends, they saw each other infrequently, Dunlap residing in New York, Brown in Philadelphia. Elihu Hubbard Smith, ⁸

Dunlap, and Brown's other friends constantly berated the young man for not communicating with them more frequently, as well as for being so secretive. And while Brown paid his friends extended visits during the early stages of his career, asking their advice and even giving them advanced readings from his works in progress, there is little evidence to suggest that any of these men were privy to his writing process or personal habits. They, like the rest of us, simply inferred his habits from the finished products of his pen, and while their testimony is certainly valuable, no modern critic should ascribe to them more knowledge and understanding than they could have possessed.

It is my contention, then, that the narratives of Charles Brockden Brown are, considering their complexity, remarkably coherent. The readily apparent inconsistencies and incongruities contained within them characterize his narrators. In each of the following chapters it will be argued that the narrator does not tell the truth. In some cases he (or she) can do nothing but lie because he does not know the truth, and therefore cannot be expected to relate it. In other cases the narrator tells complex lies to obscure his agency in a series of shocking, premeditated crimes. In such ways Brown was able to achieve thoroughly admirable unity of design. The content of his fictions, which typically deal with sincerity versus deception, benevolence versus imposture, is inextricably intertwined with varying forms of unreliable narratives that challenge the reader's perception. The cumulative evidence presented below in favor of such a radical thesis is, I hope the reader will agree, substantial.
Perhaps I ought here to anticipate an objection. Nowhere in this book do I wish to suggest that there is only one possible "interpretation" of any of Brown's fictions. Obviously, to do so would be foolish. Actually, I do not view this study as interpretive in nature, although clearly some interpretation is involved. What I hope to do is simply to establish what happens in each narrative. Far from limiting the possible interpretations, I merely wish to establish the context from which critics may begin. Establishing what happens in each novel is a different matter from the interpretation of those events. Imagine the difficulty of interpreting any work of fiction—a novel by Dickens, or Fielding, or Twain—if we could not say with assurance what actually took place in it. Yet this is the difficulty we face with Brown, or any other writer who creates a narrator who lies to us about what happens. It is simply impossible to interpret events until we know what they are.

Furthermore, I wish to disclaim at the beginning that this study is intended as a re-evaluation of Charles Brockden Brown. If I am successful, I may convince the reader that Brown was a different kind of writer than he previously supposed. But this is not to say that he was necessarily a better or worse one, which is a matter for future criticism. What follows is neither re-interpretation nor re-evaluation so much as an investigation into an occurrence: a series of literary texts and their causes. Beyond discovering what happens in them and suggesting possible reasons why Brown chose to write such fictions, I have no pretensions.
CHAPTER 2

WIELAND

Modern criticism has found one major fault with Wieland: its loose and unbalanced structure.¹ The alleged incoherence of its plot is attributed to Charles Brockden Brown's carelessness as a writer, a notion so firmly entrenched in Brown criticism that it persists all but unchallenged despite much evidence to the contrary.² However, the inference that Brown was a careless writer who was unconcerned with his art does not bear close scrutiny, as is attested by Joseph Katz in "Analytical Bibliography and Literary History: the Writing and Printing of Wieland," in which Katz concludes that Brown was a much more careful artist than he is generally given credit for being.³ Sidney Krause's recent essay on the composition of Ormond reaches a similar conclusion about another Brown novel.⁴ Indeed, there is considerable evidence to


²Larzer Ziff in "A Reading of Wieland," PMLA, 77 (1962), p. 53, explains the novel's faults this way: "To be sure Brown was a hasty, careless writer, and rather than go back and revise his novel . . . he . . . wrote a number of deus ex machina explanations."

³Proof, (1971), 8-34.

suggest that *Wieland* evolved much more slowly and with more painstaking care than most critics care to admit.\textsuperscript{5}

A better explanation for the seeming incoherence of *Wieland* is possible only if we set aside the *a priori* notion that Brown was an inferior artist. Clara Wieland herself provides us with the key when she makes the following admission:

What but ambiguities, abruptness, and dark transitions can be expected from the historian who is, at the same time, the sufferer of these disasters?\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{5}Although *Wieland* was published in 1798, it is reasonable to suggest that Brown was thinking about the novel as early as 1796, at which time the account of the Yates murders appeared in the Philadelphia and New York newspapers. The "Outline" for the novel which was discovered among the papers of Brown's father, Elijah, and which is published in the Kent State (1977) Edition of the novel, also supports this contention. Though the editor suggests that the outline "must have rather closely preceded composition," the outline itself suggests that this may not be true. It makes no reference whatever to the death of the elder Wieland, a pivotal scene in the novel, though the Maxwell-Conway subplot, often considered an awkward appendage indicating authorial haste, is presented in greater detail on the outline than in the novel itself. There are major differences between the plot indicated on the outline, and if nothing else the outline indicates the magnitude of the changes Brown wrought in the novel. Indeed, it demonstrates the difference between a book and a plan for a book. In addition, the outline also indicates that even during the embryonic stages of *Wieland* 's development Brown was already at work on four other novels, for mixed in with the characters from his first novel were lists of names he would use later in *Ormond*, *Arthur Mervyn*, *Edgar Huntly*, and *Clara Howard*: he lists the titles of several projected works as well. In view of all this, it is interesting to note that at the point he wrote the outline, he had not even settled on the names of his important *Wieland* characters. (Clara is sometimes referred to as Caroline, sometimes as Leonora; the Carwin character of the outline is named Marcrieve.) Obviously, a good deal of thought and revision went into *Wieland* between its embryonic outline and final draft—the kind of revision Brown supposedly never made.

\textsuperscript{6}Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland*; or the Transformation (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1963). All subsequent references to this edition are included in the text.
Indeed, *Wieland* is a tale told by a confessed madwoman, Clara Wieland, and her narrative seems incoherent at times because she is confused, not because Brown is. "My narrative may be invaded by inaccuracy and confusion" (166) Clara admits, but her very admission may, ironically, prevent the reader from taking her warning seriously. When she confesses that her version of various actions and motivations depends upon "a coincidence of events scarcely credible" (158), the literal truth of her assertion may escape the most alert reader. Even Pleyel only partially perceives the truth about Clara when he accuses her of having "a sensibility somewhat too vivid" (142).

William Manly has correctly argued that *Wieland* is Clara's story, not her brother's, and that Brown conveys "through a first person narrator the shifting instability of a mind swayed between objective logic and subjective terror." I wish to take Manly's argument one step further by demonstrating that Clara actually flits back and forth between imagination and reality throughout the novel, and that many of the inconsistencies which have proved a bother to critics actually provide the evidence for such a reading. Clara does not

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intentionally lie to the reader; she simply does not know the truth.  

The novel itself provides the reader with numerous reasons for questioning Clara's mental stability. First, she has inherited insanity from both sides of her family, not just her father's side. We are informed through Clara's uncle, Mr. Cambridge, that her maternal grandfather committed suicide in a sudden fit of madness by jumping off a cliff (197). Clara herself contemplates suicide more than once. On her father's side, the family instability is traced in more detail in the opening chapters of the novel which culminate in the bizarre death of Clara's father, at which point she is still a child. Both brother and sister, it seems, have inherited a legacy of violence and mental instability, yet it is interesting to note how each child chooses to deal with that legacy. Of the two, Theodore's approach is the more reasonable. It is true that he believes, as did his father, that God at times may choose to communicate directly with individual men, and this belief will eventually undo him. However, it must be stressed that

8It is curious that Clara's insanity should have been overlooked by critics, for her madness is more demonstrable than that of her brother or, as James Soldati in "The Americanization of Faust: A Study of Charles Brockden Brown's Wieland," Emerson Society Quarterly, 20 (1974), p. 4, would have it, Carwin. The novel's subtitle, "The Transformation," is more applicable to Clara than her brother, because as Ziff points out, Theodore's transformation "is not followed in detail by Brown... His insanity is a leap rather than a development" (Ziff, p. 56). Clara's mental breakdown, on the other hand, is portrayed in a careful, subtle, gradual manner, and as Wayne Franklin puts it in "Tragedy and Comedy in Wieland," Novel, 8 (1975), p. 153: "How better to inculcate the announced moral of human misperception than to present us with a narrator who does not understand her tale?"
such a tenet is not a radical one. Only Pleyel, whose rationalistic views are in the novel's historical context radical, would object to it. Throughout the novel, Clara herself vacillates on this same philosophical point of whether one can communicate directly with God. Therefore, it makes little sense to see Theodore's commonly held world view as a "potential for mania," for such a reading ignores the more significant attempts which Theodore makes to break free from the legacy of violence and insanity he has inherited. For instance, he converts his father's temple, the scene of the elder Wieland's fanatical devotions and his violent death, into a summerhouse, and symbolically refutes his father's religious mania by placing in the center of that edifice a bust of Cicero. Indeed, the son shows himself to have a more stable and inquiring mind than the father had, and while he lacks the complete religious skepticism of his friend Pleyel, he shows no sign whatever of being unbalanced until the voices begin. Therefore, Franklin's claim that Wieland is not so much duped by the voices as merely set in motion on a course that he would have inevitably followed, as Othello is through Iago's aggravations or Macbeth through the instigation of the witches, is not precisely true.

9 Dimmesdale, in The Scarlet Letter, expresses a similar belief when he interprets a meteor in the night sky as a sign sent directly from God for his personal benefit.

10 Ziff, p. 56.

11 Butler disagrees. For his analysis of the situation see pp. 132-33.
Theodore's sane approach to life is even more evident when we compare him to his sister, for numerous details in the novel suggest that Clara has been less successful than her brother in breaking away from the Wieland legacy, this despite her claim to be the more rational of the two. Where Theodore attempts to tear away from the past, Clara preserves and nourishes it. Where Theodore rejects his father's fanaticism by converting the elder Wieland's shrine into a summerhouse, Clara hoards her lunatic father's possessions and cherishes his memory as "sacred." In her closet she keeps his memoirs and reads them late at night before going to sleep. In her bedroom she keeps the antique clock which chimed her father to his death. It is Clara, not Theodore, who constantly broods over their father's strange death whenever she sees a flash of light, and it is Clara's incessant brooding which causes us to feel, as Franklin puts it, that "the father's spirit broods over Wieland as ominously as it does over Hamlet."\footnote{Franklin, p. 160.}

Neither should we ignore the way violence continually creeps into Clara's waking and sleeping thoughts. Not only does she conjure up the vivid image of Pleyel's drowned corpse and other life phantasms, but she also admits that these ugly visions have a soothing effect upon her, learning to enjoy as she does through the course of the novel "that terror which is pleasing" (65).

Clara's insanity, her inability to perceive reality, may best be illustrated by examining the major dramatic incidents of the novel:
the events which cluster around her first encounter with the voices in her closet, her dream by the river and the warning voice which speaks through the lattice, her discovery of Carwin in her closet, the murder of Catherine, Carwin's confession, and her final confrontation with her brother. In each of these episodes it can be clearly demonstrated that Clara looses touch with reality, and that the events simply could not have happened as reported.

Before Clara Wieland hears the voices in her closet plotting her murder, strange voices have been heard by others. Theodore has heard his wife's voice warn him not to ascend to the summerhouse. Another voice, again sounding like Catherine's, has informed Wieland and Pleyel of the death of the latter's fiancee (though this information turns out to be false). Clara informs us that in the case of these first two voices the agent must have been supernatural: "that there are conscious beings besides ourselves in existence, whose modes of activity and information surpass our own, can scarcely be denied" (65). She also feels that the agent must be benevolent, and that her brother's obedience to the first voice "perhaps saved him from a destiny similar to that of my father" (66). While there may be nothing outwardly sinister in these opinions, it should be noted that the pleasure Clara feels when the voice informs Pleyel of his fiancee's decease is unsettling, even though we realize that Clara herself is in love with Pleyel:

> Propitious was the spirit which imparted these tidings. Propitious he would perhaps have been, if he had been instrumental in producing as well as in communicating the tidings of her death. (66)
At best, the above passage shows Clara to be selfish enough to view as "propitious" the death of another human being. At worst, it shows that she, even if only subconsciously, condones violence for personal ends, for she tells us that the voice would merit her approval even if it had caused the death of Pleyel's Teresa, and not merely reported it.

It is shortly after the appearance of Carwin that Clara hears the voices in her closet. On one sunny afternoon Clara spies Carwin on the Wieland property; a short while later he appears at her door requesting a drink of water. The impression he makes on Clara is unaccountably strong, and she weeps piteously when she hears him speak. Later in the afternoon she draws his portrait and spends most of the night awake staring at it. She herself admits that her reaction to Carwin is most unusual: "The manner in which I was affected on this occasion was, to my own apprehension, a subject of astonishment" (72). Yet if Clara is astonished, the reader needn't be, for the reaction of the young girl is natural enough in that it is completely physical. Where she is romantically attached to Pleyel, her reaction to Carwin is quite different, as is made clear by her long physical description of him. (Pleyel, we should remember, is never described in physical detail by Clara.) Clara's description of Carwin is highly ambivalent, portraying accurately her simultaneous attraction and repulsion. Carwin is a large man who radiates strength, and despite his pallid cheeks, his large, irregular teeth, and his discolored skin, Clara finds that there was "something in the rest of his features which it would be vain to
describe, but which served to betoken a mind of the highest order" (73). And, it is Carwin's physical presence which causes Clara to blush when the man comes upon her "accidentally" when he is returning the borrowed cup. The meeting causes in Clara a "confused sense of impropriety" (72), and the phrase itself suggests that her response is a physical one. In short, Clara is, at least subconsciously, confronted with her own sexuality, and as she stares at Carwin's portrait that night, her state of mind is mirrored in the violent storm outside her bedroom window. She spends the entire next day looking alternately at the storm and the portrait, though she does not understand why she does so. She does admit, however, that "you will perhaps deem this conduct somewhat singular" (74).

While the awakening of the young woman's sexuality is perhaps not as "singular" as Clara thinks, what follows as night falls is morbidly "singular." As she stares past the portrait of Carwin out her bedroom window into the darkness, Clara finds that her thoughts turn melancholy. She begins by questioning the meaning of the storm which has just ceased:

Why was my mind absorbed in thought ominous and dreary? Why did my bosom heave with sighs and my eyes overflow with tears? Was the tempest that had just passed a signal of the ruin which impended over me? (74)

Of course, the "tempest" which Clara refers to has a double meaning. She asks in the literal sense whether the violent outer storm might be an evil omen, but the reader must realize, even if Clara does not, that the same question applies to her inner storm occasioned by the physical
presence of Carwin. The question of whether Clara's inner struggle, her battle with her own sexuality, predicts dire consequences takes on added force when in her musing state she foreshadows the tragedy which is to happen months later:

My soul fondly dwelt upon the images of my brother and his children; yet they only increased the mournfulness of my contemplations. The smiles of the charming babes were as bland as formerly. The same dignity sat on the brow of their father, and yet I thought of them with anguish. Something whispered that the happiness we at present enjoyed was set upon mutable foundations. Death must happen to all. (74)

There might not be anything all that sinister in Clara's thoughts if it were not for the fact that they turn to violent death, not merely death in the abstract. When her thoughts become "insupportable," she tries to dispell them with the songs and poetry of her paternal grandfather (who is briefly mentioned in the first chapter of the novel). The ballad she chooses contains "scenes of violence and carnage which were here wildly but forcibly portrayed" (75). It is in this state of mind ("thronged by vivid but confused images") that Clara finally falls asleep. She tells us that she is awakened at midnight by the sound of the clock--the same one, she reminds us, that called her father to the temple that tragic night--and she begins to ponder her father's bizarre death. These reflections are interrupted by voices in her private closet, which Clara informs us is always locked. After listening to a rather lengthy dialogue in which the two voices plan her murder, Clara finally jumps out of bed, rushes outside (though "scantily robed") to her brother's house. She admits that she can "hardly recollect the
process of turning the keys and withdrawing the bolts" (78). She tells us that she faints upon her brother's doorstep and is found there by Theodore and Pleyel, who have been awakened by a shrieking voice. Despite her furious departure she has managed not to awaken Judith, the maid, whom they find fast asleep upon their return.

Given Clara's state of mind when she went to sleep, the opinion of Pleyel and Theodore that the whole episode was a dream is plausible. The inability of the dreamer to run away despite danger, the lunatic discussion of the two voices which attempt to resolve the method of her execution, and the fact that the whole thing begins at midnight (the time of her father's death) by the stroke of the ill-omened clock, all suggest that Clara is dreaming. So does the fact that she flees through a series of locked doors without remembering unlocking them. It is only Carwin's confession later in the novel which lends some validity to the bizarre episode, but when the reader remembers that his confession comes to us via Clara and that his confession is contradictory, incoherent, and improbable in its own right, that reader has legitimate cause to doubt the truth of the reported events. Furthermore, the reader cannot be blamed for noticing a pattern emerging. The only tangible result of this episode is that Pleyel agrees to come and live with Clara; he resides in the vacant chamber across from her own. Earlier, another voice has prevented Pleyel from leaving Europe by informing him (falsely) of the death of his fiancee. From Clara's point of view the voices are indeed "propitious."
It is some weeks later when Clara again hears a voice, and this time there is even more justification for doubting her version of the event, for in this instance her own language reveals that she has temporarily lost touch with reality. Clara reports that she has taken a walk during the late afternoon and found herself at one of her favorite retreats, the small summerhouse in the recess of the river bank. She falls asleep on a bench while listening to the "lulling sounds of the waterfall" in a state of mental and physical "utmost supineness" (82). Perhaps it is Clara's "hereditary dread of water" (101) which causes her sleep to be "molested . . . with dreams of no cheerful hue" (82). The vivid dream that Clara recounts has been much discussed by critics;\(^{13}\) however, it is less important to interpret the dream in which Clara's brother beckons her toward an abyss, than it is to establish the boundaries of that dream—-that is, to determine whether what follows is really part of that same dream. Clara tells us that she is awakened from her dream by a voice which exclaims, "Hold!" She informs us that both the voice and the arm which pulls her back from the brink of the abyss are part of the dream itself. However, once she is "awake," she hears a voice identical to the one which just finished speaking in her dream; this voice warns her to "avoid this spot" because "the snares of death encompass it" (83).

Although Clara informs us that she was dreaming when her brother beckoned her toward the pit, but was awake when the voice spoke to her through the lattice, warning her away from the summerhouse, her testimony should be doubted. Even Carwin's confession later in the novel does not make her testimony plausible, for he himself must admit that "the coincidence of your dream in the summerhouse with my exclamation was truly wonderful" (225). Furthermore, Clara's own words suggest that the voice which warns her to stay away from the summerhouse in the river recess is part of the same dream in which her brother beckons her toward the abyss, for after the voice "awakens" her, she confesses that "images so terrific and forcible disabled me for a time from distinguishing between sleep and wakefulness, and withheld from me the knowledge of my actual condition" (82). Though she wishes to return to her house, her "faculties were still too confused" (82) to find the path. Yet despite this confusion of the senses, when she hears the voice in the lattice warning her away from the river, she insists that this voice, which is identical to the one in her dream, is real. Her certainty upon this crucial point is undercut, however, after she is rescued by Pleyel and reluctantly admits: "I was almost dubious whether the pit into which my brother had endeavored to entice me, and the voice that talked through the lattice, were not part of the same dream" (84). She also realizes that her readers will be "dubious":

You will believe that calamity has subverted my reason, and that I am amusing you with the chimeras of my brain instead of the facts that have really happened. I shall not be surprised or offended if these be your suspicions. (85)
However, by acknowledging that her account is preposterous she does not make it less so.

There are several additional reasons to believe that the voice that comes from behind the lattice is part of the same dream as the abyss. First, the episode contains many of the same dream marks as the earlier episode in which Clara heard voices in her closet; again the inability to flee from danger, the dark confusion of the senses, the less than coherent dialogue of the warning voice. After telling Clara to avoid the spot, the voice admonishes her to "Remember your father, and be faithful" (83). Despite Carwin's later confession, we cannot believe it possible for him to have said this to Clara, because at this point in time he had no knowledge of her father's history. He has been by his own admission (that is, Clara's report of his admission) eavesdropping upon the Wieland family's conversations in the temple-summerhouse, but since there is no reason to suggest that the Wielands have been casually discussing the matter of the elder Wieland's death, and since even according to Carwin's confession he had not yet at this time begun perusing Clara's diary or examining the contents of her closet, then we must conclude that the voice behind the lattice cannot have been his.

If all of this were not enough, the evidence presented by Pleyel also discourages our trust in Clara's narrative. When Pleyel comes searching for her by the river bank, he repeatedly calls out her name, yet for some time she does not respond, claiming that "such was the tumult of my thoughts that I had not power to answer him till he had
frequently repeated his summons" (84). A few evenings later, according to Pleyel, he has the occasion to view a letter that Clara is writing (presumably to Carwin) requesting another interview at midnight. This, in connection with other evidence he is soon to receive, causes Pleyel to conclude that Clara is having an illicit affair with Carwin. Indeed, Clara never does explain the letter which Pleyel catches a glimpse of, except to say that it was an entry in her diary and the words he saw were taken out of context. However, she herself never establishes the context whereby we are to understand her desire for another interview, nor does she inform us of her reported "trepidation and blushes" when Pleyel accidentally witnesses part of what she has written. It appears that she would have passed over the incident entirely had it not been for Pleyel's accusations. He reports that she questions him eagerly to find out how much of the letter he has read. Later, when he mentions his rescue of Clara to Carwin, the latter also becomes visibly uneasy for no apparent reason.

If we consider the possibility that both the abyss into which Clara is beckoned and the subsequent voice behind the lattice are part of the same dream, then that dream makes a good deal more sense than critics have previously been able to make of it. For if the dream is a dual one in which two dangers are subconsciously presented to the dreamer, then those two dangers are not difficult to identify. Despite the attempts of some critics to see the dream in which Theodore beckons Clara toward the pit as representing a threat of incest, the rest of the novel does little to encourage such a reading. After all, Theodore does
nothing to suggest that he might be a threat to Clara (although this is not the same as to say that she might not irrationally consider him to be one). As one critic has pointed out, however, the pit into which Clara nearly falls in her dream is more suggestive of violence than sex. Her brother represents for her the potential for violence she has inherited from their parents, and for that reason she later suspects that her brother is concealed in her closet and intends doing her harm. Yet the danger represented by the voice in the lattice is even clearer, for that one warns her away from the summerhouse in the recess of the river bank, the scene of her alleged lover's meeting with Carwin. Here the threat is expressly sexual, and Clara's conscious dread of becoming a "polluted" woman is responsible for the subconscious warning in the form of the disembodied voice. To Clara's conscious mind death is preferable to such "pollution," and the two are so closely linked that when she first sees the light from Pleyel's lamp, she recalls the flash of light which was a prelude to her father's death.

Seen in these terms, Wieland is a struggle between Clara's conscious and subconscious desires. The two are so disparate and so violently opposed that she becomes for all purposes a schizophrenic, flitting in and out of reality. She reports as fact "dreams" or rather delusions which cover up the truth that her conscious mind cannot accept. Her dreams, like the one of the warning voice in the river recess, are true in the mind of the pure Clara who narrates her tale, and only

\[14\text{Manly, p. 319.}\]
gradually, as evidence relentlessly accumulates to incriminate her, does the reader realize that another Clara exists—though she is well hidden. Just as there are two summerhouses, one open, close to heaven on an austere cliff, the other secret, dark, in the hidden recess of the river bank, so are there two Claras, each as different as the summerhouses they alternately inhabit. The Clara of the first sunny, open summerhouse narrates her tale as truthfully as she can, but unaware as she is of what is transpiring beneath the cliff in the hidden recess, she can only lead herself and the reader astray.

On the night that Clara reports finding Carwin in her closet we discover that she has once again worked herself into a mental state bordering on frenzy, just as she previously had done on the night when she first heard the voices in her closet. And again there is evidence that she loses touch with reality. Pleyel and the Wielands have agreed to meet during the afternoon for a dramatic recitation of a new German romance characterized by its "adventurous and lawless fancy." Like her Grandfather's romance, which Clara had been reading on the evening when she first heard the voices, this romance contains both passion and violence "portrayed in wild numbers and with terrific energy" (97). When Pleyel does not arrive at the time designated for the rehearsal, the Wielands become anxious for his safety, and when his absence is protracted, Clara bursts into tears, informing the reader that her heart was "ready to burst with indignation and grief" (100). She vacillates between anger and disappointment and informs us that she had intended that evening to reveal to him her love. Thus, when Pleyel does not
arrive, she illogically feels jilted, exclaiming: "Blind and infatuated man! . . . Thou sportest with happiness. The good that is offered thee thou hast the insolence and folly to refuse" (100). That night, as Clara continues to muse about Pleyel's failure to keep his appointment, she conjures up vivid images of his anticipated violent death by drowning, picturing his "livid corpse which the tide may cast, many days hence, upon the shore" (102).

Although Clara perceives that she is allowing herself to be thus "tormented by phantasms of my own creation" (102), she nevertheless continues to indulge her imagination, which has begun to torment her since allowing the "inroad of a fatal passion." Although Clara does not specify what passion she refers to, the reader is left to ponder whether she means her romantic passion for Pleyel or her sexual passion for Carwin. Regardless of which she refers to, one thing is clear; she makes no attempt to control her vivid imagination, for as she puts it, her new passion may "dig for me an untimely grave" (102). After imagining Pleyel's death, her thoughts then progress "by no violent transition" to the bizarre death of her father whom she "cherished with the utmost veneration" (102). She informs us that she has saved "every relic concerned with his fate" and that these are locked in her closet. It is ostensibly to read her father's memoirs that Clara decides to enter her closet, and the reader should note that she becomes frightened of what she may find within before she has any reason to suspect that someone may be concealed there. Given her state of mind, we should not be surprised that she finds inside the closet the horror she anticipates.
What happens when Clara tries to open her closet door is clearly imaginary. Once again, all the dream marks are present. Though terribly frightened, Clara cannot run away, and she tells us that her refusal to do so was "dictated by frenzy." In fact, instead of running away when she finds that someone is within the closet preventing entry, she irrationally begins to bang on the door and cry out; she explains, "Surely I was bereft of understanding" (107). That she is indeed "bereft of understanding" is still more clear when Carwin finally emerges from the closet and begins an insane monologue in which he informs Clara that her guardian spirit is too strong to allow him to fulfill his intended schemes of violence upon her. Even Carwin's alleged confession later in the novel makes no sense in this regard, for we are asked to believe that while Carwin has the necessary physical strength to prevent Clara's entry into the closet, he instead decides to reveal himself and confess to contemplated rape and murder in order to avoid having to admit to trespassing! Furthermore, Clara would have us believe that he shares her compulsion to read her lunatic father's memoirs late at night. Such an explanation of his motives only serves to make Clara's account more ludicrous.

This vivid and complete delusion, reported to us by Clara as fact, can only be correctly interpreted when we understand the symbolic significance to Clara of her closet. As the receptacle of Clara's diary, which contains by her own admission the secrets of her heart, and as the receptacle of her past, as represented by her father's memoirs and her grandfather's poetry, the secret, locked closet represents
Clara's very identity—her inner self. The preternatural voice which warns her not to open the door and examine what is within is in reality warning her against probing too deeply into that secret inner being. The suggestion is that there is something within Clara that might, if she were to be made consciously aware of it, be too much for her to face. This highly significant symbol stands for the human mechanism by which a part of the mind screens from the self those things which it cannot manage to live with.

Yet Clara's closet suggests further symbolic meanings as well. That it is also a sexual symbol is difficult to deny, and while Freudian critics will be interested in Clara's irrational fear that her brother is in this symbolic closet, the far more interesting feature of the episode, at least as I see it, is that Clara's entire delusion is a subconscious and symbolic confession of a truth which her conscious mind, because of its inhibitions, cannot grapple with. When she tells us that Carwin was in her closet, she is, in a sense, telling us the truth, for she is at the moment not in her bedroom as she reports, but rather with Carwin in the summerhouse recess where the two are overheard by Pleyel. The voice in her dream which tells her to "Hold!" and does not allow her to look inside her closet (that is, to understand herself) spares her the self-perception that would doubtless destroy her. Yet the fable related to us by the conscious mind of the pure Clara is on this level a thinly veiled allegory which reveals the truth about the other Clara that the pure one is unacquainted with. Brown provides us with a subtle clue which makes such a reading unavoidable by telling
us that just before opening her closet door, Clara hears through her open window in the dead stillness of the night "the murmur of the waterfall" which cascades beside the river summerhouse where the preternatural voice has warned her that destruction awaits. Thus Clara's fear of water, which she associates with death, and her fear of opening the door of her closet, which represents at once her own secret identity, as well as her cherished virginity, merge into a complex, artistic expression of the truth, although the teller of the tale is, by authorial design, unaware of it.

What happens after Carwin allegedly leaves Clara's bedroom also supports the reading I have argued. Rather than immediately seeking safety and counsel in her brother's house, as indeed we might expect Clara to do if her reported encounter with Carwin were real, Clara instead remains in her own house ruminating over what has occurred and not even bothering to lock the front door. She tells us that her thoughts return to Pleyel and again she imagines him dead:

I dwelt, with an obstinacy for which I cannot account, on the idea of his death. I painted to myself his struggles with the billows and his last appearance. I imagined myself a midnight wanderer on the shore, and to have stumbled on his corpse, which the tide had cast up. (120)

Of course, this vision of Pleyel's death presents some ironic truth. Subconsciously aware of her "pollution" through her connection with Carwin, Clara realizes that Pleyel is, in a sense, dead to her. Ironically, he, not she, is the actual midnight wanderer of the vision, and it is he who finds Clara in the summerhouse with Carwin and overhears their dialogue.
Pleyel's accusations concerning Clara's conduct confirm the arguments I have been presenting above. Critics have often regarded his accusations as the natural result of Pleyel's dependence upon his senses. He makes the mistake, they argue, of assuming that since the voice he hears sounds like Clara's, that the speaker must then actually be Clara. However, such a reading does not do Pleyel justice, for it is not merely the sound of the voice that he hears which convinces him that Clara is corrupt, but rather the things which the voice says, things that only Clara could know. The female voice which Pleyel overhears in the river recess discusses Clara's "former deeds of dishonor" and "the circumstances of the first interview that took place," as well as the unfortunate interruption by Pleyel and the speaker's inability to invent on the spur of the moment a suitable excuse for being in the summerhouse at night, thereby making Pleyel call out her name repeatedly. If all of this evidence were not damaging enough, the voice "dwelt upon incidents of which only you [Clara] could be conscious, incidents that occurred on occasions on which none besides your family were witnesses" (154). Furthermore, according to Pleyel, the very idiosyncratic expressions of the speaker's language were Clara's own. Far from jumping to conclusions based solely upon sense perceptions, as critics have alleged, Pleyel, as he himself puts it, "yielded not but to evidence which took away the power to withhold my faith" (154). Clara does the best she can to explain away

15 See especially Butler, p. 135 and Ringe, pp. 32-33.
the strong proofs urged against her by Pleyel, but even the explanation we get in Carwin's alleged confession (which is, we remember, relayed through Clara) does not truly answer Pleyel's accusations. We are given to believe that the reason Carwin has been able to counterfeit accurately such a detailed conversation is that he has been for months eavesdropping upon the Wieland family. On occasions when Clara might be expected to return home any moment, Carwin has nonetheless stolen into her bedroom, opened her locked closet door and read her diary. (Though he is supposed to be having an illicit relationship with Clara's maid, Clara would have us believe that Carwin's real desire is to read her diary, and that having finally been caught in this act, he tried to convince her that his intention was rape, not curiosity.) Clara herself sums up the situation when she admits that "the events of that night are marvellous. Few to whom they should be related would scruple to discredit them" (130).

Pleyel presents further evidence which also suggests the falsity of Clara's narrative. According to Pleyel, after hearing her in the river recess summerhouse, he returns to Clara's house (where he is then residing) and, finding the front door open, he goes upstairs to his room. Shortly afterward he hears Clara enter, lock the front door, and climb the stairs to her own room. Clara's account of these same events is preposterous, but not more so than is necessary to explain the testimony of Pleyel, who has no reason to lie. According to Clara, she is already in her locked room, Carwin having left, when she hears footsteps upon the stairs. She never even considers the possibility
that these might belong to Pleyel, who is, after all, living there (though it occurs to the reader), nor does that possibility occur to her even when she reports the footsteps entering his room. Instead, she assumes that the footsteps must belong to Carwin, who, for some strange reason, has changed his mind and returned to menace her once more. But the most ludicrous part of Clara's story is her reported resolution to venture downstairs to lock the front door. According to Clara, she has heard the footsteps enter Pleyel's room; after a short time she decides that whoever it was that entered Pleyel's room must have mysteriously left again (though she has not heard him do so). Despite having convinced herself that the intruder has left the premises, she nevertheless would have us believe that she tip-toed downstairs to lock the front door. That done, she informs us that she returns upstairs without taking any precautions about noise. In this fashion Clara explains, albeit lamely, how it is that Pleyel, in the very next room has heard only the ascending steps and not the descending ones. But her tale makes no sense. If she believes the intruder to have left the house, why sneak quietly downstairs? If she believes he still might linger on the premises, then why not use stealth upon her return? Compared to Pleyel's tale, which is plausible, logical, and consistent in every detail, Clara's version of this event is totally unconvincing, yet when Clara approaches her brother with this feeble tale, she invites him to examine the circumstances, which she admits are of an "ambiguous nature," and to compare her story with Pleyel's. The criteria she wishes her brother to employ in judging the truth of the two tales is
simple enough: "If there be anything in his story inconsistent with mine, his story is false" (127).

Despite the fact that Clara boldly asserts the truth of her own report, her language does little to strengthen her case. Upon hearing the loud voice warning her not to open her closet door, Clara says that she notices a resemblance between it and the voice she heard exclaiming "Hold!" in her dream in the summerhouse. So certain is she at this point that the previous voice was part of a dream that she claims "there are means by which we are able to distinguish a substance from a shadow, a reality from the phantom of a dream" (105). However, later in the novel Clara tells us that that voice in the summerhouse dream was real, that Carwin shouted "Hold!" and that his very exclamation by a strange coincidence happened to coincide with Clara's dream, though why Carwin would shout "Hold!" at a sleeping woman we are left to ponder.

Ultimately then, we are forced to assume that Clara is not as capable of distinguishing substance from shadow as she claims to be, and as the novel progresses, other instances arise which illustrate her inability to do so. For instance, on the day when Clara goes to Philadelphia to attempt a reconciliation with Pleyel, she becomes utterly confused by what she reports as his ambivalent treatment of her. When they first meet, Pleyel repeats his harsh accusation, informing her that "God may repent of his workmanship" and "send his vengeance" to destroy her; we are told that he then leaves the room, whereupon
Clara shrieks and faints. Awakening shortly thereafter, Clara finds a changed Pleyel:

> All the fury and scorn which the countenance of Pleyel . . . lately expressed had now disappeared, and was succeeded by the most tender anxiety . . . "My senses must have been the victim of some inexplicable and momentary frenzy. Forgive me, I beseech you; forgive my reproaches. I would purchase conviction of your purity at a price of my existence here and hereafter." (138)

Clara cannot understand Pleyel's rapid change of heart (nor can the reader), but she is even more baffled when a few moments later he returns transformed yet again: "The tenderness which he had lately betrayed had now disappeared, and he once more relapsed into chilling solemnity" (139). The only suitable explanation of Pleyel's reported vacillation is to see that his momentary softening is totally in the imagination of the narrator and, in fact, is another of her "dreams." Though she has Pleyel tell us that he has been a temporary victim of a frenzy disrupting his senses, the reader must see that Clara is the one who suffers such a lapse. She desperately wants and needs to hear Pleyel say that he believes her to be pure, and so in her imagination, he does.

Clara's state of mind later that day when she returns to Mettingen distorts both her perception and her account of what she finds when she gets there. Although it is getting late when she leaves Pleyel's home, Clara stops at Mrs. Baynton's house in the city where she finds a letter from Carwin waiting for her. This circumstance alone is incriminating enough, for it suggests that she has informed Carwin of
her intention of going to Philadelphia and stopping at Mrs. Baynton's; neither of which circumstances could Carwin reasonably be expected to anticipate. His letter requests another interview, this time at eleven o'clock. Given the story Clara has told us, she has great difficulty explaining just why she intends to comply with his request without even informing her brother. The best she can do is say that she trusts her heavenly protector (the voice) to defend her, and that she hopes Carwin may be found willing to help in "unraveling the maze in which Pleyel is bewitched" (160).  

After she arrives back home at Mettingen, the nature of the reported events of the evening indicate that Clara is once again flitting in and out of reality. According to her story, Clara arrives at her brother's house shortly before eleven o'clock and is surprised to find Wieland and Catherine absent. Though the light is dim, she goes from room to room looking for them, but she can find no sign of either the parents or the children. Clara tells that she feels "some vague solicitude as to the condition of the family" (62) and seeks out Louisa Conway, who is asleep in her chamber. Louisa informs Clara that Wieland and Catherine have been waiting for her return. Clara then goes to her own house where she finds the body of Catherine, who has been murdered in her bed. Clara tells us that she sits by the bed "for more  

16In fact, it seems that later on Carwin does tell Pleyel that Clara is innocent and thereby reconciles them. However, the reader must judge for himself whether what Carwin tells Pleyel is the truth. If Carwin is Clara's lover, as I maintain, would he not lie for her (and himself) about this matter?
than an hour" with Catherine's corpse without reporting the murder. Her brother then arrives and is making threatening overtures toward Clara when Mr. Hallet and the others appear on the scene and effect her rescue.

This sparse outline of events is unlikely enough, even bereft as it is of most of its startlingly contradictory details. Somehow it appears that the paths of Clara and her now maniac brother have crossed without either's knowledge. He has murdered his wife in Clara's bedroom, presumably while Clara is conversing with Louisa Conway. When Clara goes to her own house to meet Carwin, she would have us believe that her brother returns to his house and kills the rest of his family while she sits idly with the corpse of his wife, this despite the fact that both Wieland and Clara testify that each stood alone on the staircase at exactly eleven, where each witnesses a strange face and hears a loud voice. After murdering his children, Wieland is then supposed to have murdered Louisa Conway so savagely that "not a lineament of her face remained" (176). This detail, perhaps more than any other, should suggest to the reader that there is more to the truth than Clara is telling, for when we read Wieland's own statement of the case, we find no indication that he has been commissioned to kill Louisa; nor does he make any mention of having done so in the portion of his deposition that we are allowed by Clara to read. This is surely a strange circumstance in view of the fact that Louisa's execution is by far the most brutal; her face is so battered that every feature is eradicated. Such brutality seems foreign to Theodore's inmost nature and violates the
laws of human nature which Brown alludes to in the advertisement. Our perplexity is augmented when we examine Wieland's murder of Catherine, which we read about in his deposition. Though he strangles her, Wieland relents more than once, loosening his grasp. He informs us that he regrets making her suffer, for his duty is to take her life, not torture her. After the murder, Wieland places her body gently on the bed and suffers great remorse.

If the details of Louisa's unusually brutal murder seem unaccountable, the dreamlike quality of Clara's narration and her admitted "confusion of faculties" must reinforce our doubts that we have been told the whole truth. First of all, on the way up the stairs to her own room before discovering Catherine's corpse, Clara has another "vision" and hears another voice. Carwin's later confession, which attempts to explain this voice and face, is hardly satisfactory. When Clara turns around on the staircase, she sees at the bottom of the stairs a face which seems to be in the act of screaming. The sound, however, comes to her from another direction. All of this is later explained by Carwin's admitted ventriloquism, but other details of the encounter may be explained in no way except in terms of Clara's imagination. For one thing, the face she sees is clearly not human:

The eyes emitted sparks, which, no doubt, if I had been unattended by a light, would have illuminated like the corruscations of a meteor. (167)

This "meteoric refulgence" is never explained in Carwin's confession for the simple reason that it cannot be; it is pure fantasy, pure dream. Clara admits at this point that "my narrative may be invaded by
inaccuracy and confusion" (166), and that "this visage was, perhaps, portrayed by my fancy" (167), but she does not understand the lunacy of suggesting, as she does, that whatever caused the "refulgence" of the face at the bottom of the stairs might be of the same "nature of that which accompanied my father's death" (168). Such an intuitive connection taken seriously by Clara suggests that she has indeed lost touch with reality. Her plight is emphasized when, an hour later, her real rescuers arrive, but appear to her imaginary:

For a time I questioned whether these were not shapes and faces like that I had seen at the bottom of the stairs,—creatures of my fancy or airy existence. (173)

At this point in the narrative then, Clara has become so confused that not only do the creatures of her imagination seem real, but the beings of the real world seem to her unsubstantial.

Concerning this episode, then, it may be argued that both the events themselves and the way they are reported contribute to the suspicions of the careful reader of Brown's Wieland that there is more to the truth than the narrator clearly understood and told. For instance, why does Wieland, who has not heard a voice for months (not since the voice he and Pleyel heard in the summerhouse), suddenly hear one on the night of the murder? Why does the voice he hears suggest Clara's bedroom as the place for Catherine's execution? Why, when, and by whom is Louisa Conway murdered? And finally, why does Clara go completely mad after these events?
The question of why Theodore Wieland begins hearing voices on the night in question has been a thorny problem for critics. It is frequently asserted that Carwin's previous vocal imitations have acted as a catalyst, setting the potentially insane Wieland in motion, but the obvious problem with such a theory is that Wieland, according to Clara, has heard no voices for months, and even more significantly has shown no signs of instability during that interregnum or on the very day of the murder. According to Wieland's deposition, the voice begins suddenly and without warning. Under these circumstances there can be only one rational explanation for why Theodore Wieland suddenly hears a voice after so long a time, and that is that the voice urging him to murder his family is real—that it is deliberately produced by someone who wants the violence to occur, someone who has a stronger motive than the intellectual curiosity ascribed to Carwin, someone acting through cold malevolence, someone who will find in that violence a catharsis. Only one person has such a motive, though it must be seen as operating subconsciously. Clara Wieland's voice is the one that urges her brother to murder, just as it has always been her voice that has spoken to him.

When we look back on the novel, we find a cumulation of suggestions that Clara, not Carwin, is responsible for the early voices. It is Clara, not Carwin, who knows Catherine and her idiosyncratic vocal mannerisms well enough to fool even her husband. Furthermore, Carwin's

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17 In "The Voices of Carwin and Other Mysteries in Charles Brockden Brown's Wieland," Early American Literature, 10 (1975), 307-09, Robert Hobson argues that Carwin actually produces the voice which urges Wieland to murder his family.
alleged confession is not easily reconciled with earlier testimony on several important points. For instance, Clara tells us that when Carwin first appears in the novel by coming to the door and requesting a drink, she has a strong reaction to him and notes many details of his appearance. Significantly, the details she reports all suggest that Carwin is at that very moment arriving in Mettingen for the first time. His hat and coat are "tarnished by the weather," his shoes "deeply discolored by dust" (70). These physical details do little to suggest the veracity of Carwin's later confession, for if he has been in Mettingen for some weeks and has been sleeping with Clara's maid, then that very proposition raises questions: (1) How do we explain his appearance of having just arrived? and (2) Why would an escaped convict who has already found a perfect asylum (with Clara's maid) risk recognition by appearing at Clara's door to ask for a drink of water? If Carwin has been skulking around Mettingen for weeks, as his alleged confession reports, then he must know how close he is to the river, thus making the request for water unnecessary. However, if Carwin is just arriving on the scene and has no asylum and needs a drink of water, then both his appearance and his actions make sense (though we must admit that he could not have been responsible for the early voices which have already taken place). However, while Carwin's arrival does not coincide with Wieland's hearing of the early voices, it does correspond to the first voice Clara hears, though it is his mere presence which is responsible for the imaginary voices in her closet. Carwin is nothing more than a catalyst for Clara's encounters with the
warning voice. His appearance on the scene and the sexual threat he represents change the entire course of events, for his seduction of Clara and the subsequent discovery of that seduction is the pivotal fact concealed in Clara's narrative.

As soon as we see how improbable it is that Carwin could have been responsible for the first three voices, a pattern emerges. For as Clara herself points out, the voices always seem to operate on her behalf. When Pleyel is thinking of leaving for Europe and taking Wieland with him, the mysterious voice informs him his Teresa is dead, thereby keeping Clara's romantic love from departing. Later, when another shrieking voice awakens the Wieland family and Clara is found in a swoon on the porch, Pleyel is thereby induced to stay in Clara's spare bedroom. The fact that Clara is, by her own testimony, in the company of Catherine when the first two voices are heard, should not affect this hypothesis, for I have already illustrated Clara's propensity for reporting herself (and indeed believing herself) to be in one place, when in reality she is someplace else.

Therefore, when a voice again operates upon Theodore and convinces him to murder his family, we must see that as part of a pattern with regard to Clara, not her brother. The murdered people symbolize for Clara the goodness and chastity she has lost. Only by seeing this as the real motive for the murders can we understand why Louisa Conway too is murdered, for she is not one of Wieland's family, and it makes little sense for her to be murdered by him as if she were. She must die simply because she is a chaste, innocent, young woman; her death is
dictated by her relationship to Clara, not Theodore. Furthermore, the utter savagery of her murder, and the fact that the deed is never mentioned in the portion of Theodore's deposition that we are allowed to read, suggests that Clara is the guilty party. We remember it is she who enters Louisa's room before going to her own house to meet Carwin. Again, Louisa's is not a murder committed by a man who believes himself acting under divine injunction, for such a man would not enjoy the violence for its own sake. Clara, however, does have a motive for brutally eradicating Louisa's "lineaments," for Louisa represents Clara's lost purity. Therefore, she is not simply killed, but her identity erased, the innocence and beauty of her face completely annihilated. Moreover, such a reading makes clear why Catherine, who represents a different kind of chastity, that which derives from matrimonial fidelity, must be murdered in Clara's bed rather than her own: The voice that compels Wieland directs him to commit the crime in his sister's house because Clara, as stage manager, is symbolically destroying and punishing herself through Catherine, the actual victim, murdered in Clara's bed.\footnote{Brown's source for the murders was an account of a multiple murder perpetrated by one James Yates. The same account was published in \textit{The New York Weekly Magazine} (July, 1796) and \textit{The Philadelphia Minerva} (August, 1796). Though there can be no doubt that this account served as Brown's source, it is interesting to note that Brown changed his source significantly. He adds the brutal murder of Louisa Conway, who is not a member of the Wieland family; in his source Yates murders only his family. Furthermore, where James Yates chases and murders his wife in the field outside their farm, Brown has Theodore murder Catherine in Clara's bedroom. Each of these changes supports the reading I have given above.} It is for this reason that Clara so
unreasonably blames Carwin for everything that happens in the novel, because to her mind her seduction is the ultimate cause of the later murders. Even when her rescuers appear on the scene, Clara invites them to look heavenward and see Carwin's sparkling visage and mocking contempt. She actually believes his face is there, following her. Clara goes mad at this point not because she has witnessed a brutal crime, but rather because she has occasioned it.

The sanity to which Clara is restored by her rationalistic uncle is less than complete. After her bout with raving deleriums, she is subject to fits of imagination, and she still believes these fantasies to be real. She remains suicidal but does not understand the irony of her own words when she says, "My life is marked for a prey to inhuman violence" (208). She continues to regard Carwin (though now we understand why) as the cause of the entire tragedy, and she admits that she finds relief in having an "object ... on which we may pour out our indignation and our vengeance" (208). She tells us that she believes Carwin to be a kind of preternatural demon and that "evil spirits existed, and that their energy was frequently exerted in the system of the world" (209). Despite Clara's continued instability, however, she does at this point come as close to conscious self-perception as she does anywhere in the novel. In contemplating her brother's tragedy she says:

Now I was stupified with tenfold wonder in contemplating myself. Was I not likewise transformed from rational and human into a creature of nameless and fearful attributes? Was I not transported to the brink of the same abyss? Ere a new day should come, my hands might be imbrued with blood and my remaining life be consigned to a dungeon and chains. (199)
Indeed Clara has been transformed into a "creature of nameless and dreadful attributes," and, as I maintain, hers is the transformation referred to by Brown in the novel's subtitle.

Clara's final return to her own house, the scene of her final confrontation with her brother, is as dream-like a scene as the others already discussed. Her stated reason for her return is to destroy her diary, the one which she says Pleyel unfortunately caught a glimpse of and misinterpreted. Without informing her uncle of her design, Clara travels to the site of the recent tragedy unattended. As we have seen her do on previous occasions, she works herself into a highly emotional state, this time by stopping at the family graveyard "to ponder on the emblems and inscriptions . . . on the tombs of Catherine and her children" (211). She also walks past the recess in the river bank where, I allege, she has met with her lover, Carwin. By the time she actually arrives at her house, she has reached such an emotional pitch that "slight movements and casual sounds were transformed into beckoning shadows and calling shapes" (212). Though she quickly secures her diary, Clara inexplicably remains in the house until she collapses "incoherent and half-articulate," calling out Carwin's name.

Given these circumstances, we should hardly be surprised when Carwin does appear to Clara, though we must understand that he only appears in the young girl's imagination. Clara begs heaven to produce him before her, and in the dim light produced by a ray of light streaming through the keyhole of her closet door Carwin noiselessly appears.

As I have suggested previously, Clara's closet symbolizes her own
identity, and it is appropriate that out of the misty half-light of that identity Carwin should appear to her and confess to all that she herself is guilty of. Although Carwin is little more than Clara's scapegoat in Wieland, the picture that we get of him has been enshrouded in the "chimeras" of the narrator's brain. He is guilty of none of the things he allegedly confesses to in this scene; however, he has succeeded in doing the one thing that his "confession" denies: he has seduced Clara.\(^{19}\)

There are other evidences that Carwin does not actually return to Clara's house to confess. First, it is extremely unlikely that he

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\(^{19}\)In this regard it is interesting to examine Brown's fragment, Carwin, the Biloquist, which was intended as a sequel to Wieland. It follows the career of Carwin as a young man before the events at Mettingen. Few readers of this fragment have noted the importance of Carwin's role as a seducer. Though he has unusual biloquial powers, we see that Carwin employs them repeatedly for the purpose of seduction. For instance, when Carwin goes to Spain, he informs us that he frequently uses his ventriloquism "to annihilate the scruples of a tender female," and he further admits that "if voluptuousness, never gratified at the expense of health, may incur censure, I am censurable." Wieland; or the Transformation, Together with Memoirs of Carwin the Bioloquist (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926), p. 309. Even more significant is the episode which is left incomplete at the end of the fragment. Here Carwin has been befriended by a man named Ludloe who belongs to a secret society which practices deceit while requiring total honesty between its members. Ludloe warns Carwin that in order to become a member the latter must confide every aspect of his past life, and that if the young man attempts to withhold anything, his death will be the result. Carwin, however, has decided not to inform Ludloe of his biloquial powers, but leads the reader to believe he has told Ludloe everything else about his own past. As it turns out, however, Carwin has concealed, not only from Ludloe, but from the reader as well, one important episode from his past, and when the fragment breaks off, Carwin has just been presented by Ludloe with evidence of the young man's seduction of a young lady in Toledo. In addition to this, Carwin informs us that it is Ludloe's plan to marry him off to a rich widow named Mrs. Bennington, presumably to gain control of her fortune. In the entire fragment then, Carwin's biloquial powers are secondary in importance to his role as a seducer. Brown portrays him as a young man on the make, not unlike the author's later Arthur Mervyn.
would do so, when we recall that he is an escaped convict and that there is now a warrant for his arrest. Why would he return to the scene of the crime at all, and how do we account for the fact that after all these months he appears on the scene at the very hour that Clara herself arrives? Even more convincing evidence is presented when Theodore Wieland appears on the scene and does not even seem to notice Carwin. According to Clara, she and Carwin hear footsteps on the stair, but the latter makes no move to escape, though for all he could know, were he truly present, the person approaching may be in pursuit of him:

His [Carwin's] confusion increased when the steps of one barefoot were heard upon the stairs. He threw anxious glances sometimes at the closet, sometimes at the window, and sometimes at the chamber door; yet he was detained by some inexplicable fascination. He stood as if rooted to the spot. (236)

Carwin's unreasonable behavior (his failure to flee from danger) is explicable only when we see that he is part of Clara's dream and cannot run away any more than she, in an earlier dream, could run away from the imaginary person concealed in her closet. The dream will not admit of escape. Therefore, although Carwin is a large, powerful man, in Clara's dream he becomes a whimpering little coward upon the arrival of the smaller, emaciated, unarmed Wieland. Furthermore, it seems that Carwin is only visible to Clara:

His [Carwin's] station was conspicuous, and he could not have escaped the roving glances of Wieland; yet the latter seemed totally unconscious of his presence. (236)

Although Clara repeatedly attempts to draw her brother's attention to "Carwin"; and while she tells us that Wieland finally does see him,
we have reason to doubt Clara's testimony on this point, for the questions purportedly addressed to Carwin by Wieland appear to be rhetorical in nature. "Man . . . what art thou? The charge has been made. Answer it" (238). Furthermore, the questions which follow could just as readily have been addressed to Clara herself, and not the phantom Carwin. For instance, Wieland asks, "The visage--the voice at the bottom of the stairs--to whom did they belong? To thee?" (238). When we remember that Clara, according to her own narrative, was supposedly herself ascending the stair at eleven o'clock on the night of the murder, and that she has testified that Wieland was not present there at eleven, we see that their version of events can in no way be reconciled. If he was on the stair at eleven (as he testifies), then she cannot have herself been present, unless, as I maintain, it is Clara who is concealed at the bottom of the staircase and taunts her brother to murder his wife. The question "to whom did they [the face and voice at the bottom of the stairs] belong?" is addressed to her. Furthermore, the reply to the question, which Clara ascribes to Carwin, is likewise her own:

"I meant nothing--I intended no ill, if I understand--if I do not mistake you--it is too true--I did appear--in the entry--did speak. The contrivance was mine, but--" (239) 

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This confession is confusing at best if we take it at face value as coming from Carwin. It contradicts what he has allegedly just finished telling Clara. He claims in his earlier confession to her that he had nothing to do with the voice which urged Wieland to murder his family, and he further comments that he did not even know about the tragedy. Yet when Wieland asks him (according to Clara's
When we realized that this confession, ascribed to Carwin by Clara, is in reality her own, then her brother's response is understandable; rather than becoming justifiably enraged, as we might expect if Wieland were really confronting Carwin, Wieland becomes subdued and allows the guilty party to withdraw with the admonition, "Go and learn better. I will meet thee, but it must be at the bar of thy Maker" (239). Wieland, at last undeceived, is a broken man, but he has no desire to murder his own sister, regardless of the enormity of her crimes. That Clara subconsciously wants to be punished is clear, for she says that when "Carwin" was allowed to retreat with this admonition, she is unwilling to let him go: "I thirsted for his blood, and was tormented with an insatiable appetite for his destruction" (240). She further hints at the chimerical quality of her projected scapegoat and at her own debased nature when she says, "Surely thou [Carwin] wast more than man, while I am sunk below the beasts" (240).

account) whether it was his face at the bottom of the stairs, and whether it was his voice that urged Wieland to commit murder, Carwin reportedly stammers that this is true. The resulting obvious contradiction has led Hobson to conclude that Carwin must have in actuality incited Wieland to murder his family. The problem is that Carwin can have no motive for such an act, since cold-blooded murder is a different matter from intellectual curiosity—the motive usually ascribed to Carwin in the case of the earlier voices.
The dream-like quality of what follows can only be explained when we realize that Clara cannot perceive reality accurately. The guilty part of Clara's schizoid personality has confessed the truth to her brother, but that confession is related to us as Carwin's. The still pure part of Clara, however, does not accept responsibility, except subconsciously, and therefore calls down curses upon her scapegoat, Carwin. Her brother, who now finally perceives the truth, attempts to convince Clara that she should not blame Carwin. Although the latter has supposedly left the room at this point, Wieland's words suggest that he has never been present:

"Clara! . . . by thyself. Equity used to be a theme for thy eloquence. Reduce its lessons to practice, and be just to that unfortunate man." (244)

Wieland does not understand that by calling down curses upon Carwin, part of Clara is begging for self-punishment, but there can be little doubt that this is true when we remember that the voice which earlier taunted Wieland to kill his family, also instructed him to kill Clara as well. As Wieland himself recalls, "Once it was the scope of my labours to destroy thee, but I was prompted to the deed by heaven" (243). He had been about to carry out that portion of Clara's mad design when she was rescued by Mr. Hallet and the others, for it had been her plan to destroy herself along with the rest of the family. Now facing her brother for the last time, she gives him yet another opportunity to kill her; however, having learned the truth, that he is not under divine injunction, Wieland proves refractory. He simply hands the knife to Clara and says that she has nothing to fear from him.
Her final perverse attempt at self-destruction foiled in this manner. Clara finds she cannot accept her brother's passivity; in order to reach the desired conclusion she must resurrect Carwin and his magic voice once more. According to Clara's narrative, shortly after Wieland tells her that she need not fear him, he nevertheless begins to undergo a swift and radical change similar to the ones Pleyel was reported to have gone through earlier. To Clara, it seems that "a new soul appeared to actuate his frame, and his eyes to beam with preternatural luster" (244). This new Wieland is once again unaccountably bent upon his sister's destruction, despite his recent avowal of nonviolence, and he informs her that "thy death must come" (245). But as Wieland approaches to kill Clara, she notices the phantom-like Carwin reappearing noiselessly in the room. Again he is unnoticed by Wieland, and although Wieland himself earlier was heard distinctly to approach in his bare feet, Carwin enters without a sound, emphasizing yet again the insubstantial, imaginary quality of his presence in Clara's mind. When Clara beseeches him to save her, Carwin pays no attention, but rather turns around and "glides" through the doorway. Wieland himself "seemed to notice not the entrance or exit of Carwin" (247), nor does he seem to grasp the fact that Clara is holding the knife in her hand. The dream marks are all too clear; we are once more at the mercy of Clara's imagination.

The final voice that Clara hears is also, even more clearly than the others she has heard, the result of her imagination. She informs us that Wieland is approaching, intent upon killing her; however, we
remember, that she, not he, is holding the knife. As she wields the knife against her brother, "a voice, louder than human organs could produce, shriller than any language can depict, burst from the ceiling and commanded him—to hold!" (248). Although Clara informs us that the command was issued to him, we must see that in reality the voice of her imagination is commanding her, for she is the one with the weapon, and she is the one about to strike down her own brother with it. The rest of that voice's inhibiting warning also applies to Clara, not her brother:

"Man of errors! cease to cherish thy delusion; not heaven or hell, but thy senses, have mislead thee to commit these acts. Shake off thy frenzy, and ascend into rational and human. Be lunatic no longer." (249)

These words do not apply to Weiland, who has become calm and rational and resigned much earlier in the scene, when the cause of the voices was explained to him. He has been true to his word in that, once undeceived, he never menaces Clara, whom he simply pities. The warning voice functions, as indeed it so often does throughout the novel, as Clara's conscience. Just as it earlier warned her to stay away from the recess in the river bank, now it warns her against the murder of her brother. This time the warning is louder—louder than human organs could produce—because the crime is more serious. As in the previous case, however, Clara does not heed the warning. She informs us that she unconsciously lets the knife drop from her hand, whereupon her brother picks it up and plunges it to the hilt into his own neck. But Brown provides us with a physical detail which belies the truth of that
assertion, having Clara tell us, "My hands were sprinkled with his blood as he fell" (250). Thus Clara's earlier prediction, that someday she would awaken with her own hands embrued with blood, comes to pass, and the young girl is seen to exhibit fully the Wieland legacy of insanity and violence.

Theodore Wieland, then, is murdered by his sister, and Carwin's presence from the beginning of the scene is purely imaginary. After the murder of Theodore, Clara's own language with regard to Carwin reinforces this truth yet again:

Carwin . . . had left the room; but he still lingered in the house. My voice summoned him to my aid; but I scarcely noticed his re-entrance, and now faintly remember his terrified looks . . . (251)

Later, when Clara tells us that Carwin does finally leave her alone in the house, she says: "When he left me, I was scarcely conscious of any variation in the scene" (251).

That Clara reaches some degree of self-awareness at this point seems probably in view of her words and actions. Too few readers have taken her seriously when she truthfully informs us:

I listen to my own pleas, and find them empty and false; yes, I acknowledge that my guilt surpasses that of all Mankind; I confess that the curses of the world and the frowns of a deity are inadequate to my demerits. Is there a thing in the world of infinite abhorrence? It is I. (241-42)

Having reached this conclusion, Clara attempts one last time to fulfill her insane design. Despite the pleadings of her uncle, she refuses with "ferociousness and frenzy" to leave her house, the scene
of all the tragedies. On the last page of her primary narrative, Clara hints at her intended suicide: "And now my repose is coming—my work is done" (252). Shortly thereafter she has to be rescued from her burning house. As it burns, Clara, inside, dreams of the dark abyss (again, the recurring symbol) which she stands at the brink of. Below are whirlpools and jagged rocks. She is witnessing the eruption of a volcano, which corresponds to both her physical and mental state as she sleeps in the burning house, when she is again rescued, having failed to do by her own hand what her brother earlier refused to do. From the cleansing fire of that interior volcano and the corresponding exterior one, Clara emerges purified, but totally self-deceived:

I was, in some degree, roused from the stupor which had seized my faculties. The monotonous and gloomy series of my thoughts was broken. (256)

Clara thus regains her sanity in so far as she puts the tragedy behind her, but she does not perceive the truth of her existence. Clearly, the truth would be too much for her to bear.

Admittedly, there are features of the novel which are not attributable to Clara Wieland. First, there is the "Advertisement" at the beginning of the novel, and second, the matter of the learned footnotes throughout the text; these come to us directly from Charles Brockden Brown, not Clara. If Brown were writing the kind of narrative that I have argued above, would he not have provided the reader with some hint of his intentions? For it is one thing to argue that the narrator of Wieland has deceived us, but another matter entirely to argue that the author has. In fact, the "Advertisement"
Wieland presents strong evidence in favor of the reading presented above. In it Brown admits that "the incidents related are extraordinary and rare." He mentions specifically the ventriloquism of Carwin and the religious delusion of Wieland, but his textual footnotes make clear that he also includes in this category the spontaneous combustion of the elder Wieland and the curious suicide of Clara's maternal grandfather. However, while Brown states that there are records of such "miraculous" events, he hopes that "... intelligent readers will not disapprove of the manner in which appearances are solved. ..." Furthermore, he says that "... the solution will be found to correspond with the known principles of human nature" (my italics). He suggests then that the novel hinges not so much on scientifically verified data (though he concedes that one historical instance is "a sufficient vindication of the Writer") as it does upon human nature. He seems to have agreed with Coleridge that the one thing never permissible, if the reader is to suspend his disbelief, is insufficient character motivation. The "Advertisement" suggests that Brown is less interested in documenting the events themselves than he is investigating what he terms "the latent springs and occasional perversions of the human mind." Far from being "temporary" (topical) in its treatment of odd scientific occurrences, he hopes Wieland will illustrate "some important branches of the moral constitution of man." Clearly then, there is nothing in Brown's preface which should be viewed incompatible with the reading given above.
That Brown wishes us to look for a human solution to the mysteries of Wieland is also apparent when we examine his learned footnotes, especially the one on "spontaneous combustion." Indeed, the episode of the elder Wieland's bizarre death and its accompanying footnote plainly discredit the scientific explanation—spontaneous combustion—in favor of a more "human" one. A close examination of the incident and Brown's source—an account of the death of an Italian priest—reveals that Brown intended for his "intelligent readers" to conclude that Clara's father was murdered. The facts are these. Old Wieland, who seems to know that his death is approaching, climbs the hill to his temple on the cliff to pray. It is midnight. He is gone some time when his wife hears a loud report and sees a gleam of light. When Clara's uncle arrives at the scene, the light vanishes, and he finds only the charred body of Wieland, who, before he dies, gives an account of what happened. He says that his first impression was that someone was approaching him with a lamp, but before he could turn around, he received a blow to the right arm. Then he saw a spark drop into his clothes, igniting both them and him. These details—the loud report, the blow to the arm, the spark which ignites the clothes—do little to suggest that Wieland was a victim of spontaneous combustion. Neither does the fact that his hair, the most flammable part of the human body, is not burned. Nor are his slippers. It would appear that the fire

21"Letter Respecting an Italian Priest, Killed by an Electric Commotion, the Cause of which Resided in his Own Body," American Museum, 11 (April, 1792), 146-49.
originated in his clothes, not his body; it is extinguished before it reaches the extremities of the body.

A careful examination of Brown's source surely supports my reading and discourages the theory of spontaneous combustion. The account in the American Museum is composed of two parts. The first contains the testimony of the physician who attended the dying priest, Bertholi. Many of the details are identical to those given in Wieland, and there can be no doubt that the account was Brown's principle source. There is a loud report, a flash of light, a blow to Bertholi's right arm, and a "spark" which drops into the man's clothes. When Bertholi is found, his body is badly burned, but his hair is untouched. The physician concludes that Bertholi was a victim of spontaneous combustion— that he was "killed by an electrical commotion, the cause of which resided in his own body." However, the second part of the account contains an analysis of the physician's conclusions, and the writer of this portion pointedly disagrees with the doctor's reasoning. He too mentions that it is illogical for Bertholi's hair to remain unburned. He too mentions that the combustion theory in no way explains the loud report, the blow to the arm, and is a best neutral on the matter of the fatal spark. Even more persuasively, the writer points out that the lamp in Bertholi's room had been full of oil before the incident but was found to be dry afterwards, though the wick was visibly charred. Clearly, the evidence pointed more toward human malice than spontaneous combustion.
One thing is undeniable. Since Brown used the American Museum account as a source for Wieland, he could not have been unaware of the ambiguity of the details. He could not have been unaware that the writer of that account argued convincingly against the spontaneous combustion theory. Yet Brown himself did not delete the compromising details. Instead he added to them. First, where Bertholi was obese and an alcoholic as well, the two details which led the physician to suspect combustion, Wieland is neither, which renders the combustion theory in the latter case even weaker. Next, Brown adds two significant details not in the original. He allows Wieland to inform the reader that his first impression was that someone was approaching him with a lamp. But the most suggestive detail—also absent from the source—is that, according to Clara's uncle "there was somewhat in his [Wieland's] manner that indicated an imperfect tale. My uncle was inclined to believe that half the truth had been suppressed" (38).

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22 I have already argued how the changes Brown made in his source concerning the Yates murders support my reading of the novel. See footnote 18. Brown's other two learned footnotes also do nothing to discourage it. On ventriloquism, Brown tells us that "The power, is, perhaps, given by nature, but it is doubtless improvable, if not acquirable, by art." And in the novel itself Carwin informs us that "... it is an art which may be taught to all." Finally, concerning the strange madness of Clara's maternal grandfather, Brown refers us to Erasmus Darwin's Zoonomia. The "mania mutabilis" to which Brown alludes turns out to be a type of schizophrenia whereby "patients are liable to mistake ... imaginations for realities," just as I have argued that Clara does throughout her narrative. The example Darwin gives, interestingly enough, is that of a woman who "imagined that she heard a voice say to her one day as she was at her toilet, 'Repent, or you will be damned.'" Zoonomia; or, The Laws of Organic Life (London: 1756), II, 356-58.
After relating to us the details of this bizarre event, Clara presents us with a philosophical dilemma which she has been a lifetime trying to resolve. She cannot make up her mind whether her father's death was the result of divine edict (as a punishment for not obeying a divine command), or whether it was a pure accident, the result of spontaneous combustion. Brown's point is that the dilemma she presents herself and the reader is a false one, for it ignores a third possibility—indeed the most plausible explanation—that her father was murdered. Even at the end of the novel Clara is still debating the question she begins her narrative with. Though she comes to accept the possibility that evil demons exist, she cannot see that they may be human. Indeed, human malice is never a reality for Clara, and her refusal to consider its existence is reflected in her inability to interpret correctly her own motives and desires as the novel progresses.

The final paragraph of the novel, in which the reader is left to moralize upon the tale, also suggests that the postscript is not merely an appendage. When Clara says, obstensibly of Louisa Conway's mother, "If the lady had crushed her disastrous passion in the bud, and driven her seducer from her presence when the tendency of his artifices was seen" (263), the tragedy need not have taken place, the reader should understand this, in view of the argument presented above, as applying to Clara's relationship with the seducer Carwin, which sets in motion the entire tragedy of Wieland. Clara ends the novel by wishing that she herself "had been gifted with ordinary equanimity or foresight"
(263), but she does not understand the "double-tongued deceiver" is not Carwin, but herself.

Although most critics stress the psychological aspects of the novel (as, in fact, I have done), we must also see that Wieland is a philosophical novel of some stature. Ultimately, it deals with the complex issue of epistemology. It thoroughly refutes "Franklinesque" optimism and the philosophy upon which that optimism was founded, for the novel's major tenet seems to be that Man is incapable of obtaining true knowledge since he is incapable of perceiving things correctly. Clara, contemplating her own deceived senses, asks: "What is man, that knowledge is so sparingly conferred upon him?" (121). The world of Wieland, like the world of Brown's other novels, is one of imposture, falsehood, and deception, all of which coexist with honesty and sincerity. The self, which colors all perceptions, is the greatest uncertainty of all. Even those characters in the novel who are not self-deceived are nevertheless incapable of making rational judgements based on sense perceptions. Theodore Wieland is deceived by clever mimicry into committing outrageous acts that are abhorrent to his gentle nature. Pleyel, who comes closer to the truth than anyone else in the novel when he correctly suspects the true relationship which exists between Clara and Carwin, nevertheless finally allows himself to be deceived by her lover's lies and even ends up marrying her. To know and to accept what one knows are different matters. And Pleyel would have done well to heed his own warning, which is also Brown's admonition to the reader: "It is better to know nothing than to be deceived by an artful tale" (146).
Paul Witherington, in his bibliographical essay on Charles Brockden Brown, suggests that "more attention should be given to point of view, to style, to Brown's attempts—not so clumsy as some critics still maintain--at creating form."1 The form of Ormond, for example, has been left largely unexplored. The majority of the novel is related by the narrator, Sophia Westwyn (Courtland), as hearsay. In her dedicatory letter to I. E. Rosenberg, Sophia admits that the information upon which her narrative is based is "sometimes scanty." Furthermore, she acknowledges that her tale will be colored by the fact that Constantia is her friend. Yet critics have not drawn the necessary inferences from such admissions, for surely Sophia's partial knowledge of Ormond, when viewed in conjunction with her bond of friendship with Constantia, suggests a resulting lack of objectivity if not definite bias. There can be little doubt that Brown is knowingly using an unreliable narrative. There are glaring incongruities throughout Sophia's narrative, many of which she herself is aware of and attempts to resolve. However, critics insist that these incongruities are caused by Brown's alleged failures and shortcomings as a craftsman.

Some important recent criticism of Charles Brockden Brown's novels has dealt with the question of unreliable narrative.\(^2\) However, it is difficult to discuss seriously the possibility of narrative unreliability, or to give credence to such a discussion, when so many critics persist in attributing inconsistencies in the narratives to what they consider Brown's sloppy narrative technique. The purpose of this essay, then, is not so much to provide a new reading of the novel as it is to dispel some of the more popular misconceptions about Brown's art and to suggest how carefully he plotted Ormond so as to obscure the truth in a rich fabric of semiplausible lies. In this sense, the theme of the novel (deception) is also the form of the novel (narrative unreliability).

\(^2\)Patrick Brancaccio, "Studied Ambiguities: Arthur Mervyn and the Problem of the Unreliable Narrator," American Literature, 42 (1970), 18-27. Brancaccio argues that the narrative structure of Arthur Mervyn is deliverately framed so as to question the veracity of the seemingly innocent and naive narrator. In Kenneth Bernard's "Edgar Huntly: Charles Brockden Brown's Unsolved Murder," Library Chronicle, 33 (1967), 30-50, Bernard suggests that Edgar, the protagonist, is actually the murderer of his friend Waldegrave, though the former is unaware of his sleep-walking deeds. The term "unreliable narrative" often crops up in discussions of Brown's fiction, but most critics do not see it as a deliberate and comprehensive authorial device. However, there are several essays which deal with the themes of duplicity and secrecy in Brown's fiction without relating them to the narrative structure. See, for instance, Michael D. Bell, "'The Double-Tongued Deceiver': Sincerity and Duplicity in the Novels of Charles Brockden Brown," Early American Literature, 9 (1974), 143-63; Warner Berthoff, "'A Lesson in Concealment': Brockden Brown's Method of Fiction," Philological Quarterly, 37 (1958), 47-57.
Paul Rogers' essay, "Brown's Ormond: The Fruits of Improvisation," is typical of what many critics think about Brown as a craftsman. Rogers cites well-known facts about Brown's haste (he wrote his four most important novels between 1798 and 1800) and his publisher's deadlines. Brown, we are told, did not even reread, and therefore could not remember, what he had previously written. Rogers also speaks of Brown's unwillingness to revise that which he had already written and his corresponding willingness to borrow as filler whole chapters from previously published works (Brown borrowed the entire Ursula Monrose incident in Ormond from The Man at Home). Rogers then concludes that these methods of "improvisation" provide the very "fruits" of Brown's novel. We are to be content with occasionally vivid scenes.

In this writer's opinion Rogers' arguments do not bear close scrutiny. It may be true that Brown was writing in haste while at the same time editing a journal, but his duties were little different from, say, Dickens' a half century later, and we must admit that not only did Dickens write in greater quantity but better quality as well. If Ormond is the patchwork quilt that Rogers suggests, there is no reason why Brown should not have been able to turn out even greater

3Paul Rogers, "Brown's Ormond: The Fruits of Improvisation," American Quarterly, 26 (1974), 4-22. More recently, however, Sidney Krause in "Ormond: How Rapidly and How Well 'Composed, Arranged and Delivered,'" pp. 238-49, argues that Brown was "much more careful than he was thought to have been," though he admits Brown was "not as careful as he might have been with some matters of planning" (p. 247).
quantities of such stuff with very little stress. Furthermore, Rogers' inference that Brown must have borrowed the Monrose story from The Man at Home because he needed filler to meet a publisher's deadline ignores the more plausible inference that in many respects Ormond may be a reworking of The Man at Home, which was written and abandoned earlier in the same year (1798). Rather than proving that Brown was unwilling to revise, the borrowings from the earlier work suggest that Ormond is in fact a revision of the earlier story. Finally, that Brown often did not reread his work and therefore often could not remember what he had previously written is inconsistent with Rogers' other arguments. If Brown were writing as hastily as Rogers suggests, it is unlikely that he would have time to forget that which he had written so recently. In fact, we see ample evidence that Brown remembered the most minute details of his plots.

An example of Brown's memory may be seen in the episode of the midnight burial of Roselli (Ursula's "father"); the burial is witnessed by Baxter, who, when he tells the tale of what he saw, mentions that the daughter, Ursula Monrose (later, Martinotte de Beauvais), is weeping while she buries her dead father. Later in the novel Martinette

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5 For instance, in Ormond, long after the reader has forgotten about Mr. Dudley's lute, Brown surprisingly brings it back into the plot. No doubt its reintroduction is clumsily handled, but it attests to the author's memory and command of detail.
contradicts the now dead Baxter, saying the weeping that Baxter witnessed was a figment of his imagination. Rogers maintains that Brown was forced into this contradiction because the newly created character of Martinette de Beauvais was quite different from the character he borrowed from the earlier work. Yet if Brown is working so hastily and is so forgetful of detail, how is it that he remembers the daughter's weeping at all? Rogers does not note a second inconsistency in Martinette's tale when she says that Roselli, her adopted father, contracted the plague and died slowly, thereby exhausting her grief before the actual event of his death. We have previously been told by another source, Sarah Baxter, that when Roselli's body was exhumed by officials, there was no sign of his having had the plague. And the signs, we know from earlier descriptions, are vividly plain and visible. Thus the veracity of Martinette's whole story is called into question. Why at midnight has she clandestinely buried the corpse? Why has she not reported the death and had the body safely buried by public attendants? And why afterward has she disappeared and changed her name (which was already an alias)?

Contradictions, inconsistencies, and downright unbelievable absurdities are apparent throughout Ormond, and they are not, I maintain, attributable to Brown's habits of composition or what is referred to as his basic inability to construct consistent, straightforward plots. Secrecy and deception are at the very heart of Ormond. During the course of the novel nine characters assume fictitious names. The name
of the title character is an assumed name, if indeed Ormond is Martinette's long lost brother. Thomas Craig turns out to be the son of Mary Mansfield, and thus his is an assumed name. We are told that Mr. Dudley and Constantia use the name of Acworth in Philadelphia. Martinette and Roselli use the name of Monrose, and the former assumes the name of de Beauvais after the death of Roselli. We are told that Helena Cleves lives with Ormond under the name of Mrs. Eden. Sophia Westwyn's mother quickly assumes a new identity when she inherits her dead husband's money and moves to Charleston. Although various characters have equally various reasons for assuming new identities, it must be admitted that Ormond is a novel that deals with imposture, and the world of the novel is one where things are often not what they seem, and people are not who they seem to be. An innocent face, like Thomas Craig's, is not necessarily the index of an honest nature.

But what of Constantia Dudley and Ormond, the two central characters? The one seems innocent enough, the other deceitful and dangerous. Yet certain facts must be kept in mind. Despite the fact that Sophia, the narrator, claims in the preface to have several secret sources of information about Ormond, and despite the fact that she claims, also in the preface, to have met Ormond more than once, the narrative itself reveals that she never meets Ormond until she sees him dead on the floor of the Perth-Amboy house. And only in one instance does she give information about him that does not come from Constantia. Therefore, the bulk of the evidence that the reader has concerning the character of Ormond comes to us directly from the person who kills
him—Constantia Dudley. Sophia seems to believe everything her friend tells her, but must the reader?

Viewed objectively, Constantia Dudley's story, as told to her friend Sophia, and through her to us, is full of inconsistencies and contradictions. Many of her actions seem absurd and her motivation incomprehensible if we disregard her pious protestations. Occasionally, she is contradicted by outside sources. The best way to analyze her narration (I must refer to it as her narration, though we understand that it is being filtered through Sophia) is to discuss the plausibility of six major episodes: (1) Thomas Craig's swindle of the Dudleys in New York, (2) Constantia's activities in Philadelphia during the plague, (3) the interpolated tale of Ursula Monrose already mentioned and briefly discussed, (4) the events surrounding the second meeting between Constantia and Craig, and her subsequent introduction to Ormond, (5) the interpolated tale of Helena Cleves and the restoration of the Dudley's wealth, and (6) Constantia's final confrontation with Ormond and Craig at Perth-Amboy. In addition to these episodes, the narrator, Sophia Westwyn, tells the story of her search for Constantia. I will demonstrate that in each of these episodes, including the interpolated tales, there is ample justification for doubting the veracity of what the reader is told. For in a hearsay narrative, we may question the truthfulness of what is reported in much the same fashion as we would in a court of law. The narration is suspect under the following conditions: (1) when it is contradicted by someone who has no reason to lie, or who is outside the events themselves and
unaware of the narrator's version of them, (2) when the events of the narrative are contradicted by other events related within the same narrative, and (3) when the events of the narrative simply do not make sense as related to us—that is, they violate what we understand to be laws of logic and basic human nature. We begin then by carefully examining the narrative.

The narrator, Sophia Westwyn, hears about Thomas Craig's swindle of the Dudleys when she is in Europe, but it is Constantia who gives her the details of the episode which Sophia relates at the beginning of *Ormond*. As the novel begins, Stephen Dudley has returned from Europe after his father's death and is forced to run his parent's apothecary business. An artist and bohemian at heart, Dudley happily hires a handsome youth, Thomas Craig, to relieve himself of the responsibility of actually working in the shop, thereby giving himself more free time to pursue his painting. Craig says he has just come from Europe and is happy to work for the Dudleys in exchange for food and clothing. He continues to correspond with his mother and sister in England, and he shows the letters that he receives from them to Mr. Dudley. We are told that the style and penmanship of the mother and daughter are "distinct and characteristic." Mr. Dudley himself corresponds with the mother, and between them they agree to make Craig a partner in the business. Craig is authorized to draw upon an account in a London bank for his share of the partnership, but when Dudley suggests that Craig's younger brother, of whom the young man has told Dudley, be brought into the business also, Craig unaccountably balks.
Nevertheless, Dudley writes to Craig's mother suggesting this expedient and gives the letter to Craig to give to a friend of his (Dudley's) who will soon be traveling in England.

After a short time has elapsed, a letter comes for Craig when he is out of town; this letter Mr. Dudley reads in Craig's absence. It is from one Mary Mansfield, who claims to be Craig's mother. When he returns and see the letter, Craig betrays surprise, which is secretly witnessed by Mr. Dudley, who then becomes suspicious. Craig later shows the letter to the Dudley family and laughs about its contents, but when Craig again leaves town, Mr. Dudley, his suspicions aroused, locks Craig's personal trunk in the closet and hides the key to the door. Craig shortly returns with a friend who is soon to sail for Jamaica, and tells Mr. Dudley that he would like to give his friend his personal trunk, which he says contains nothing of any value anyway. However, the key to the closet door, which Mr. Dudley has hidden, cannot be found, and this necessitates Craig and his friend's departure without the trunk. Craig never returns, and when the chest is opened, it is found that the Dudleys have been swindled, for all the letters, including those supposedly sent by Mr. Dudley to Craig's mother, are found within. Besides the many forged letters, in which Mr. Dudley's hand is exactly imitated, a ledger of Craig's embezzlements is found. The young man has used the shop's credit to secure funds for which Mr. Dudley is legally responsible. Even the downpayment for Craig's entry into the partnership has been obtained in this fashion, and as a result, Mr. Dudley is ruined by his creditors, though not imprisoned. His daughter Constantia is sixteen years old at the time.
It has been said that the story of Craig's imposture in the beginning of Ormond "receives an emphasis not justified by its later significance." However, since this early episode determines many subsequent events, and since Thomas Craig is blamed for nearly everything which follows as the novel progresses, this initial event must be viewed as one of great importance. Furthermore, Brown has provided us with enough detail to make us question whether the events happened exactly as Constantia has portrayed them to Sophia. There can be little doubt that Craig has intended to swindle the Dudleys, but there is considerable doubt as to how well he has succeeded. We remember that when Craig is about to leave for Jamaica with his friend, he is anxious to secure his trunk, the one that is later found to contain all the evidence against him. But Mr. Dudley, after becoming suspicious, has placed the trunk in the locked closet. Dudley notes that when Craig discovers that he cannot regain his trunk, he displays "more uneasiness than he was willing to express." The reader is tempted to accept Craig's "disappointment" at face value without analyzing its source, but there is no logical reason why Craig should even want the trunk. True, it contains evidence against him, but his mere desertion is far more damaging evidence. Once he had departed, his embezzlements would quickly have been detected without either the forged letters or


7Charles Brockden Brown, Ormond, ed. Ernest Marchand (New York: 1937). All subsequent references to this edition of the novel are included in the text.
the ledger. The things found in Craig's trunk do little but clarify the method of the swindler, whereas his departure and the resulting investigation prove his guilt. Thus the reader is led to question what Craig has done with the money that he has been embezzling for more than a year. He cannot have spent it under the very noses of the Dudleys without arousing their suspicions. To place embezzled money in a bank would be equally hazardous. However, we do know of one place that Craig keeps valuable secret things: the wooden chest secured by Mr. Dudley. If the chest contained the stolen money, Craig's consternation at not being able to recover it would be thoroughly understandable, for he would still have to abscond, since the Dudleys would have evidence against him, and yet he would have to leave without the fruits of his labor, his name sullied.

Such a hypothesis is strengthened when we examine The Man at Home, the unfinished novel from which Ormond derives. The narrator of The Man at Home, an elderly gentleman named Bedloe, is placed in an uncomfortable situation by his former partner, who asks him to cosign a promissory note. Bedloe decides that it is safe to do so and agrees, but when the note comes due, the partner cannot pay it. Bedlow then has the choice of paying the note and thereby exhausting his funds, or refusing to pay and attempting to escape the authorities. He chooses the latter alternative and goes into hiding in a small dwelling which he seldom leaves. In this dwelling is a wooden chest left by the previous tenant, who turns out to be one de Moivre. (The interpolated history of de Moivre and his daughter is borrowed as the Monrose
incident in *Ormond*.) The elements of the two plots are too similar to ignore: ruin through a partner's borrowings, a wooden chest, the incident of a French lady and her father. The opening episodes of *Ormond* are clearly revisions of the earlier novel.

If Mr. Dudley has found the stolen money in Craig's chest, several features of *Ormond*'s plot become clear. An alternative explanation may be given for Mr. Dudley's hasty departure for Philadelphia, and his secretive seclusion once he arrives there. Dudley, like Bedloe, would have the ability to pay his debts, but he rationalizes, again like Bedloe, that since they were incurred by another, he is justified in withholding payment. He has only to hide out for a while and wait for the storm to pass. In *The Man at Home*, Bedloe moves into a house previously occupied by the Frenchman and his daughter; in *Ormond*, we are told that the Dudleys do the same thing by moving into the Monrose house after the death of Roselli. Like Bedloe, Mr. Dudley cannot inform his Baltimore relations of his whereabouts since he does not want others to find out also. This explanation for his silence and seclusion makes a good deal more sense than Constantia's tale of woe in which Mr. Dudley, who seems to have friends and relatives everywhere (London, the West Indies, Baltimore, and Philadelphia), would rather die, and have his daughter die, than contact those friends for help, so ashamed is he of having failed in business.

Some other facts of the narrative also make more sense according to this hypothesis. The way in which Constantia later inherits her father's Perth-Amboy house, in which Ormond is killed at
the end of the novel, is preposterous in every way. According to her story, it is sold at auction after the Dudley ruin, then coincidentally bought by Ormond, who gives it to Helena Cleves (who does not live there, but rather in Philadelphia), who wills it to Constantia. It is far more logical to assume that some arrangement has been made between Dudley and his Philadelphia friend-associate, Melbourne (whom we are told also handles all of Ormond's business). Dudley himself could not live in the Perth-Amboy house since he is supposed to be penniless, but through Melbourne he could secretly hang on to the property. Even in Constantia's version of the story, it is through Melbourne that she officially inherits the estate. When she moves to Perth-Amboy at the end of the novel, we are informed that the intermediate owners have kept the mansion just as Mr. Dudley, who did all the art work and decoration, had left it. This happy circumstance is easily explained when we understand that the property has never really left the Dudleys' possession after their removal from New York.

There is yet one further suggestion that Mr. Dudley's role in the Craig affair is not entirely honest. Toward the end of the novel, when Ormond confronts Constantia, who is about to leave for Europe with Sophia, he says that her actions have been influenced by "poverty, disease, servile labor, a criminal and hapless parent" (214). Constantia's narrative certainly shows her father to be "hapless," but it gives no indication why Ormond should proclaim him "criminal."

The Craig episode is not then as clear cut as it seems to be. There is another whole aspect of the affair, which I have not yet
touched upon, but first it is necessary to jump ahead to Constantia's second encounter with Thomas Craig, this time in Philadelphia.

According to Constantia, at this point in the novel the plague has run its course, but it has left the Dudleys penniless. Constantia, who has just remembered about her father's friend Melbourne, is on her way to his house when she sees Thomas Craig. She traces him to Ormond's house (though she has not met Ormond yet), where she writes Craig a letter asking for money to relieve her father's suffering. On her way out she passes Ormond, who is just coming in. When Ormond questions Craig about the identity of the young woman, the latter identifies her as Constantia Dudley. He then proceeds to tell the story of the Dudleys' ruin, but says that his brother was the swindler. He also claims that Constantia was this brother's lover and accomplice. He produces, on the spot, love letters, purportedly written by Constantia to Craig, which support his contention. These letters and the letter that Constantia has just written to Craig are kept by Ormond, and later, when Constantia visits Ormond (ostensibly to plead her friend Helena's case), he confronts her with them and Craig's accusations.

Constantia, of course, denies the charges, saying the letters are forged for the express purpose of defaming her character, but circumstances do not make this explanation very plausible, in that Craig has no reason to defame her character. Since he has no idea that Constantia is in Philadelphia, he has had neither the reason nor the opportunity to forge a whole series of incriminating letters. Are we to believe that previous to their accidental encounter Craig forged
the letters on the off chance that she might appear? Since the letters in no way mitigate Craig's crime of embezzlement, but merely show him to have had an accomplice, it cannot be argued that he forged them with any view toward safeguarding himself. He need only have said that it was his brother who committed the crime and not himself, for why would he wish to defame the innocent girl?

Physical evidence also casts a grave doubt upon Constantia's explanation of the letters. Ormond notes that the handwriting of the letter which was just that evening delivered to Craig is identical to that of the earlier love letters. Can Craig, who has never had reason to copy her handwriting before, remember it well enough to forge those love letters (again, so that he may use them for no logical reason on the off chance that their paths will ever cross again)? Yet this is exactly what Constantia asks us to believe.

There are other details that suggest the truth of Craig's allegations. Craig's embezzlement hinges on a series of letters purportedly written by his mother and sister. The handwriting of each is said to be "characteristical." Constantia, we are told repeatedly, is skilled with the pen, and would in this instance have been a valuable ally. Furthermore, the text provides her with a motive. After the ruin of Stephen Dudley, Constantia is introduced more formally onto the stage. She is described as very beautiful, and the narrator also tells us that until her father's ruin she had many suitors, one of them serious, whom her father wished her to marry. This unnamed suitor, however, disappeared on a voyage at the time of Mr. Dudley's ruin, the
desertion taking Constantia very much by surprise. If Thomas Craig, who also disappears on a voyage at this time, is as highly thought of by Dudley as the text says he is, might not he be the young suitor in question? The young, impressionable girl may have been very taken with him indeed.

If all this is not enough, there is one final suggestion that Constantia was Craig's accomplice. When Mr. Dudley finds that he is ruined, he reflects that "the serpent which had stung him was nurtured in his own bosom" (15). No doubt the serpent referred to by Mr. Dudley is Craig, whom the Dudleys had taken into their home. However, the image of the serpent's tooth recalls another foolish old man, King Lear, who used it to refer to the particular pain incurred when the serpent is one's own daughter: "How sharper than the serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child." Mr. Dudley, a cultivated man, may even be aware of the irony of the allusion, aware that his beloved daughter has contributed to his ruin. As Lear is figuratively blind in the beginning of the play and becomes a homeless wanderer, so Stephen Dudley may realize how blind he has been after he too becomes homeless. (His reported physical blindness will be discussed later.)

Such arguments raise as many questions as they answer. If the Dudleys are not destitute in Philadelphia, but rather in hiding, what do we make of their reported poverty in the vividly painted plague scenes and of Constantia's schemes for obtaining food and fuel? A thorough understanding of what happens to the Dudleys in Philadelphia, however, can only be achieved by piecing together bits of information
we obtain from various sources as the novel progresses. Just as important, it is not easy to accept the possibility that Constantia, who has been seen by critics as Brown's ideal woman, may be lying to her friend Sophia and the reader. However, the evidence of every major episode in the novel supports that contention.

Two early episodes in particular suggest that Constantia is not the sweet, innocent girl she seems to be. Both of these occur before Constantia has established her acquaintance with Ormond. The first of the two incidents concerns the forged check that Constantia gives to her landlord. When Constantia sees Thomas Craig in the street and follows him to Ormond's house, she asks Craig for money to relieve her father's suffering. She informs us that Craig gave her a note for fifty dollars. The Dudleys have been threatened with eviction by the greedy M'Crea, but the note from Craig allows Constantia to pay the rent. M'Crea takes this note and gives Constantia twenty-five dollars in change. However, a few days later he returns, demanding both the twenty-five dollars and the rent; the note, he says, was rejected at the bank as a forgery. We are informed that it is Mr. Dudley who is legally responsible for the debt, but it is Constantia who appears before the magistrate, since the infirm and now blind Dudley never ventures outside his lodgings except at night. The magistrate turns out to be Melbourne, Mr. Dudley's friend, whom Constantia has been seeking for days. She meets with him not in court, but rather in his private chambers (surely a breech of legal decorum), and Melbourne, when he finds out that she is his old friend's daughter, accepts the story of how she came to be in the possession of the forged note.
However, while Melbourne believes Constantia, Ormond, who has not yet been introduced to her and who hears about the event from Melbourne, does not. He goes directly to the heart of the matter by inquiring how the note can have been forged unless she herself forged it. Thomas Craig cannot have forged his own signature, and he would have had no reason to pass a counterfeit bill, since he plans to tell Ormond that he gave the girl nothing, thereby inducing Ormond to entrust him with a legitimate check for one hundred dollars to give the Dudleys. Ormond therefore suspects Constantia of duplicity, and since Craig has told him other things about the beautiful girl's character, he begins to wonder, "Might not this girl mix a little imposture with her truth?" (91).

The second episode, which also casts doubt upon Constantia's character and narrative, is really a series of events that cluster around Constantia's meeting and subsequent friendship with Balfour. As in the case of her chance meeting with Craig, Constantia first meets Balfour on the street, at night. Indeed Constantia is frequently out "on business" at night (at least six different times in the novel), but the unsuspecting reader hesitates to draw the logical inference that this woman who constantly walks the streets at night may in fact be a streetwalker, because Constantia repeatedly protests (too much) that she is innocent and naive in worldly matters. But more than one character in the novel recognizes her as a prostitute. For instance, when Constantia finds that Craig is staying at a nearby inn, she goes there (at night) to find him, and she is treated rudely by the waiter.
and Craig's servant, both of whom seem to think that she is a whore. She explains their treatment of her as an example of the way single women are always treated. But earlier in the novel, Constantia, again walking home at night through a very bad section of town, is accosted by two ruffians who take her for a prostitute. She is rescued by a Scottish adventurer named Balfour, although what he was doing in the district is never explained. Constantia tells us that he became a suitor and that she rejected him because she did not love him and had no wish to marry so young. We are also told that when she rejects his suit, Balfour's malicious sister, whom the reader never meets, begins to circulate rumors about Constantia, who loses all her needlework as a result. The nature of these rumors is never specified, but since her patrons will no longer have anything to do with her, the inference is clear that they concern her moral character. While it is true that Constantia always has an innocent enough excuse for her actions, she is, like Arthur Mervyn in another Brown novel, found in a remarkable number of compromising positions. And the fact remains that she is accused of being a prostitute by no less than seven characters in the novel, including Craig and Ormond.

Ormond also speculates about what he considers Constantia's "imposture" concerning the forged note, and he wonders what motive would induce such a girl to become involved in a criminal activity such as forgery: "Who knows the temptations to hypocrisy? It might have been a present from another quarter, and accompanied with no very honorable conditions. Exquisite wretch! Those whom honesty will not
let live must be knaves. Such is the alternative offered by the wisdom of society" (91). Although the diction of the above passage is vague, it does indicate Ormond's basic distrust of Constantia. Ormond also suggests that her duplicity may be the result of another person ("a present from another quarter"), and he may even believe her immoral behavior to be the result of another person's influence ("no very honorable conditions"). But it is the interpolated tale of Ormond and Helena Cleves that may shed some light upon this evil influence in Constantia's life.

Constantia is introduced to Helena Cleves, who is living as Ormond's mistress under the name of Mrs. Eden, by Ormond himself. Constantia becomes both her seamstress and friend. The narrator, Sophia, tells us that Ormond had met Helena in New York when she was the young daughter of a local merchant. Helena was very beautiful, an accomplished musician, and exceptionally skilled with the pen. Although Ormond later considers her to be stupid, he admits that she is a match for him at his favorite intellectual pastime, the game of chess. When Helena's father dies, she agrees to live with Ormond as his mistress, and he sets her up in a "small but elegant mansion." Despite being increasingly depressed about the illicit nature of her relationship with Ormond, she is referred to as a "model of tenderness and constancy."

Constantia, it turns out, had previously known Helena in New York, although the details of the acquaintance are never spelled out explicitly. However, both have since changed their names. Constantia agrees to plead her friend's case with Ormond, whom she at first feels
should marry Helena. In the meantime though, we are informed that Ormond has fallen in love with Constantia, and now considers Helena a "noisome weed." Furthermore, Constantia begins to have her own doubts as to whether the two are well matched. A confrontation between Ormond and Helena soon results, in which Ormond informs his mistress that he loves her seamstress and intends to marry Constantia at all costs, but he graciously offers to allow Helena to pretend to be his sister, thus salvaging some remnant of her already tarnished reputation. Instead Helena commits suicide, leaving all her worldly possessions to Constantia, including (according to Constantia) the Perth-Amboy estate formerly owned and built by Mr. Dudley (which we are told was purchased by Ormond after the Dudley's ruin and given to Helena). Constantia also inherits the house in which Helena was living with Ormond, and she tells us that she and her father immediately move in there. This is the second house they reportedly move into after the death of its former occupant (after the death of Roselli, they had moved into the vacant house next door to the Baxters). Thus, through the death of Helena, the Dudley wealth is restored to them.

All of this, of course, is Constantia's version of the events and I have previously discussed in part how unlikely her account is. The restoration of the Perth-Amboy property in this manner is a wild coincidence, and I have already suggested an alternate explanation—that the Dudleys never really lost the estate in the first place. But, according to Constantia, Helena makes out her will with Ormond's knowledge. The executor is Melbourne, who agrees to the unusual arrangement
out of respect and concern for the Dudleys. What is left unexplained by Constantia's version of the events is why Helena owned the Perth-Amboy estate to begin with. It makes sense that Ormond would give his mistress a house in Philadelphia, since he meets her there regularly, but why would he give her the New Jersey estate? We are told that neither Helena, nor Ormond, nor anyone else has lived in the mansion at Perth-Amboy since the Dudleys lost it. Further, while it is understandable that Helena would include her new friend in her will, and while it is commendable that she not hold a grudge against her after Ormond's revelation, it is highly unusual that the man she loved at the time of making out the will and whom she confesses loving even at the point of death is left nothing.

A much more reasonable explanation for the entire interpolated tale is that Constantia has concocted the Helena Cleves story in order to explain how she has come into possession of the property her father is thought to have lost. Again, I suggest that Constantia comes into the property through a prior arrangement between Stephen Dudley and Melbourne.

Despite the fact that the restoration of the Dudley fortune through the death of Helena Cleves is highly improbable, the story itself of the relationship between Ormond and Helena has the ring of truth to it. The explanation may be that the basic story is true. It may be that Constantia is telling her own story as if it were someone else's—that of Helena Cleves. The similarities between the two girls are overwhelming, even though critics have seen them as symbolizing
very different sorts of women. Both are daughters of New York businessmen. Helena is called the "fair Sicilian"; Constantia's mother is Italian. Helena, like Constantia, is beautiful, loves music, and is skilled with the pen. Both play the lute beyond compare [sic].

The primary difference between the two girls, as they are portrayed in Constantia's narrative, is that Helena is intellectually deficient. The exact nature of the deficiency is difficult to discover, however, since she seems to be intelligent in discourse, accomplished in behavior, and a rival for Ormond as a chess player. In addition, Helena is referred to as a "model of tenderness and constancy" (my italics). If we believe Constantia's story, these similarities in the nature and background of the two girls, and the return of the Perth-Amboy property, must be viewed as awkward coincidences of the plot, and as evidence that Brown is not really a very good writer. But if we distrust Constantia's tale, the coincidences vanish, and we begin to see that Brown crafted his novel very carefully indeed.

My suggestion that Constantia is the Helena Cleves of the interpolated tale creates both difficulties and possibilities. Obviously, Helena cannot have died. (We remember that she had no relatives and no friends other than Ormond and Constantia.) Is it then Constantia who is having an affair with Ormond? Such a suggestion must strike the reader as improbable, and indeed it is. A simpler explanation is that Constantia is having an affair with a man who knew her father in New York, as the Helena Cleves story goes, but not with Ormond, whom she has only recently met. It is far more likely that she is having an
affair with Thomas Craig, whom she knew in New York and with whom she has previously been accused of having illicit relations. By telling the story of her affair with Craig as if it happened to two other people, Constantia cleverly weaves truth into her falsehood. Only the names have been changed to protect the guilty. She has to explain to Sophia (and the rest of us) how she has so suddenly regained her father's lost wealth, and she cannot tell the truth—that in fact the Dudleys never lost it. The story she concocts is improbable, but no more improbable than it need be to cover the facts, which are very incriminating indeed.

As is often the case when dealing with unreliable narration, the resolution to one problem raises another. We recall Sir Walter Scott's famous lines, "O what a tangled web we weave/When first we practice to deceive," for if Constantia, at this point in the novel, is living with Thomas Craig as his mistress, then how can she be living with her father and their servant, Lucy, as she tells Sophia she is? And if Craig is as tired of Constantia as "Ormond" was of "Helena," then why does he consent to take has as his mistress? The answers to these questions unravel some of the most intricate parts of the "tangled web."

According to Constantia, the Dudleys move to Philadelphia where they change their names to Acworth. Mrs. Dudley dies a victim of "discontent," and Dudley himself has a bout with alcoholism from which he is "rescued" by blindness. During the plague he, Constantia, and Lucy live in a miserable dwelling off an alley. After the death
of Roselli, they move into the cheaper cottage next door to the Baxters. This cottage has the same landlord as the previous lodging. It is while living here that Constantia gives M'Crea the forged note. She is then summoned in her father's place before the magistrate, Melbourne, who afterward briefly visits his old friend, Stephen Dudley. Constantia, at this point, becomes friends with Helena (again, all this according to Constantia), and after Helena's death inherits her property. Mr. Dudley is thus restored to wealth, but is still blind. A surgeon friend of Ormond's, whom we never see, operates upon Mr. Dudley and restores his sight. Despite this rather large favor Dudley remains distrustful of Ormond and wishes to take Constantia away to Europe. They are preparing for the journey when Dudley is murdered. Later, in the final confrontation between Ormond and Constantia, the former admits to having hired Craig to murder Dudley.

The problem with this story is that most of it simply cannot be true. Enough evidence exists either to contradict it or cast serious doubts upon its veracity at every turn. Neither Ormond, nor Craig, nor anyone else is guilty of Mr. Dudley's murder because Mr. Dudley is never murdered. He in fact dies shortly after his move to Philadelphia, a victim of the plague, and his death is reported by eyewitnesses who have no conceivable reason to lie. When Sophia Courtland begins her search for Constantia, she goes to Baltimore, where Constantia's cousin, Miss Ridgeley, informs Sophia that Constantia and her father have perished during the plague. Sophia, in an aside, tells us that this rumor is false and that it was started by Craig, who has malicious
designs upon the Ridgeley fortune. This nonsequitur is difficult to understand, however, since reporting the death of the Dudleys would only increase his own culpability in the world's eyes, which already see him to blame for the ruined plight of the Dudleys. Such a false rumor would merely make him seem morally, if not legally, a murderer. More important, however, is the fact that the rumor of Dudley's death is later verified by an eyewitness, one Thompson, who was a superintendent during the plague. Thompson tells Sophia (directly, not via Constantia) that a man named Dudley did take lodgings off an alley during the plague, and that this man had a young woman with him. The landlord's description of the man fits Mr. Dudley's description, except that there is no mention of blindness. This old man and young woman are extremely secretive and they make no acquaintances. At the height of the plague, the young woman, seemingly ill, attracts the attention of the hearse driver, who in turn contacts Thompson the next day, and when the two investigate they find two bodies. The man seems to have died of the plague, the woman of starvation. There is no reason to doubt Thompson's story, but we may legitimately ask whether in fact the two people are the Dudleys. Certain details--the name of Dudley, the physical description of the man (blindness excepted), their desire for secrecy and seclusion--suggest that they are the Dudleys, while other details suggest the opposite. Since Lucy was supposedly living with the Dudleys at this time, logic demands that there should be three corpses, not two. However, the fact that there are only two corpses supports my contention that Constantia was not living with her father
in Philadelphia. The two corpses are those of Dudley and Lucy. If
the dead man is Dudley then Constantia has not only lied about living
with her father, but also about his reported blindness as well. (Her
reason for this lie will become apparent in a moment.) If we do not
believe that the body found by Thompson is that of Stephen Dudley, then
we have to ask ourselves why Brown included the Thompson episode at
all, since it would serve no function but to return rather awkwardly
to the horrors of the plague.

Yet if Stephen Dudley does die in the plague, what do we make
of the later scenes in the novel in which he is said to give advice
to Constantia, receive a visit from Melbourne, and finally be murdered?
These are strands of the tangled web that must be convincingly unraveled
if my contentions are to hold up. Constantia tells us that after their
move to Philadelphia, Mr. Dudley stays strictly to himself. He seeks
no friends other than his daughter and never leaves the house except at
night. He is purportedly embarrassed by his financial ruin, but I have
suggested that he is really hiding from creditors. After the plague,
Constantia reports that her father's habits remain the same, i.e.,
antisocial. During this time only one person sees him who could
identify him as Stephen Dudley—his friend Melbourne. Indeed if we
could say that Melbourne did identify his former friend, we would be
forced to admit that the corpse found by Thompson could not have been
that of Constantia's father. However, the fact is that Melbourne does
not recognize Dudley, though he believes that the man he visits is his
old friend. Melbourne finds that sickness has so emaciated his friend
that his features have become "corroded." The visitor is struck by what he refers to as "a contrast of . . . appearances" (89). Furthermore, during the short interview between Melbourne and Dudley, the latter does not speak, but rather "resigned to his daughter the task of sustaining the conversation" (89). He also "studiously forbore all expressions tending to encourage any kind of intercourse between them" (89). This behavior, so strange for a close friend, does nothing to dispel the notion that the man Melbourne meets is not Stephen Dudley at all, but a clever impostor. On other occasions, when visitors suddenly drop in, Mr. Dudley is conspicuously absent. Martinette, for instance, never meets Mr. Dudley, although she visits Constantia at home more than once. If the man whom Melbourne meets is in fact an impostor, then the reason for the imposture is not difficult to fathom. I have suggested that after the Dudley ruin, the Perth-Amboy property still belonged to Stephen Dudley, through an arrangement with Melbourne, but there is no way that Constantia can claim it with her father dead, for she is still a minor. She must then produce a live Mr. Dudley. The reason for her father's blindness now becomes clear, for it is the feigned blindness (which would allow the impostor to shade or cover his eyes), along with his refusal to speak, that makes the whole imposture work.

In this way Constantia can regain her father's wealth. Unfortunately, it is Sophia's unexpected arrival, for she too can identify Dudley, that necessitates Constantia's inventing the absurd story of her father's restored sight and subsequent murder, thus killing him off
again so soon after taking the trouble to resurrect him. She never
gives the reader any details concerning Dudley's mysterious death. Like
the death of Roselli, all is enshrouded in vague mystery. When Dudley
is supposedly murdered, no member of the household hears a sound. An
investigation of the premises fails to reveal the secret door by which
Ormond later reportedly claims the murder was effected.

The final episode of Constantia's narrative also needs to be
examined closely in light of the evidence and hypotheses that I have
placed before the reader. The final confrontation between Constantia
and Ormond, as related by Constantia, is incredible in the literal
sense of the word. After Constantia agrees to go to Europe with Sophia,
she tells us that she is given an ambiguous warning by Ormond, who does
not want her to leave. Sophia returns to New York to prepare for the
journey, while Constantia, contrary to her friend's wishes, moves into
the Perth-Amboy house in New Jersey. Sophia has warned Constantia
about Ormond by relating to her the story of Ormond's former rape of a
young girl and the murder of his friend Sarsefield. Despite these
warnings, Constantia remains alone at the Perth-Amboy house for two
months, much to the chagrin of Sophia, who thinks she may be in danger.

One day at dusk, Constantia, alone in a small room on the
second floor of the mansion, sees a solitary horseman, whom she
recognizes as Ormond, approaching the house. The front door is unlocked
and the frightened Constantia awaits further developments. She soon
hears some sounds outside her closet door, but reasons that since Ormond
was seen approaching openly, he probably meant no harm. When she
finally leaves her closet, she stumbles over the body of a prone man who appears to be dead, but who exhibits no visible wounds. She does not recognize him as Craig, but she wonders how the body got there. Was it this man who was responsible for the sounds outside her door? Hurrying down the stairs, she comes face to face with Ormond, who says that her time of reckoning has come. When he goes upstairs to retrieve the body of Craig, Constantia discovers that the front door is locked and that her key will not unlock a second bolt which she says must have been installed by Ormond. When he returns with Craig's corpse, Ormond admits that he hired Craig to murder Constantia's father and that he has just murdered Craig as well. He then makes it clear that he intends to rape Constantia. However, the lady has in her possession a knife which she tells us she was planning to clean her key with, and when Ormond informs her that he intends to rape her even if she commits suicide, Constantia changes her mind about killing herself and kills him instead.

At this point Sophia arrives on the scene and sees Ormond's horse grazing by the entrance. There is only a single light within. After speaking to Constantia through the locked door, Sophia procures help from the neighboring tenants, who force the door. She finds that her friend has fainted after killing her adversary.

Viewed objectively, Constantia's story is not only far-fetched, it is even inconsistent with the physical evidence reported by both women. Constantia reports the approach of Ormond, and Sophia later sees a solitary horse grazing outside. How then did Craig get to the
Perth-Amboy house? It is unlikely that he walked to this rural retreat. Although Constantia claims that she has been living alone at the mansion for two months, the more plausible inference to be drawn from the physical evidence is that she and Craig have been living there together. Only one horse is found because only one visitor, Ormond, has recently arrived.

Constantia claims that Ormond confessed to the murder of Craig, but the reader must find this difficult to believe. Since Ormond was not seen to arrive with Craig, he must have found the latter (by coincidence?) in the house and murdered him quietly. But the means of such a murder remain unfathomable since Ormond reportedly has no weapon when he threatens Constantia. Furthermore, Craig's corpse displays no visible wounds. A far more logical and probably explanation for the physical evidence is that Constantia, the apothecary's daughter, has poisoned her lover, who has become useless to her now that she has regained her father's wealth. Also, if Craig is as weary of Constantia as "Ormond" was of "Helena" in the interpolated parable, then Constantia may have an additional motive for Craig's murder. In any case, Constantia has the means, motive, and opportunity, whereas Ormond has none of these.

Constantia's account of how she kills Ormond is also suspicious. Her explanation for having a knife in her possession (to clean the key that she knows does not fit the lock) is the shallowest imaginable pretense. Witherington and other critics have commented upon the ease
with which Ormond, a formidable villain, is done in, but they have always assumed that Brown himself was to blame for the unconvincing final scene. Many find Ormond's passion for Constantia rather unconvincing. We are asked to believe that Ormond becomes a passionate animal so consumed with lust that he will rape Constantia at all costs, but is content to wait two months before even approaching her at Perth-Amboy. Constantia has previously informed him that she plans to depart immediately for Europe, yet he confidently waits two months before approaching her. Such a fluctuating passion is curious indeed. A more reasonable explanation for Ormond's delay is that he has no idea where she is. I have argued throughout this essay that Ormond never owned the Perth-Amboy property, and he therefore could not be expected to know where she was residing after she left Philadelphia. It has taken him this long to locate her, which accounts for the haste with which he approaches the house, since he is not certain that he will still find her there. It is also doubtful that Ormond has any intention of raping Constantia. More likely he has been swindled by Craig and Constantia and is simply concerned with recovering his losses. Therefore, he approaches the house quite openly, where a man contemplating rape and murder would surely be more secretive. He is murdered with ease because he is taken by surprise.

Other evidence also suggests that Constantia's account of her confrontation with Ormond is a lie. When Sophia approaches the house, she can see only one light through the keyhole, but she hears Constantia walking around within. Sophia hears the sound of a key turning in the lock and infers that someone is "engaged in unlocking." However, the sound of unlocking is the same as the sound of locking; it is more plausible to assume that Constantia is locking the door to prevent entrance than that she is attempting to unlock the door with a key that she already knows does not fit. By forcing Sophia to retreat for help, Constantia gains valuable time. No doubt the victims did not die where they are found by Sophia when she returns. Previously, she had peeked through the keyhole and seen a lamp on the lowest step of the staircase, but the light emitted from that lamp did not make visible the bodies of the two men which are later discovered on the floor at the bottom of the staircase. The whole scene closely parallels an earlier one where Ursula Monrose buries the dead Roselli by the light of a single lamp and is witnessed by the peeking Baxter. We are reminded of Miss Monrose's physical strength as she lugs the heavy body of her "father" into the grave she herself has dug. Constantia's strength is also formidable, and we are justifiably perplexed when we find that upon Sophia's return she has fainted. It is peculiar that she does not faint at the horror of having killed a man, but rather at finally being rescued by her best friend.

To summarize Constantia's entire narrative, I submit that it is a semiplausible fabric of lies designed to explain very incriminating
circumstances. Seen in this light, her narrative completely alters our opinion of Ormond. Critics from Shelley to the present have found him an archfiend and a villain, but I suggest that he is nothing of the sort. I have attempted to prove that there is real cause for doubt concerning most of the actions imputed to him by Constantia. He does not kill Mr. Dudley. He does not kill Thomas Craig. He does not drive a woman to suicide. He does not try to rape Constantia. He is merely a swindled man, a "mark."

Ormond's character, thus understood, is at least consistent in a way that the Ormond portrayed by Constantia never is; her Ormond is thoroughly unintelligible. Not only have many critics viewed him as inconsistent, but Sophia herself has to admit that "Ormond will, perhaps, appear to you an unintelligible being" (13), and she further remarks that concerning Ormond (and, by extension, Constantia) "to comprehend the whole truth with regard to the character and conduct of another, may be denied to any human being" (92). This basic inability to know the mind and heart of another person is the central philosophical statement of Ormond, and it determines both the content of the novel, with its maze of lies and impostures, and the form of the novel, with its unreliable narrative.

It is because of Constantia's lies that the character of Ormond becomes inconsistent and contradictory in both thought and action.

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Constantia's Ormond prides himself upon sincerity above all things, but he loves disguise and deception. According to his basic moral philosophy, he believes that it is not possible to aid others in finding happiness, yet he repeatedly offers help to the Dudleys. He believes the world is irreversibly corrupt; yet he has a plan to change the world through revolution. He is a cold, intellectual man who hates the merely voluptuous, but he is willing at the end of the novel to settle for physical rape, indeed necrophilia. He cries passionately that Constantia must be his wife in one scene, but shortly thereafter refuses even to contemplate an idea so loathsome as marriage. He is reportedly a brave warrior who kills five armed enemies in combat; then he hires Thomas Craig to murder old Stephen Dudley. These are not mere discrepancies between Ormond's thoughts and his actions, for such discrepancies would be understandable enough in human terms, as John Cleman has in fact argued. Rather with Ormond, as Constantia portrays him, thought contradicts thought; action contradicts action. Such contradictions are neither human nor intelligible according to normal psychology or, more important, good fiction.

The reason that Ormond seems such a mass of contradictions is that the thoughts and actions ascribed to him by Constantia belong to two different men: Ormond himself and Thomas Craig. I have already

suggested how the interpolated tale of Ormond and Helena Cleves is contrived by Constantia, who bases the story on her own relationship with Thomas Craig. In this way Craig's thoughts, actions, and character are attributed to Ormond and inconsistencies immediately arise. Where Ormond, the revolutionary, has a plan to change the world, Craig believes that the world is irredeemably corrupt and unchangeable. Ormond is open and generous; Craig believes in looking only to his own welfare. Ormond prides himself upon his sincerity, whereas Craig loves the disguise and deception of a con man. Ormond is a passionate, physical man capable of great violence and great love; Craig is a cool, intellectual (it is no doubt he who plays chess), passionless man who is greatly averse to the idea of marriage and who quickly grows tired of a voluptuous woman. The real Ormond would be entirely capable of rape and murder in battle, but completely incapable of hiring the murder of a defenseless old man.

I have analyzed most of the important parts of Constantia's story, but there remains another important strand of the tangled web yet to be unraveled, for Sophia's own narrative is called into question at several points. When Constantia attempts to relocate the gold-framed miniature of Sophia, she finds it has been sold to a young man of questionable character named Martynne, who had lived for some time in one particular boardinghouse and left suddenly without paying his bill. It is at this boardinghouse that Constantia meets Sophia, much to the surprise of both. In the ensuing excitement, Sophia never explains what she herself was doing there. We might accept the coincidental meeting
as innocent enough if Sophia had not later been accused by Miss Ridgeley of having an affair with Martynne. The young man had displayed the miniature of Sophia in public and claimed that she was his mistress. While Sophia denies the truth of the accusations and forces Martynne to retract his words, we remember the unbiased testimony of a shopkeeper, who claims that the young man bought the miniature because he knew or recognized the original. Sophia claims that she has never seen Martynne before she is formally introduced to him by Miss Ridgeley, but when she then turns up by accident at the same boardinghouse that Martynne has just vacated, the reader has cause for suspicion. Furthermore, Sophia's rather cavalier attitude toward her new husband, whom she does not hesitate to leave for a long period immediately after their wedding can only add to the suspicion.

There are, no doubt, strands of the tangled web that remain tangled even after this lengthy and detailed analysis of Ormond's narrative. However, it has not been my purpose here to provide an alternative reading of Ormond, although such a reading has inevitably presented itself. Nor has it really been my purpose to untangle the web of Ormond, but rather to suggest through careful analysis that the web does in fact exist. At every turn of the narrative—Constantia's tale, the Ursula Monrose story, the Helena Cleves story, and finally Sophia's own narrative—Brown carefully presents facts which belie what the reader is told. What I would like to suggest here is that Charles Brockden Brown, no matter what we say about him as a stylist, was a careful craftsman who was far ahead of his time in terms of narrative technique.
Arthur Mervyn, the title character of Charles Brockden Brown's novel of the same name, seems to be one of the most idealistic, purest, most virtuous characters in American fiction. Yet when one reads criticism of Brown's novel, one thing stands out: nobody likes him. Even critics who admire him compliment Arthur backhandedly. Warner Berthoff, for instance, finds Mervyn a "chameleon of convenient virtue" and refers to him as a "modern bourgeois teen-age Tartuffe."¹ Patrick Brancaccio sees Arthur as a "meddlesome, self-righteous bunglar who comes close to destroying himself and everyone in his path."²

Furthermore, it is not the change in mores during the past one-hundred and eighty years that makes for difficulties in perceiving the nature of the central character. Rather it is the truly intricate narrative which confounds and challenges the twentieth century reader. True, we do seem to have a low tolerance for showy virtue these days; even Natty Bumppo's genuine piety gets on our nerves. However, there is a difference between Natty in Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales and Arthur in Arthur Mervyn. We may wish the former would not sermonize, but we

²Brancaccio, p. 22.
never doubt his sincerity, for to dislike Natty would be to disapprove of virtue itself. Arthur is another matter, however, and many readers have come to feel that his piety is feigned, his virtue convenient, and his self-deprecation a species of calculated, phony modesty.

Brancaccio was the first to suggest that Arthur's character played a significant role in the resulting narrative. He terms the novel's narration "unreliable," claiming that "Arthur's tale is called into question through a complex set of narratives within narratives which provide the reader with conflicting views of the same events." Brancaccio is careful to qualify his theory of Arthur's unreliability by suggesting that the young man is "neither a simple innocent nor a conscious hypocrite," but is indeed self-deluded; thus the novel presents an "ironic interplay between Arthur's conscious and unconscious motivation."

Paul Witherington terms Brancaccio's reading of the novel "extreme," and seems to favor the argument of James Justus, who suggests that Arthur is simply in Brown's view a typical American following Franklin's doctrine of "enlightened self-interest" in a new land. Justus sees no irreconcilable conflict in the fact that Arthur's

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3 Ibid., p. 19.
4 Ibid., p. 27, 18.
"streak of self-interest has always been at least as strong as his rigid morality."\(^7\)

Despite Witherington's judgement that Brancaccio's argument about the unreliability of Arthur's narrative is "extreme," I would like to suggest that Brancaccio is not extreme enough. The narrator of the novel is indeed a "chameleon," as Berthoff dubbed him, but the evidence of the narrative suggests that there is no internal conflict between the conscious and sub-conscious motivation of the narrator. Rather, I maintain, he is a conscious liar who uses his pious protestations and innocent good looks as tools in his con-man's trade. The narrator is the novel in the sense that ambiguity of vice and virtue, as focused in the title character, is the novel's central thematic concern.

Dr. Stevens, the narrator of the novel's outer frame, pinpoints the main philosophical problem of the novel: the ambiguity of virtue and vice. It is the same question posed in Melville's *The Confidence Man*. How does one tell the real from the fake? Numerous critics have noted that the world of *Arthur Mervyn* is one of fraud, forgery, and duplicity, which coexist with honesty, sincerity and benevolence. However, it is important to note that the problem of discerning what is genuine bears upon the central character, Arthur Mervyn, since his version of the events he relates is challenged by other characters at every turn. Stevens' point of view focuses the question of ambiguity concerning young

\(^7\)Ibid., p. 313.
Arthur, who in Stevens' words is the object of "the most heinous charges." The good doctor admits that "wickedness may sometimes be ambiguous, its mask may puzzle the observer; our judgement may be made to falter and fluctuate. . . ." (218). Further, Stevens notes that:

A smooth exterior, a show of virtue, and a specious tale, are, a thousand times, exhibited in human intercourse by craft and subtlety. (218)

However, after bringing to our attention the possibility that evil may wear a mask of goodness, Stevens immediately contradicts himself by pointing out nothing but Arthur's appearance, his "simple but nervous eloquence," makes his story credible. The doctor also comments: "He that listens to his words may question their truth, but he that looks upon his countenance when speaking, cannot withhold his faith" (218). Stevens' contradictory conclusion then, based upon the narrator's appearance, is that "Surely the youth was honest" (218).

Dr. Stevens places the reader in the impossible position of telling us that his only reason for believing Arthur is that the young man looks honest ("... the face of Mervyn is the index of an honest mind") while we, as readers, cannot have such knowledge. Where Stevens judges from appearances (which he himself admits may be deceiving), we must judge Arthur through what he tells us. Stevens warns us that Arthur's tale is scarcely credible. Are we to simply accept Dr. Stevens personal judgement based on appearances, thereby ignoring his warning

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about the ambiguity of evil? Kenneth Bernard blythly asserts that we have to trust the narrator is anything in the novel is to make sense; he concludes that "It is Mervyn's virtuous impulses that in the end straighten everything out. If he is not constant, then nothing in the book makes sense." The opposite assertion can, however, also be said to hold true—that nothing in the novel will make sense as long as we trust the narrator. I insist that it is only when we heed the skepticism inherent in Stevens' remarks about the ambiguity of evil that we can see Mervyn in his true lights and make sense of the text of his narrative.

As Brancaccio points out, the novel is structured in such a way that the reader gets numerous versions of the same events. At one point in the novel the narrative is four layers deep—a tale within a tale within a tale within a tale. Most critics have found that this structure simply causes confusion, but in reality the exact opposite is true. The confusion in the novel is caused by the fact that the narrator is constantly lying, and only the complex framework, which provides a steady stream of testimony by which to correct Arthur's version of the various events, allows the reader to catch the narrator in those lies, thereby separating the truty from falsehood, the genuine


10Brancaccio, p. 19.
from the forgery.\footnote{It may be useful at this point to describe the framework of the novel. \textit{Arthur Mervyn} is divided into two parts. Dr. Stevens is actually the narrator of the first part, although most of it is Arthur's tale, purveyed to us via Stevens. For this reason there is no escape from referring to Arthur as the narrator. Within Mervyn's narration are a number of interpolated tales, two of which are told by Welbeck, others by minor characters. Within one of Welbeck's narrations is the history of the Lodi family. Dr. Stevens also introduces the second part of the novel, but although he is in evidence in the early chapters of this part, he quickly disappears and the narration shifts to Arthur, who takes up the story where Stevens leaves off.} In this sense the reader is allowed to address the central philosophical questions of the novel himself.

The answer to the question of what is real and what is forgery lies in accepting the proposition that the narrator of the novel is not only a conscious liar, but in fact a clever impostor. For \textit{Arthur Mervyn} is the story of one man's charade in a new land. By cleverly mixing lies with what he knows to be true and verifiable, Arthur Mervyn always appears to be telling the truth. Since part of what he says is demonstrably true, we are supposed to assume illogically that all of what he says \textit{should} be. If the narrator sometimes tells more than he needs to and is occasionally willing to reveal to the reader evidence which may tend to incriminate him, we must see that doing so is ultimately to his own interest, for to conceal events entirely or to lie openly is a much greater risk because such overt untruths may be disproven. In fact, on several occasions when he actually does lie about what happens, he is tripped up by the testimony of others who have no
reason to lie and then he must revise his own account (as we will see below). His brilliance as a con man derives from the fact that he tells the truth about events whenever possible, all the while ascribing false motives to himself and others, for as Dr. Stevens points out: "Motives are endlessly varied, while actions continue the same; an acute perception may not find it hard to select and arrange motives, suited to exempt from censure any action that an human being can commit" (218). No single character in the novel possesses enough information to unmask the narrator (with the exception of Stevens, who trusts him implicitly). But the reader is given as much information as he needs to unravel Mervyn's multiple deceits.

The first four chapters of the second part of Arthur Mervyn (the second part was published in 1800, one year after the first part), all present evidence from various sources which contradicts the narrator's version of the events constituting part one. The first chapter of part two contains the accusations of Wortley, the friend of Doctor Stevens who is nearly ruined when Welbeck absconds. The second chapter deals with the evidence presented by Mrs. Althorpe, who was a neighbor of the Mervyn family. The third chapter contains the narrative of Williams, the friend of the murdered Watson. The fourth chapter concerns evidence received from Mrs. Wentworth concerning her nephew, Clavering. The combined evidence presented in these successive chapters has even the credulous Stevens temporarily doubting his young friend.

Among these accusations made against the narrator, those of Mrs. Althorpe are the most serious, for the charges she makes are never
answered specifically by the narrator and her testimony is on several counts irreconcilable with his. Furthermore, Mrs. Althorpe has no reason to lie (although on one occasion Arthur has treated her rudely), and most of what she says is either verified by other neighbors or so easily verifiable as to render a lie on her part very foolish. Mrs. Althorpe tells us that Arthur Mervyn was a lazy, uneducated, cunning youth. According to her, he refused to take up the plow or in any way help with the manual labor on his father's farm. All of this is in direct contradiction to what the narrator tells Dr. Stevens: "... the trade of ploughman was friendly to health, liberty, and pleasure" (9) he says, further adding that "I cheerfully sustained my portion of the labour" (15). Moreover, the narrator insists that "I had no wish beyond the trade of agriculture, and beyond the opulence that one hundred acres would give" (18). In part two of the novel, after hearing Mrs. Althorpe's charges concerning his indolence, the narrator substantially revises his statements. "It is true," he admits, "that I took up the spade and hoe as rarely ... as possible" (326). He explains that his apparent laziness was in deference to his mother, who worried about his "delicate and feeble" frame, but he acknowledges that until her death he could not be convinced to perform any work. The narrator's attempts to reconcile these discrepancies in his testimony, after learning of Mrs. Althorpe's description of his character, are feeble at best; the reader is still left to ponder why a young man who so prides himself on his honesty and plain dealing should have misrepresented himself to Stevens in the first place.
Apart from his attitude toward farm work, the narrator is even less successful in refuting the testimony of Mrs. Althorpe on other matters. For instance, she informs Dr. Stevens that the Arthur she knew was boorish and uneducated, and that he had dropped out of school after attending only a very short while. She described him to be, like the rest of the Mervyn family, a functional illiterate. According to Mrs. Althorpe, Arthur's father could not even sign his name, and the mother, who could read but little, had all she could do to "decipher the figures in an almanac" (223). The son's ability, she informs us, "was not much greater" (223). Stevens finds this information scarcely credible, since he knows his young friend to be well-spoken and very knowledgeable. He asks Mrs. Althorpe if it were possible that Arthur could have acquired his education through private study; she replies that this was definitely not the case.

The narrator's self-proclaimed ignorance has been a thorny point for critics too, for everything about his speech, his actions, and his ideas belies the truth of his assertion. It will not do for us to argue that since Arthur insulted Mrs. Althorpe on one occasion, she may be exaggerating the details of the young man's ignorance in order to malign him. Such a lie would tend to excuse his boorish behavior towards her, since we could say that he simply knew no better. Furthermore, it would serve no purpose for Mrs. Althorpe to lie about a characteristic of the young man and his family that could so easily be investigated.

Indeed, there is a major discrepancy between the portrait of Arthur Mervyn that we receive from Mrs. Althorpe and that purveyed to us
through Stevens. Mrs. Althorpe's Arthur, a drop out from a country
grade school, is illiterate, or at best, semi-literate. The self-
education that the narrator claims is belied by Mrs. Althorpe's
testimony that "You might as well look for silver platter or marble
tables in his house, as for a book or a pen" (223). Yet the Arthur
Mervyn that Dr. Stevens meets is, despite his repeated assertions that
he is a country bumpkin, extremely well educated. The pen, he claims,
is his favorite tool, and indeed he is employed by Welbeck as a copyist.
His knowledge of Shakespeare is so thorough that he can spontaneously
and exactly quote an apropos line from the canon of Shakespeare's works.
During the course of the novel he demonstrates particular knowledge of
world geography and the history of the English Royal House of Stuart.
He is enough of a poet to compose "elegaic stanzas" (his own terminology)
beneath the miniature portrait of Clavering. His knowledge of law is
such that he can argue its finer points with a lawyer (and win!).
Finally, his acquaintance with Latin is so profound that he proposes to
translate a volume of Italian, a language he does not know, into English.

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12When the narrator attempts to claim the thousand dollar reward
offered by Mrs. Maurice, her lawyer informs him that the lady will not
pay unless she is legally forced to. The lawyer hints that to try to
compel her would result in embarrassing questions being directed at the
narrator, questions concerning how he came to be in possession of the
bonds in the first place. The narrator calmly replies to these insinua-
tions:

Whether a bond, legally executed, shall be paid,
does not depend upon determining whether the payer
is fondest of boiled mutton or roast beef. Truth,
in the first case, has no connection with truth in
the second.

The lawyer, not surprisingly, decides to pay the reward.
simply by intuiting the similarities between the Tuscan tongues. This country bumpkin, it seems, is little short of a renaissance man.

The narrator lamely asserts that this wealth of knowledge is to be attributed to the fact that he memorized the few books that he owned as a youth, but such an explanation is preposterous. Nor can we logically maintain that the obvious inconsistency in Arthur's character is due to Brown's faulty craftsmanship, a panacea to their misperceptions that critics would be well advised to surrender. For it is extremely unlikely that Brown would choose to emphasize the inconsistency in the character of Arthur Mervyn by having Mrs. Wentworth, an important minor character in the novel, comment that "such a one as you, with your education and address, may possibly have passed all your life in a hovel; but it is scarcely credible, let me tell you" (347).

Mrs. Althorpe makes a series of other charges against Arthur Mervyn as well, charges which are supported by the rest of the neighbors, who consider the young man to be "half an idiot." According to Mrs. Althorpe, it was young Arthur who made Betty Lawrence, who later marries Mervyn's father, a prostitute. Furthermore, Arthur is said to have made off with all his father's cash, as well as his best horse, when the young man left the Mervyn house for Philadelphia. After hearing this accusation by Mrs. Althorpe, the narrator denies the theft of the money, which he attributes to the wiles of Betty Lawrence, whom he claims has hoodwinked his father. As to the charge of seducing Betty, the narrator informs Stevens that he is innocent, but that he never took any pains to convince the neighbors of his innocence, although they universally
assumed his guilt in the matter. The narrator explains that he rejoiced in the fact that his neighbors despised him, for their hatred proved that their hearts were in the right place, since they were to be commended for condemning that which they though evil. Such a selfless attitude must seem strange to the reader in view of the fact that the narrator spends most of the novel attempting to vindicate his other actions to a great variety of people. Even more importantly, the narrator's abstract denial of any wrongdoing does not answer the specific charge of degrading Betty Lawrence. The narrator's claim that he never went out of his way to convince the neighbors of his innocence does not explain the specific comments he has allegedly made concerning Betty. After charging publicly that his father married a whore (does this sound like the pious Arthur of Stevens' acquaintance?), Arthur is accused by a neighbor of making her one, to which the young man reportedly replies: "If it were I that made her such, with more confidence may I make the charge" (226). If this were not enough, we are told that Arthur, who on more than one occasion exhibits a pious and moralistic outrage at the idea of a woman "polluting" herself through prostitution, calmly remarks about his father's impure wife:

... think not that I blame Betty. Place me in her situation, and I should have acted just so. I should have formed just such notions of my interest, and pursued it by the same means. (226)

Thus the picture that we get of young Arthur Mervyn is a contradictory one. It is important to note that it is the narrator who changes his account of specific incidents after hearing Mrs.
Althorpe's testimony, but even then the two pictures seem widely discordant. Even if all the facts tallied, which they don't, we would be justified in concluding that the spirit of the two character portraits—Mrs. Althorpe's of Arthur and Dr. Stevens' of Arthur—are extremely dissimilar. The Arthur Mervyn of Mrs. Althorpe's testimony is stupid, boorish, inconsiderate, insensitive, and cruel. Yet Dr. Stevens tells us that all one has to do is look at the young man to know that none of this is true.

All of the above evidence of irreconcilable discrepancy in the two portraits of Arthur leads to one bizarre but inescapable conclusion: the young man who is found by Stevens at the beginning of the novel, the young man who in fact narrates most of the story, is not Arthur Mervyn at all, but an impostor who finds the guise of country bumpkin well adapted to his necessity. This imposter must appear stupid and inexperienced in order to explain away his actions during the course of the novel, actions which always appear, even by Stevens' admission, highly culpable.

There are many indications in the novel that the narrator is an impostor. Arthur Mervyn, when he first meets Dr. Stevens, is supposedly eighteen years old, yet the doctor comments that "... no one who merely observed your manners, and heard you talk, would take you to be under thirty" (416). Indeed, the narrator seems truly chameleon-like to various acquaintances besides Stevens. To the doctor and those of his circle, Arthur is naive and innocent, but how different is the Arthur who presents himself to Philip Hadwin, the bully and man
of the world, whom the narrator with brashness and calculated impudence manipulates as if he were a mere child. Moreover, the narrator has the ability to see himself from the outside, as if he were someone else, and we see numerous examples of absurd posturing, presumably done for our benefit. For instance, when the narrator is surprised at the house of Mrs. Maurice by Williams, the friend of the murdered Watson, he portrays for us the way he himself looked to Watson: "My eyes sparkled with pleasure at this unexpected interview" (368). Throughout the novel the narrator builds his own persona in the minds of his new acquaintances so that they will place faith in him rather than what he says and does. His appeal is the same as Melville's Confidence Man: "trust me." He wins people over in this fashion, for as Stevens puts it: "If Mervyn has deceived me, there is an end to my confidence in human nature" (236).

Who, then, is this narrator, the impostor who calls himself Arthur Mervyn? When we make a list of necessary attributes, only one character in the novel comfortably fits the profile. The impostor must be a young man similar in appearance to the real Arthur, though an exact likeness is not necessary, since no one who knew Arthur on the farm ever meets him in the city, including Mrs. Althorpe. The impostor must be skilled with the pen and well educated. Most of all, he must be so well acquainted with Mervyn's homelife that he can relate details about that young man, details that he knows to be true, such as Arthur's occupation of knitting socks, which both the narrator and Mrs. Althorpe agree on.
The impostor who claims throughout the novel to be Arthur Mervyn is the man who repeatedly turns up in the story, the man who seems always to be on the periphery of the plot but who is in reality the center of it, the man who is reported by the narrator to be dead but who is seen alive and conversed with by someone who knew him well: the impostor is Clavering.

It is Clavering, the artist, who is so skilled with the pen that he would be of assistance in a scheme of forgery. It is Clavering who, having been educated in Europe, has the kind of in-depth knowledge of languages, history, world geography, and literature that the real Arthur cannot have—unless we assume that Mrs. Althorpe and her neighbors are a passle of unmotivated liars. Most importantly, it is Clavering, who, through his extended visit with the Mervyns, knows the intimate details of the young man's life.

Other evidence in the story also points to this conclusions. For instance, we remember that the house in Philadelphia which was rented by Welbeck and Clemenza has been formerly inhabited by the Clavering family, who have reportedly gone to Europe in search of their missing son. Shortly after the narrator arrives in Philadelphia he goes to this house and sits on the front steps. He tells us that he intends to beg there, but shortly thereafter he meets (by coincidence) the man who lives there. This man, Welbeck, hires him on the spot as a copyist, but does not immediately put him to work. Rather, Welbeck seems more anxious that the young man be clean, relaxed, and comfortable. Welbeck requests that the narrator make use of the more suitable clothes that have been left behind by the Claverings. These clothes are fancy French articles,
but the narrator tells us that he has no difficulty in learning how to wear them. He explains that "I remembered the style of dress used by my beloved Clavering" (48). He also informs us that the clothes were "fitted to my shape with the nicest precision" (48). The inference here—that these are the narrator's own tailored clothes—is unavoidable, and is underscored by his own ironic comment:

I could scarcely forebear looking back to see whether the image in the glass, so well proportioned, so gallant, and so graceful, did not belong to another. I could scarcely recognize any lineaments of my own. (48)

This sort of irony is again in evidence when Welbeck tells the narrator to "consider this house as your home" (50).

There is other evidence besides the above hints and suggestive coincidences that the house is indeed the narrator's former home. Later in the novel when the narrator returns to this house during the plague (he is looking for a place to die, he tells us), he and Welbeck are interrupted in the midst of an argument by a group of men at the front door who are clamoring for admission. Welbeck flees the premises, as we might expect, but the narrator, though he tells us he has done nothing wrong, hides in a secret attic room, the trap door of which is so well concealed that he could "escape the most vigilant search" (203). It is never explained how the narrator, who has lived in the Philadelphia house only a few days (if we believe him), can know of this secret compartment which Welbeck, who has lived there for many months, seems to be ignorant of. The problem vanishes when we realize that the narrator has lived in this house as a youth and knows it thoroughly.
Thus the physical evidence of the story suggests that the narrator of the tale is not really Arthur Mervyn at all, but Mrs. Wentworth's nephew Clavering, posing as the bumpkin Mervyn. Such a reading does not contradict any facts in the novel but rather explains numerous coincidences and contradictions. For instance, there is no reason to assume that there is a "powerful resemblance" between the features of Arthur and Clavering, as the narrator tells us there is.\textsuperscript{13} We know little about Clavering, and what we do know is muddled by the lies that the narrator has evidently told the Mervyn family. He has informed them (and, of course, as narrator, he informs us) that he (Clavering) was born of noble British parents and that he was banished to America and threatened with death if he should ever return. He tells the Mervyns that he has fallen in love with a girl his parents did not approve of. However, none of this story squares with what outside sources, including Mrs. Wentworth, tells us about Clavering. According to that lady, Clavering's parents have been residing in Philadelphia, not Britain, and far from having banished him, they have been for years urgently trying to find him. They have recently embarked for Europe to search for him there because he previously attempted to gain passage to the continent. Thus, Clavering's parents are in Europe when their son is reportedly seen alive in Charleston. We have no specific information as to how long the young man has been gone, but

\textsuperscript{13}Arthur's mother has reportedly noted a remarkable resemblance between the two men, but a more plausible explanation is that the narrator, by telling such a lie, covers the possibility of his being recognized as Clavering. He has already been recognized in Charleston, and he no doubt wishes to be prepared for another such incident.
the narrator claims that Clavering died three years ago on the Mervyn
farm, and the impression is that he has left his parents' home long
before then.

Since at the time the story actually begins (when Stevens finds
the plague-stricken narrator leaning against the wall), Arthur has no
relatives or friends in Philadelphia, and since Clavering's own parents
have recently departed for Europe, Clavering has run no risk of
exposure in returning to Philadelphia incognito.\(^1\) (His motivation for
the imposture will be discussed below.)

As I have suggested, *Arthur Mervyn* is a novel which abounds in
deceptions of various kinds, and the narrator's imposture, just dis-
cussed, is not the only one in the novel. It is agreed by Wortley and

\(^1\) The narrator runs two risks. If he should meet Mrs. Althorpe,
or anyone who knows the real Arthur Mervyn, his masquerade is ended. He
need not worry about meeting the real Arthur, who may be expected to die,
as did his brothers, from an hereditary defect before reaching his
eighteenth birthday. Young Arthur is approaching that birthday when he
leaves his father's farm. Even if he were in the city of Philadelphia,
there is little chance that he would have survived both his hereditary
defect and the plague as well. (The very fact that the narrator is alive
is additional proof that he cannot be the genetically defective Arthur,
and the real Arthur's absence from the scene should not trouble the
reader.) The narrator also runs the risk of being recognized as
Clavering. He has prepared for this possibility by concocting the story
that Mervyn and Clavering look alike. Clavering's parents are in Europe.
Mrs. Wentworth, Clavering's aunt, has not seen him in many years, and
we have no idea how the young man may have changed his appearance for
her benefit. If she does recognize him there is always the lame explana-
tion that there is a "powerful resemblance" between the two young men.
That Mrs. Wentworth is in fact suspicious of the narrator's appearance
is clear:

She fixed scrutinizing and powerful eyes upon
me . . . I was somewhat abashed by the closeness
of her observation. . . . She was evidently desirous
of entering into some conversation, but seemed
at a loss in what manner to begin. (60)
Thetford, as well as Thetford's conspirators, that Thomas Welbeck is "not what he ought to be" and will "some time or other, come out to be a grand impostor" (38). Indeed, much about the character of Welbeck is left unclear at the time of his death in the Philadelphia prison. Much of what is related to us through Welbeck's narrative (which is purveyed to us through the narrator as a tale within a tale in part one) does not agree with what we know about him from other sources. But the reader only meets Welbeck directly for a short period of time when Welbeck is sick in prison. In these scenes it is Stevens, not "Arthur," who tells us what transpires. The Welbeck that we see through Stevens' eyes is quite different from the Welbeck of part one as seen through "Arthur's." In part one Welbeck confesses (through the narrator) to the seduction of Watson's sister, to engaging in a scheme of forgery, and finally to the murder of Thomas Watson. Yet the reader must see that "Arthur" has a reason to lie about the character of Welbeck when we remember that it is only Welbeck's confession in part one which is instrumental in absolving the narrator from any complicity in the crimes mentioned above. It is interesting to note that in part two the Welbeck we meet directly never confirms any of the narrator's version of his own (Welbeck's) history.

What Welbeck has told others differs substantially from what the narrator tells us about him. He has claimed to others to be the father of Clemenza, and even the narrator admits that Welbeck's speech partook of a "foreign idiom." It is the narrator's insinuations concerning Welbeck and Clemenza which convince us that he is not her
father, despite a great deal of evidence which suggests that he is, in reality, Vincentio Lodi, senior.

Ironically, it is the absurdity of Welbeck's narrative, purveyed to us through "Arthur," that convinces us that the events related therein cannot possibly be true. Toward the end of Welbeck's narrative in part one, we are told that he (Welbeck) has been discovered by Watson, whom he knows to be bent upon revenge for the seduction of the latter's sister. Allegedly intent upon suicide, Welbeck burns all of his papers, though why, if he planned to kill himself, he is worried about them we are left to ponder. He is hastening to the river to drown himself when he is accosted by an acquaintance who requests that he talk to a plague-stricken young stranger, who we are told turns out to be Clemenza's brother. Welbeck immediately forgets his death wish and hastens to the young man's side. Not only are we encouraged to believe that Welbeck does this, but also he is said to remove this stranger to his own house, the very house he has just fled and where his nemesis Watson is known to be seeking him. Welbeck tends the young man, who gives him before he dies a manuscript written by Vincentio Lodi, senior.

Preposterous as this whole incident seems, it does what the narrator ("Arthur") wants it to do. It places in the hands of Thomas Welbeck, however coincidentally, the possessions of Vincentio Lodi, senior. Also, it partially absolves the narrator from stealing the manuscript later in the novel. For if he were to admit that the manuscript and its contents did in reality belong to the man calling
himself Thomas Welbeck, even the glib-tongued "Arthur" would be hard pressed to justify its theft.

Something else is also accomplished by this alleged chance meeting. When the narrator first meets Clemenza in Welbeck's house, she is greatly startled and appears frightened. The narrator explains that the reason for her reaction is that he ("Arthur") looks so much like her dead brother. Thus, if we believe the narrator's version of all the events, we must accept the absurd proposition of a triple resemblance in physical appearance. Clavering strongly resembles Mervyn, who is a mirror image of the Italian, Lodi. Of course, there is a much more plausible explanation. Clemenza's surprise at seeing the narrator may be explained much more rationally if we see that the narrator (Clavering) is her lover (who has abandoned her), and that he (not Welbeck) is the father of her unborn child. The physical evidence again proves conclusive in this matter. Clavering is said to have been in love with a foreign girl whom his parents did not approve of. Furthermore, this particular foreign girl, who seems to recognize the narrator, also has a portrait of him in her room, though the narrator tells us that it must have been a portrait of her brother, who coincidentally looks like the narrator. However, the narrator cannot help but remark that: "It was impossible to overlook its [the portrait's] resemblance to my own visage. This was so great that for a moment, I imagined myself to have been the original from which it had been drawn" (77). This reading makes Clemenza's shock at seeing "Arthur" so suddenly and her "tokens of uneasiness" around the narrator more
understandable, for her first reaction would seemingly have been joy if she truly believed the stranger to be her beloved brother. And if the young man truly did resemble her dead brother, her continued standoffishness is hard to understand, since the chance resemblance would then be pleasant to the young girl. On the other hand, if the young man is her seducer, then her actions are not only understandable, but indeed justifiable.

The events of the second part of *Arthur Mervyn* confirm our suspicions concerning the Mervyn-Welbeck-Clemenza triangle. The narrator twice visits Welbeck in jail, and the latter's attitude differs widely on those two occasions. During the first visit, when Stevens is not present, Welbeck openly vilifies the narrator. Upon recognizing him, Welbeck stares at him in "mortification and rage." Scholars, who are fond of drawing parallels between *Arthur Mervyn* and *Caleb Williams*, have insisted upon seeing in Welbeck's anger the unreasonable wrath of the guilty against the innocent; Welbeck hates the innocent Arthur for the same reason that Falkland despises the innocent Caleb. However, such a reading ignores the more plausible possibility that Welbeck's anger is in fact righteous. When the narrator describes for Welbeck the conditions of Clemenza in Mrs. Villar's whorehouse and the death of the newborn infant, Welbeck exclaims: ". . . you are the author of the scene you describe and of horrors without number and name" (322). This is the plain truth. Since the narrator has carefully shaped our opinion of Welbeck, we may never guess that Welbeck is here speaking literal truth and not simply raving like a madman; and as Clemenza's father,
"Welbeck" has every right to accuse her fatal seducer. In this light we should remember the scene in part one of the novel in which the narrator sees Welbeck emerging from Clemenza's room in the middle of the night. In that scene the narrator tells us that he has left his room for the purpose of taking a bath and that upon returning he has heard a sound from within Clemenza's chamber. He tells us that "Though not conscious of having acted improperly, yet I felt a reluctance to be seen" (69). Thus, when Welbeck finds the young man skulking outside Clemenza's room, the older man "assumed an expression in which shame and anger were powerfully blended. He seemed on the point of opening his mouth to rebuke me" (69). The reader has been so conditioned by the insinuations of the narrator to regard Welbeck as the guilty party that he doesn't see in Welbeck's anger and intended rebuke that it is the narrator who has been caught in a compromising position, not Welbeck. Later, when the narrator first visits Welbeck in jail, we must see the significance of Welbeck's threat: "Thank thy fate, youth, that my hands are tied up by my scorn; thank thy fate that no weapon is within reach" (323, my emphasis). We may not assume that Welbeck despises the narrator's innocence, for the use of the word "scorn" suggests that Welbeck's anger is righteous.

It is also important to note that Welbeck never confesses, except through the narrator, to any of the crimes he has been accused of. When Stevens enters the dying man's cell, the narrator informs Welbeck that he ("Arthur") has told Stevens everything; Welbeck replies: "Am I known to be a seducer and assassin? To have meditated all crimes,
and to have perpetrated the worst?" (247). The actual wording is very important here. The reader should note that Welbeck is not confessing to the crimes mentioned; he is simply asking if this is the way the world views him. At this point in the novel Welbeck realizes what no other character in the novel fully grasps, "... that under that innocent guise there lurked a heart treacherous and cruel" (247).

Thus during the first interview with Welbeck in jail, the dying man views with anger and astonishment the treachery and cruelty of the narrator. It is then difficult to account for the change in Welbeck's attitude during the second visit, when Dr. Stevens joins the narrator. Instead of raging against the treachery of young "Arthur," Welbeck informs Stevens that the young man is honest. This rapid transformation is only explicable if we see that Welbeck is indeed Clemenza's father and that he is trying to protect his daughter. In the previous interview, when the narrator was alone with Welbeck, the young man suggests that it might be arranged for Clemenza to join Welbeck in prison. Welbeck sees in this suggestion the thinly veiled threat. The reader may judge for himself whether Welbeck's response is the rational fear of a repentant seducer or the genuine love of a father who would at all costs keep his beloved child out of the vile prison:

What! he cried. What! Is she here? Ye powers, that have scattered woes in my path, spare me the sight of her! ... The moment that she appears I will pluck out these eyes and dash them at her feet. (321)
Welbeck continues:

No; keep her from prison. Drag her to the wheel or to the scaffold; mangle her with stripes; torture her with famine; strangle her child before her face, and cast it to the hungry dogs that are howling at the gate; but--keep her from a prison. (321)

The judgement that Welbeck is Clemenza's father is substantiated by Clemenza's conduct when the narrator visits her at Mrs. Villars'. Just as Welbeck's first concern is for Clemenza, so her first concern is for him. She shows immediate and strong aversion for the narrator, but when it becomes clear to Clemenza that "Arthur" does not intend to go away, her first question to him is: "Where is Senior Welbeck?" The narrator also admits that "The utter dejection which her features had lately betrayed [upon seeing "Arthur"] was now changed for an air of curiosity" (311). Are we to believe that Clemenza views Welbeck, if he is her seducer, with such ambivalent curiosity even after the death of the child? Furthermore, if Welbeck is Clemenza's seducer, how do we explain her continued aversion for the narrator:

When she discovered me, a faint start was perceived. She looked at me for a moment, then putting one spread hand before her eyes, she stretched out the other towards the door, and waving it in silence, as if to admonish me to depart. (310)

This entire sequence of scenes can only be correctly interpreted if we understand the relationship of the characters in them. Welbeck's attitude in jail changes drastically because he wants to protect his daughter from the narrator. He begs "Arthur" ("Save her Mervyn, Comfort her. Awaken charity for her sake") to shield his daughter and agrees
not to implicate him, instead taking the entire blame for the narrator's crimes so that none may fall upon his daughter. Likewise, Clemenza's concern for her father, "Welbeck," becomes understandable, as does her strong aversion for her seducer, who, despite his protestations of innocence, has abandoned her.

Once we see that the narrator of the novel is not really Arthur Mervyn at all, but Clavering posing as Mervyn, we find that much of what the narrator has told us becomes highly suspect. If Welbeck is really the father of Clemenza Lodi, then how much of what is imputed to him by Clavering is actually his own doing? In light of the hypothesis I have propounded above, at least four major scenes in the novel must be reevaluated: the seduction of Mervyn's sister by Colvill, the seduction of Watson's sister by Welbeck, the murder of Thomas Watson, and the death of Susan Hadwin.

In examining the Colvill incident, we must return to the testimony of Mrs. Althorpe. She verifies what the narrator tells us near the end of part one concerning a seducer named Colvill. At first glance this corroboration suggests the narrator's truthfulness in this matter, especially since Mrs. Althorpe seems to know so much about the Mervyn family; she discusses the death of Arthur's mother and his brothers, the seduction of his sister by Colvill, and the details about Betty Lawrence. What must strike the reader as conspicuous in its absence, however, is that there is no mention made by Mrs. Althorpe of the visit to the Mervyn farm made by Clavering, an event made much of by the narrator. The fact that Mrs. Althorpe, who knows nearly everything else
about the Mervyn family, knows nothing of the mysterious young man who supposedly looks like Arthur, and who mysteriously dies while staying with the Mervyn family, seems to corroborate Mrs. Wentworth's view that this event never took place; it also supports the thesis of this essay. However, the fact that Mrs. Althorpe has never heard of Clavering merely proves that the young man did not use his own name while staying in Chester County. The inference that Clavering was using the name of Colvill could well account for Mrs. Althorpe's apparent ignorance. Further, we know that Clavering at that time was trying to elude the search of his parents and it would certainly make sense that he would adopt an alias for this purpose. Moreover, what we know of Colvill is congruent with what we know of Clavering; Colvill is an educated young man who arrives in Chester County on foot and accepts the job of country schoolmaster; during his stay he is extremely secretive and is not discovered to be a villain until it becomes obvious that Mervyn's sister has been seduced; whereupon, Colvill flees the scene.

It is important to remember that the narrator has attempted to conceal this seduction from the reader. When the narrator first tells Dr. Stevens his (that is, Mervyn's) history, he completely neglects the Colvill incident, telling Stevens that there is some genetic defect in the Mervyn family which has caused the death of all the Mervyn children before they reached the age of eighteen. It is only later in the novel, after the murder of Watson, that the narrator mentions Colvill, and then it is under the most preposterous circumstances. At that point the narrator has returned to Welbeck's house where he informs us that he
intends to die in peace. He goes upstairs and hears someone inside Welbeck's locked study. When a voice inside tells him to go away, the narrator says he recognizes the voice of Colvill. (Of course, the man in the study is really Welbeck, who is disguising his voice.) The narrator then explains this bizarre circumstance. Welbeck, after swimming the river, has been found by the seducer of Mervyn's sister and has been nursed back to health by the formerly heartless Colvill, the seducer recently turned humanitarian, whose voice Welbeck has decided on the spur of the moment to imitate—though for what purpose the reader is left to ponder. Nevertheless, the imitation is so perfect that the narrator immediately recognizes not the voice of Welbeck who is inside, but that of his sister's seducer, whom he has not seen in years. To credit such a preposterous tale requires more than the usual suspension of disbelief. Its sole purpose is to explain how the narrator has come yet again to be in the company of a man he has told us is a murderer.

As we begin to see through the narrator's lies, events in *Arthur Mervyn* begin to form a recurring pattern in which there are no wild coincidences, like the alleged meeting between Welbeck and Colvill, or the coincidental meeting between Welbeck and Vincentio Lodi, Junior in part one. *Arthur Mervyn* is the story of consistent imposture, in which the narrator imputes his criminal acts to others. His character remains consistent throughout the novel. He seduces both Clemenza and Arthur's sister, and then coldly abandons them. With this in mind, we should reexamine the alleged seduction of Watson's sister by Welbeck.
In Welbeck's narrative in part one, he confesses (through the narrator) to the seduction of Watson's sister, but in view of my claim that Welbeck is Clemenza's father, Vincentio Lodi, Senior, this confession—or rather the narrator's account of it—becomes highly suspect. No reason exists to doubt that someone using the name of Welbeck has seduced the young woman in question, since we know that Watson was searching for a man named Welbeck. But the man presented by the narrator as Welbeck (Clemenza's father) seems an unlikely candidate. We know that he is physically not very attractive; and if he is Clemenza's father, as I have attempted to demonstrate, then it becomes even more improbable that he is the guilty party. We are even more likely to rule out Welbeck as the seducer when we remember that Clavering, who I have suggested has seduced two other girls, has recently himself been seen in Charleston, the scene of the seduction, and conversed with by "one who knew him well" (238). The evidence of the outsider who cannot be mistaken and who has no reason to lie is strong evidence that the narrator has not only lied about Clavering's death to Mrs. Wentworth, but also is using his various lies to disguise his own culpability.

Much textual evidence suggests that everything "Arthur" attributes to Thomas Welbeck is actually his own doing. For instance, the narrator would have us believe that Welbeck not only concocted the scheme of forgery, but actually engaged in counterfeiting. Such a tale is difficult to credit, however, if we remember that Welbeck has a ruined hand, which makes it necessary for him to hire the narrator as a scribe in the first place. It is the narrator who is skilled with the
pen, not Welbeck. Furthermore, we should remember the scene in which the narrator attempts to convince us that he inadvertently, through ignorance, destroyed twenty thousand dollars worth of genuine bills because Welbeck, a man the narrator has repeatedly declared to be a liar, said they were forged. It is far more plausible to suggest that the narrator destroys these bills because he knows they are forged, having forged them himself, and that he destroys them because they are evidence against him if found by the angry men who are at that very moment banging on the door for admittance.

The reason that the narrator is able to escape calumny is that he repeatedly claims to have been Welbeck's unwitting pawn, whereas the evidence suggests that Welbeck is the pawn of the narrator. This also seems to be the case with regard to "Welbeck's" plan to defraud Mrs. Wentworth. The narrator tells us that Welbeck has conceived of a plan whereby he can substitute Clemenza in the affections of Mrs. Wentworth, if he can only convince her that her nephew Clavering is dead. The narrator would have the reader believe that his informing Mrs. Wentworth that her nephew is in fact dead is unpremeditated, when we must realize that what happens in that first interview is carefully planned. Indeed, Mrs. Wentworth herself does not believe in this coincidence, as her careful scrutiny and questioning of the narrator indicate. In fact, Welbeck's alleged plan to defraud Mrs. Wentworth seems half baked, for how would convincing Mrs. Wentworth that her nephew is dead insure that she will automatically transfer her affections to the first pregnant
foreign girl who happens along? The reason that Welbeck's plan makes only partial sense is that we have been told only part of the plan. No doubt Mrs. Wentworth is also to be told that Clemenza bears Clavering's child (which, as I have argued, happens to be true). However, the narrator cannot tell us this without revealing that Welbeck is not Clemenza's lover and not the father of her child. It is not more plausible to suggest that this plan is the narrator's, since Welbeck and Clemenza would have no way of knowing about the relationship between Mrs. Wentworth and Clavering unless the narrator told them? In this way, the narrator can get his hands on his aunt's money without revealing his identity. Clearly, he does not wish to be discovered by his parents; furthermore, his crimes may require him to continue the imposture.

Thomas Welbeck, then, is neither a seducer nor a forger. But is he a murderer? Again, physical evidence suggests that he is not. Indeed, since he is not the seducer of Watson's sister (as I have argued), then Watson would have no quarrel with him (we remember that Watson knows the seducer by sight as well as by name—thus the man he is looking for is the narrator, Clavering). Furthermore, the account of the murder, as related to us by the narrator, simply does not make sense.

In order to examine the episode of the murder of Watson, it will be helpful to summarize the narrator's version of the event in part one. The young man tells us that he has returned home after discovering the nature of Thetford's plan to defraud Welbeck. So distraught is he by the discovery which he made in the afternoon that he has absentmindedly
walked around in the fields until dark, whereupon he returns to find Welbeck missing. After waiting in vain for Welbeck's return, and finding himself alone in the house, the narrator retires to the bath area, leaving a lighted candle in the hall. When he returns from the bath, the candle is gone.

He begins to investigate this mysterious occurrence by searching through Clemenza's room. Even the narrator admits to the illogic of this proceeding, admitting that he has "no precise object" for doing so. However, he finds the portrait of a man who looks exactly like himself and also a letter which he is about to read when he hears a gunshot. Hastening downstairs to Welbeck's room, the narrator finds it locked. It then occurs to him that the gunshot may have originated in the study, which is on the second floor (where the narrator was originally). In the study he finds Welbeck with the corpse of Watson. Welbeck then proceeds to tell the narrator his entire history; the seduction of Watson's sister, the scheme of forgery, the theft of Lodi's property, and finally the murder. Watson, intent upon revenge, has handed Welbeck a pistol with which to defend himself, and Welbeck, though overmatched, has killed his adversary. Welbeck, who again determines to commit suicide, nevertheless exacts a promise from the narrator that he will not reveal any of what he has been told, and for reasons never made sufficiently clear, the usually pious narrator agrees to this criminal arrangement. The two men then lug the body of the murdered man into the cellar and prepare to conceal it; the narrator
informs us that he is in a semi-trance during this period. When Welbeck goes back upstairs to find a spade, the narrator thinks that he has been locked in the cellar with the corpse and that Welbeck has no intention of returning. In groping through the dark passages in the cellar, the narrator walks into a wall and bloodies his nose. Welbeck, to the narrator's surprise (and the reader's) returns with the spade and digs Watson's grave. Welbeck then gives the narrator Watson's personal belongings and the two men flee.

The narrator's version of these events is so absurd that the logical mind boggles. Physical evidence and what we later learn from outside sources contradict the tale at every turn. The narrator tells us that he is alone in the quiet, empty house, but does not hear the two men enter, although, according to Welbeck, Watson is in a rage and slams his fist on the table; although the two men argue loudly, the narrator hears nothing. Nor when he is upstairs searching through Clemenza's room, which we know to be near Welbeck's study, does the narrator hear the two men quarreling. The first thing he hears is a gunshot. Welbeck later claims that two shots have been fired, but that Watson's, though it had been "leveled by an eye that never before failed," (100) missed its mark. Even Welbeck, in the narrator's version of his tale, is at loss how to explain how he has won the duel against a more experience marksman, especially since his own weapon was "negligently raised." When Welbeck explains that the reason the narrator heard only one shot was that "Both triggers were drawn at the same instant," (100) an improbable tale becomes a ludicrous one.
Furthermore, the entire account is undercut by the testimony of Williams, the friend of Watson, who claims to have discussed with the young man on several occasions what action he would take when he found his sister's seducer. Watson's reply throws additional doubt upon the narrator's testimony:

[Williams] . . . would you stab or pistol him?

[Watson] No! I was not born for an assassin. I would upbraid him in such terms as the furious moment might suggest, and then challenge him to a meeting, from which either he or I should not part with life. I would allow time for him to make his peace with Heaven, and for me to blast his reputation on earth, and to make such provision for my possible death, as duty and discretion would proscribe. (234)

All of the motives for abstaining from immediate violence fit the character of Watson as we know him, but the last one mentioned above, that he would settle his own affairs before risking death, is especially important since we know Watson to have been carrying large sums of money which were not his. Under these conditions it seems unlikely that Watson would have so lost his head as to forget such well-considered and virtuous motives.

Physical evidence also belies the truth of the narrator's version of events. I have already argued that Watson's quarrel is with the narrator (who is the seducer) and not Welbeck (who was with his daughter, Clemenza, at the time), and the details of the narrator's account suggest that he, not Welbeck, is Watson's murderer. The narrator's account of his fumbling around in the darkness of the cellar and getting a bloody nose does nothing more than establish clumsily a
feeble excuse for his clothes' being covered with blood. When Welbeck sees the narrator, however, no blood is proceeding from "Arthur's" nose. The narrator explains: "The blood, by some inexplicable process of nature, perhaps by the counteracting influence of fear, had quickly ceased to flow" (107).

If further proof is necessary, the narrator's account of the murder makes complete hash of the character of Welbeck, whom the narrator has portrayed as a villain. If Welbeck is the kind of man, self-willed and capricious, that the narrator has told us that he is, why does he return to the cellar with the spade? The reader is surprised when Welbeck returns because such an action is a violation of his character as we know him. Even more significant is Welbeck's giving to the narrator the personal possessions of Watson, for in this instance we see Welbeck behaving in direct contradiction to earlier actions ascribed to him by the narrator. When Welbeck allegedly comes into the possessions of the dead Lodi, he makes personal use of them. Later in the novel the narrator tells us that Welbeck claimed them as his own. Yet when placed in a similar position with respect to the large sums of money being carried by Watson, the villainous Welbeck blythly hands them over to the narrator without so much as a scruple. Yet we realize that the narrator must tell the story this way, or else how can he explain being in possession of Watson's property.

Viewed according to the hypothesis I have suggested above, the characters of both the narrator and Welbeck are consistent. Welbeck is in fact the pawn in the whole scheme of things, the pawn which the
narrator claims himself to be. Seen in this fashion, the flight of the
two men across the river makes a good deal more sense. According to
the narrator's account, the reader is left to wonder why Welbeck insists
upon the narrator's accompanying him across the river and why he
requires from the young man a pledge of silence if Welbeck intends to
commit suicide. If suicide were his purpose, Welbeck could just as
easily drown by jumping from the river's edge, thus making the theft of
the boat and the further complicity of the narrator unnecessary. But
the narrator, I insist, is not the accomplice. It is the narrator who
insists upon flight, and if anyone insists upon a vow of silence, it is
he, not Welbeck. Understanding that the narrator, and not Welbeck, is
the murderer of Watson, places the dramatic disappearance of Welbeck
while crossing the river in a different light. If he hasn't committed
the murder, why should he wish to commit suicide?

A particularly sinister explanation for Welbeck's hasty
departure suggests itself when we see that it is Welbeck who at this
juncture is accompanying a ruthless murderer bent upon his silence.
Seen in this light, Welbeck's suddenly jumping overboard suggests that
he is frightened of the narrator, and viewed in conjunction with the
fact that the narrator unaccountably loses an oar when searching for
Welbeck (surely "Arthur" has used it to assault his accomplice, for
Brown does not emphasize physical detail to no purpose), such a reading
makes more sense than a suicide attempt. This reading would also
explain the conduct of Welbeck in part two when the two men meet once
again in Welbeck's (the Clavering family's) house. The narrator informs
us that when Welbeck hears the narrator outside the door of the study, 
the former disguises his voice so as not to be recognized. It is 
entirely plausible to suggest that the elder man still fears for his 
life, being confronted once again by a man who has already attempted 
to take it.

The events which take place on the Hadwin farm bear examining 
because they follow the patterns established by the narrator earlier in 
the novel. When he is in trouble in the city (as the narrator is after 
the murder of Watson) he sets out for the country to elude his persuers. 
If the narrator is Clavering, as I have argued all along, we see history 
repeating itself in the Hadwin episodes. Just as Clavering appeared in 
Chester County (using the name of Colvill), he now ingratiates himself 
upon the Hadwins (using the name of Mervyn). He stays with them for 
some time while the creditors of "Welbeck" are searching for both men. 
However, the narrator immediately returns to the city when the chaos 
occasioned by the plague makes it safe for him to do so. His ostensible 
purpose for returning to Philadelphia is to search for Wallace, Susan 
Hadwin's fiance, but he spends a good deal of time searching through 
houses which he enters unannounced. His actions, if we disregard his 
pious protestations, are not unlike those of modern looters during 
crisis situations. Moreover, the narrator becomes alternately ill and 
well again as the occasion demands.

There is every reason to believe that the narrator's hasty 
departure from the Hadwin farm had nothing to do with finding young 
Wallace. We remember that he leaves without telling anyone his purpose,
and shortly thereafter, Mr. Hadwin, who has stubbornly refused to enter the city during the plague to look for Wallace, arrives there unexpectedly. The narrator tells us that upon being informed of his nephew's (Wallace's) death, Mr. Hadwin quickly returns to Malverton. The old man dies shortly thereafter of the plague he contracts in the city. It is weeks after these events, during which time the narrator is convalescing with Stevens, before "Arthur" himself returns to Malverton. (He leaves for Malverton shortly after he is recognized and accused by Wortley.) "Arthur's" behavior when he returns to Malverton is, by his own admission reprehensible. When he arrives, he is informed that Mr. Hadwin is dead and Susan is dying. He is recognized by the old servant Caleb, who tells Susan that he has arrived. Upon hearing this information, Susan is heard to shriek. The narrator explains this circumstance by suggesting that Caleb must have thought he was Wallace, and that the shock and joy of his return was too great for Susan to bear. However, such an explanation is difficult to credit when we remember the description of Susan when she rushes into the kitchen where the narrator is standing:

Susan rushed into the room, pale, emaciated, haggard, and wild. She cast a piercing glance at me, uttered a feeble exclamation, and sunk upon the floor without signs of life. (261)

A more plausible explanation is that Susan (and Caleb) know full well who has returned, and that she shrieks at his return (as does Clemenza) because he is her seducer. He has clandestinely left Malverton for the same reason that he secretly left Chester County after seducing
Mervyn's sister, and for the same reason he left Charleston after
seducing Wallace's sister. Such a reading would convincingly explain
Mr. Hadwin's sudden change of heart about entering the plague stricken
city. He has not been searching for his daughter's fictional fiance
(now the reader understands why the narrator in his version of events
must find and save Wallace, who nevertheless never returns to the
Hadwin farm); he has been searching for his daughter's seducer. We
have only the narrator's word for the brief meeting which supposedly
took place between Mr. Hadwin and "Arthur" in Philadelphia.

Such a reading also suggests an obvious motive for the narrator's
bizarre insistence upon immediately and secretly burying Susan. Even
"Arthur" admits that it was wrong to do so, but the reader does not
suspect that a much more serious crime has been committed than a mistake
in judgement; however, we should recall that we have only the narrator's
word for the fact that the young girl is dead. "Arthur" tells the
reader that the girl dies, but he does not awaken her slumbering sister,
nor does he immediately mention Susan's death to Old Caleb. Instead,
he pays a visit to a neighbor, and upon returning hands Caleb a spade
and informs the old man of his intention to bury Susan without further
ado. Caleb understandably balks, whereupon the narrator informs us
that he secretly buries the young girl anyway, while her sister slept
and the old man sat unaware in the kitchen. The narrator's only comment
on these odd activities is that "It seems as if I acted with too much
precipitation" (268).
To suggest that the narrator has buried Susan Hadwin alive is not as outlandish as it may at first seem, when we remember that in all probability two characters in the novel have already met just such an end. The dialogue of the hearse drivers clearly suggests that the evil Thetford was placed in his coffin before he was dead:

... it wasn't right to put him in his coffin before the breath was fairly gone. I thought the last look he gave me, told me to stay a few minutes. (134)

Similarly, the narrator himself suggests that Watson was not dead when he was buried by Welbeck and himself:

Glancing vaguely at the countenance of Watson, my attention was arrested by a convulsive motion in the eyelids. This motion increased, till, at length the eyes opened, and a glance, languid but wild, was thrown around. (104)

If we believe the narrator's account of the events leading up to the shooting of Watson, his silence upon noting the movement of Watson's eye is unaccountable; however, his motive for silence is all too clear if he is, as I have maintained, the one who shot Watson to begin with.

The narrator's behavior after he buried Susan Hadwin also suggests that he is her murderer. At this point in the story, "Arthur" is unaware of the fact that Eliza, Susan's younger sister, has an uncle who, upon the death of her father, will become her legal guardian. When the narrator does find this out, he tells us that he and Eliza find her father's will (which proclaims the uncle's guardianship and gives him sole ownership of the farm), and that Eliza destroys it. However, old Caleb's version of these events is quite different; he claims that
narrator convinced young Eliza to destroy the will. When they leave
the Hadwin farm, Arthur and Eliza take all the money, and Caleb testifies
that they were heading for town, not overland to the nearest neighbor's
residence, as the narrator previously testified. It is significant to
note that the narrator informs us on numerous occasions that Eliza is
the girl of his dreams, but once he finds out that the farm has a
mortgage on it, and that there is no way he can become Eliza's legal
guardian and take control of the property (now that Susan is gone), the
narrator quickly loses interest in Eliza, who he tells us is immature.
Instead, he falls in love with a dark, diminutive, sickly Jewess, who
is six years his senior, whom he first meets in a brothel, and who
happens (incidentally) to be rich. He can afford to give up his other
schemes for such a prize as Ascha.

Judging from the critical response to Brancaccio's pioneering
essay on Brown's use of the unreliable narrator, there is little doubt
that the arguments I have presented in this essay will be viewed radical
and extreme by some. Therefore, knowing full well how far out on a limb
I am, I see no reason not to make yet another "extreme" assertion. In

15 It is difficult and perhaps senseless to ascribe the various
tokens of racism in the novel to either the author or narrator, but it
is important to note that Brown could not have been ignorant of the
dramatic effect of having his narrator fall in love with a Jew. The
contemporary reader was to note the contrast between the pretty,
innocent Eliza and the dark Jewess, Ascha.

Earlier in the novel, when Arthur shares a coach with two black
girls, he comments to the reader on how much they look like monkeys,
and when he later meets a young, black, servant girl, he remarks to us
that in order for her to be pretty, all she needed was skin of a "lighter
hue."
my opinion, Brown intended a sequel to *Arthur Mervyn*.\(^{16}\) Any reading of the novel as it stands, including mine, will leave some loose ends. For instance, no critic seems to know any more what to do with the baby found in Mrs. Thetford's bed than the bewildered Mrs. Thetford. But there are numerous indications and evidences in the novel that a sequel was intended to clear up many of these loose ends.

The final sentence of the novel in which the narrator suggests that he will not pick up his pen again until he has been made the happiest of men by marrying Ascha Fielding seems to suggest the novel's lack of finality— that the longed for event may not come to pass. There is also the matter of "Arthur's" dream—that Ascha's husband will return from the dead to haunt him—which is given undo emphasis, if nothing more were to be made of it. Moreover, there are two strong indications in particular which hint at a sequel. The first is the fact that Mrs. Wentworth, the only character in the novel who remains to the end skeptical of both the narrator's motive and identity, has asked him to write his entire narrative down (which is his pretense for taking up the narrative where Stevens left off). "Arthur" admits that Mrs. Wentworth's is a curious request, but he does not appear to see

\(^{16}\)I cannot claim this novel idea as my own. In a graduate seminar given at The University of Arizona, Professor John McElroy suggested the possibility. Interestingly enough, everyone present agreed and noted the various indications in the novel that a sequel must have been planned. However, I have never seen such a suggestion in print, and one must admit that there is no extant manuscript to suggest its implementation. Nevertheless, Paul Allen in *The Life of Charles Brockden Brown*, the previously unpublished biography, recently printed by Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints, 1975, claims that all of Brown's novels were unfinished and that Brown purposely left openings so that he would be able to resume his subject "as his future leisure or inclination might dictate" (388).
that the lady is still suspicious and has the good sense to get his statement in writing. Surely Brown would not tantalize us with such a device if he did not intend to gratify our curiosity at a later date.

The second indication of a sequel is even more intriguing, for it comes at the end of part one, not part two of *Arthur Mervyn*. At this point in the novel, the narrator has returned to Welbeck's house and burned the notes he has told us were forged. When an angry group of men force their way into the house, the narrator hides in a narrow, secret compartment in the attic. That compartment is described as long, low, and narrow: "... one studious of concealment, might rely upon its protection with unbounded confidence" (204). In that compartment the narrator tells us that he finds something "sufficient to set me afloat on a sea of new wonders and subject my fortitude to a new test--" (204). Of course, we never find out what it is that "Arthur" sees there, but there can be little doubt that whatever it was was important in terms of "Arthur's" narrative, for he tells Stevens that he absolutely refuses to divulge what he saw in the recess. Nevertheless, he admits that concerning what he saw: "... consequences may hereafter flow, deciding on my peace and life."17 Since no such consequences have yet ensued by the end of part two, we may at least speculate that more on the subject of *Arthur Mervyn* was intended by its author.

17I have attempted in this essay to deal simply with the facts of the narrative and what those facts suggest. To speculate on what the narrator sees in the recess would be pure conjecture, since nowhere in the text have I been able to find so much as a hint as to what is concealed there.
CHAPTER 5

EDGAR HUNTLY

Early criticism on Edgar Huntly claimed that an unnatural cleavage existed between the central narrative about the title character and the long, interpolated tale about Clithero Edny. Recent critics, however, have stressed the thematic and psychological unity of this novel and emphasized the close parallels that exist between the tales of Clithero and Edgar. Indeed, the parallels have by no means been fully explored, and Edgar Huntly might even be seen as structurally the simplest and soundest of Charles Brockden Brown's major novels.

However, despite the novel's relative simplicity in comparison to, say, Arthur Mervyn, which Brown was composing concurrently, it remains Brown's most ambiguous work. I have argued that in the previous novels—Wieland, Ormond, Arthur Mervyn—the author presented the reader with a complex fabric of events and conflicting reports of those events.


from which the reader is able to discern narrative unreliability. In the case of *Wieland* Clara lies because she does not understand the bizarre truth about herself. In *Ormond* the story is related by a woman, Sophia Courtland, who has been deceived by her close friend Constantia Dudley, a cunning and resourceful liar, as well as a murderess. *Arthur Mervyn*, I have suggested, is the story of an impostor's charade. Furthermore, in all of these novels the events of the narrative themselves are repeatedly called into question. Crimes are imputed to characters who are not in truth guilty of committing them. Carwin, Ormond, and Welbeck are little more than scapegoats.

With a single important exception, this is not the case with *Edgar Huntly*. Except for the murder of Waldegrave, the events reported by Edgar and Clithero are true. Edgar kills the five Indians just as Clithero kills Arthur Wiatte and attempts to murder his benefactress, Mrs. Lorimer. The uncertainty posed is one of motivation. We do not question what Edgar and Clithero have done so much as why they have done it. Are they motivated by benevolence as they claim?

Edgar, like the narrator of *Arthur Mervyn*, stresses the paramount importance of pure motives. As Huntly puts it, "Proofs of a just intention are all that are requisite to exempt us from blame."  

We would do well, however, to remember the warning of Dr. Stevens in *Arthur Mervyn* concerning the matter of proof with regard to motivation:

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"Motives are endlessly varied, while actions continue the same; an acute penetration may not find it hard to select and arrange motives, suited to exempt from censure any action that an human being can commit." 4

Even more significantly, the issue of motivation is also obscured by the question of epistemology, for as Edgar declares late in the novel: "How little cognizance have men over the actions and motives of each other! How total is our blindness with regard to our own performances" (267). This is the central philosophical assertion of the novel. It belies Edgar's earlier statement regarding his own self-perception: "What light has burst upon my ignorance of myself and of mankind! How sudden and enormous is the transition from uncertainty to knowledge!" (6). For despite Edgar's claim to self-knowledge, more than one critic has come away from the novel feeling that Edgar remains to the bitter end, "the man who was unknown to himself." 5

Although Kenneth Bernard's pioneering essay, "Edgar Huntly: Charles Brockden Brown's Unsolved Murder," 6 has been attacked as "literalistic," 7 there can be little doubt that his thesis that Edgar Huntly murders his friend Waldegrave is correct. Bernard correctly sees that the "tensions generated by the book" require that Edgar be the murderer. Further evidence, overlooked by Bernard, who focuses on the

4AM, p. 218.
5Alderson, p. 7; Kimball, p. 224; Schulz, p. 332.
7Alderson, p. 9.
psychological necessity of Edgar's unwitting deed, supports this thesis. In the Introduction to a little read fragment entitled "Somnambulism," which was published in his Literary Magazine and American Register, Brown tells his readers that the story which follows is based upon an actual event reported in The Vienna Gazette, on June 14, 1784, concerning a young man discovered to have murdered the woman he supposedly loved. He had warned her not to go upon a certain journey at night but was ignored. When circumstantial evidence points to the young man as the murderer, both the police investigators and the doctors who examine him agree that the deed had been performed when he had been sleepwalking and was entirely "unknown to himself." The story which follows this editorial introduction, while certainly by Brown, is probably an early composition; it closely adheres to the details of the Gazette story, and from that source Brown seems to have appropriated the phrase "unknown to himself," which he used as the subtitle to his lost novel, Skywalk; or, the Man Who was Unknown to Himself. Obviously, the three works—"Somnambulism," Skywalk, and Edgar Huntly—are closely related. Skywalk was to have taken place in a remote wilderness called "Skywalk," which Brown changed to "Norwalk" in the later novel. From William Dunlap's Diary we also learn that one of the principle characters of Skywalk was named Lorimer (as in Huntly). Also, the scene in Edgar Huntly where Clithero fortuitously "discovers" a dagger in

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8"Somnambulism: A Fragment" was originally published in Brown's Literary Magazine and American Register, 20 (May, 1805), 335-47. It has been reprinted in Jahrbach für Amerikastudien, 8 (1963), 280-96.
Mrs. Lorimer's bedchamber at the exact moment he needs it, also had its counterpart in the earlier work, for Dunlap comments that it is scarcely credible.\(^9\) While the differences between the two novels were no doubt substantial, the similarities were perhaps greater than critics have realized. The link between the fragmentary "Somnambulism" story and *Edgar Huntly* transcends the common subject matter of sleepwalking, for the youthful protagonist of both works tries to discover the murderer of a loved one—Constantia Davis in the story, Waldegrave in the novel. Although the story was not published until after the novel, it gives every evidence of being a much earlier work; there can be little doubt that it was written before *Edgar Huntly*, and, in all probability it preceded *Skywalk* as well. When Dunlap, speaking of *Skywalk*, says that the novel was "founded on Somnambulism," he may have been referring to the specific story, not the general subject heading.\(^10\)

Edgar's own solution to the mysterious murder of Waldegrave is unsatisfactory. He tells us almost as an afterthought near the end of the novel that Waldegrave was killed by a marauding Indian who has no other motive than to kill the first white man he happens across. This alleged act is supposedly the first of the murderous attacks that take place in the second half of the novel. Such an explanation is highly improbable, however, because the murder of Waldegrave and the subsequent attacks on the white settlements are separated by months. In addition,


\(^10\) *Diary*, April 11, 1798.
the other Indian attacks in the second half of the novel do not take place in Solesbury, where Waldegrave was murdered, but in neighboring Chetasco, where Old Deb, their supposed leader, lives. Thus the acts of violence are temporally and spatially too distant to fit Edgar's explanation comfortably.

The motive for such an attack is also questionable. Edgar tells us the story of Old Deb, the lunatic Indian squaw who remains behind when her people are forced westward by the encroaching settlers. At first, she establishes a dwelling in the Norwalk wilderness but later moves to Chetasco. However, she is periodically visited by her clan, one of whom has supposedly killed Waldegrave, after being incited to the act by the solitary squaw. However inviting such a theory may be to Edgar, the reader must see that it is out of character for all parties concerned. The braves who visit Old Deb are the same who have been doing so over a period of some twenty years without incident. Old Deb, as Edgar portrays her, is nothing more than a peaceful old lunatic. She has even made friends among the English speaking settlers, and Edgar informs us that she is a frequent visitor in his father's house and that "I sometimes visited her; insensibly she seemed to contract an affection for me, and regarded me with more condescension than any other received" (199). It is therefore astonishing that this person, whom Edgar has described as "a woman aged and harmless" (199), should be blamed for motivating an Indian uprising and Waldegrave's murder.

Not only do the marauding Indians lack sufficient incentive and opportunity for that murder, but the physical details themselves suggest
a white man was the murderer. In the first place, Waldegrave is shot with a pistol, which is not a typical Indian weapon (nowhere in the novel is an Indian seen to carry one). Secondly, Waldegrave is not scalped, a detail which Edgar himself accounts for but lamely: the Indian's "sagacity made him forebear to tear away the usual trophy from the dead, lest he should afford suspicion as to the authors of the evil" (270). This reluctance is curious indeed if the savage band is planning the full fledged attack described by Edgar in the second half of the novel. Furthermore, nowhere else in the story does an Indian pass up an opportunity to take a scalp.

Indeed, since the motive, method, and opportunity of these savages is at best problematic, the only reason for crediting Edgar's conclusions on the subject of Waldegrave's murder is that Old Deb is said to have confessed to all the crimes. However, when we recall that she is and has been mad for years, her confession cannot bear much weight. Edgar Huntly himself, in contrast, had at his disposal the correct means, the logical opportunity, and a variety of hidden motives, which will be explored below. In addition, his behavior after the death of Waldegrave indicates, as several critics have noted, his guilt.¹¹ As Donald Ringe puts it, Edgar Huntly is "told by a narrator in imminent danger of losing control over his mind and emotions."¹² I suggest that he has already lost control at the point where his narrative begins.


¹²Ringe, p. 89.
Bernard has examined the peculiar language of the novel's opening scenes thoroughly,¹³ and indeed, why Edgar should stress his own "folly," "shame," and "regret" in connection with the murder of his friend, unless he is concealing something from us, and perhaps himself, is odd. He hovers around the scene of the crime, near a large elm, on the premise that the murderer might return to the scene, seemingly unaware that his own behavior in this regard is highly suspect. The premise that the murderer will return to the scene of his crime applies to Edgar as well as others, and it is he who is skulking there when the novel begins. He goes over in his mind again and again the circumstances leading up to the murder. Waldegrave, Edgar tells us, ignored his young friend's advice and set out on "an ill-omened journey . . . on foot during a dark and tempestuous night" (7). These details Brown seems to have borrowed from the "Somnambulism" fragment (which was itself borrowed from the report in the Vienna Gazette) in which the young protagonist warns the girl he loves not to set out on a journey at night. Despite his adament opposition to the journey, the young man in "Somnambulism" can offer the girl and her father no reason for postponing it except hints of dire consequences. After they depart, the young narrator continues to brood over the fact that they would not allow him to accompany them, and he remembers that in their path some miles along the road stands a giant oak, the existence of which their guide might

¹³Bernard, pp. 30-33.
forget. It is under this very tree that the young lady is in fact murdered. The parallels between the fragmentary story and Edgar Huntly are clear. In the novel, the beloved lady has become the beloved friend; the giant oak, the scene of the murder, has become the giant elm; both protagonists are sleepwalkers who have urged their loved ones not to travel. Bernard's conclusion that Edgar has murdered his friend, just as the un-named protagonist of "Sommambulism" murders the young lady, is not so much the question as the matter of Edgar's motivation for the deed. For even a sleepwalker has reasons.

If Edgar has murdered his friend, then the novel is principally one of self-discovery, or rather attempted self-discovery. Ultimately, like Clara Wieland, Edgar will never identify the true villain, for such knowledge would destroy him or drive him insane just as it does Clithero Edny. However, despite the fact that he will remain "unknown to himself," Edgar nevertheless does, like Oedipus, search for the very knowledge which threatens at every turn to destroy him. He learns most about himself through Clithero Edny's long, interpolated tale, and as several critics have noted, Clithero is Edgar's double. It is this relationship

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14 Brown's preface, in which he summarizes the account given in the Vienna Gazette, makes it clear the young man is in fact the murderer, although the fragmentary story breaks off at the point of the murder.

15 Richard Slotkin, Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860 (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973); Also Alderson, pp. 5-9; Bernard, pp. 33-42; Schulz, pp. 326-28.
between the two men that gives the novel its unity. Their character and narratives are mirrored, and it is Clithero's tale that provides the reader with the key to interpret Edgar's narrative.

What has not been noticed, however, is that the shadowy figure Edgar finds haunting the giant elm is not Clithero. Indeed, there is no reason, conscious or subconscious, for Clithero to be weeping and digging at the site of Waldegrave's murder, for even though Clithero is carrying about his share of guilt, none of it in any way concerns Edgar's murdered friend. Rather, the shadowy figure is a manifestation of Edgar's guilt; it is this shadowy figure who will lead Edgar to Clithero, his double, who in turn will teach him about himself.

Brown goes out of his way to suggest that the shadowy figure which Edgar first meets is a figment of the narrator's imagination. Despite the bright moonlight and the fact that the figure "came so near as almost to brush my arm" (10), Edgar tells us, "I did not recognize in him anyone whom I knew" (10). If this were the real Clithero, Edgar would surely have recognized him under these circumstances, for he knows Edny by sight; his failure to recognize anyone he knew is symbolic of his own predicament, his inability to identify his own shadowy self, a hidden self, a part of his personality he does not understand. But he does recognize the danger involved in investigating the figure, for he

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16 C. F. Keppler in Literature of the Second Self (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1972), pp. 10-12, explains that what is essential for a true second self relationship is the sense that the "other" is both "me" and "not me," "here" within at the same time he is "there" without. Such a paradox of similarity and difference is at the very heart of the Clithero-Huntly relationship.
wonders if in doing so he will mentally "be proof against the utmost surprise" (15). That utmost surprise is, of course, just as it was for Oedipus, self-recognition.

The next evening, when Edgar decides to return to the elm, the insubstantial quality of the figure that he once again finds there is emphasized when the dark human shape materializes on the spot:

An hour elapsed before my eyes lighted on the object of which they were in search. My previous observation had been roving from one quarter to another. At last it dwelt upon the tree. The person whom I before described was seated on the ground. I had not perceived him before, and the means by which he placed himself in this situation had escaped my notice. He seemed like one whom an effort of will, without exercise of locomotion, had been transported hither, or made visible. (17)

When the figure departs from the elm and begins its nightmarish journey through the forest with Edgar in close pursuit, the narrator again reflects upon the possible dangers of following this shadow, though he instinctively feels that he need not fear the shadow itself; as Edgar puts it: "Man to man, I needed not to dread his encounter" (18). Such a statement only makes sense in a symbolic context, for if Edgar were following a real, flesh-and-blood murderer, he would have every reason to fear a physical confrontation. Yet Edgar realizes intuitively that it is not the figure he need fear, but rather the kind of world that it will lead him into. By following the shadow, Edgar runs the risk of becoming lost in the Norwalk wilderness or crashing headlong into some pit or marsh or glen. Even when the figure enters a cave, Edgar's primary concern is that if he too enters he may become lost in the
darkness and never be able to return. Therefore, he sits down at the
mouth of the cave and awaits the figure's return. Despite the fact that
once again it is a moonlit night and that he has been following the
figure closely, Edgar still has not been able to identify the figure,
though he says he suspects it may be one Clithero Edny. Brown seems to
suggest, however, that Edgar's inability to identify the figure is the
result of the narrator's reluctance to follow him into the dark cave of
self-knowledge.

When on the following night Edgar again follows the dark shape,
it leads him on the same nightmarish trek, but this time the destination
is not the cave. Instead, it leads him to the barn where Clithero Edny
lives. It should be noted, however, that Edgar has still not identified
the figure as Clithero, but rather infers from the fact that it has led
him to Clithero as proof of the figure's identity, a judgement with
which critics have concurred. Nevertheless, the fact that the figure
leads Edgar to Clithero is less conclusive than it may appear, for it
seems that Edgar may have been led to Clithero as an alternative to
entering the dark cave of self-knowledge, which Edgar at this point
refuses to do. Had he done so the previous evening, he would have found
not another man, Clithero Edny, but "the utmost surprise," himself, and
possibly insanity. As an alternative, he is led to Clithero, whose
interpolated tale and tortured life serve as a bridge into the dark
world of self-knowledge that Edgar is reluctant to enter. Ultimately,
of course, by listening to Clithero's tale and by sympathizing with him,
Edgar falls headlong into a dark cave very much like the one he was afraid to enter at the beginning of the novel.\(^{17}\)

At this point in the novel, Edgar becomes convinced that the figure he has been following without being able to identify it, is Clithero Edny. After employing Clithero in some nameless task and looking into the other man's background, Edgar arranges to meet him at night and takes Clithero, significantly enough, to the giant elm, the scene of the two previous nights' encounters. Edgar tells us that he has no difficulty distinguishing Clithero's features although the other man is standing exactly where the figure stood the two previous evenings, which causes the reader to wonder why, if the real Clithero were really present on those occasions, Edgar had not recognized in the figure "anyone that he knew." Indeed, it is Edgar who is the dramatic focus of the present scene; it is his behavior and his language which

\(^{17}\)Although Clithero Edny is real (in Brown's fiction), a character known not only to Edgar but Sarsefield, Mrs. Lorimer, and others, the reader may be justified in doubting whether Edgar ever really meets him in the first half of the novel. I have argued that in the opening scenes Edgar does not identify the figure by the elm as Clithero although he should have been able to do so. Later, after Edgar becomes convinced of the identity of the figure he has been following, he tells us that he forces Clithero's secret from him, and we get the long interpolated tale. But is this really Clithero speaking? The situation is not clear cut, for we are told that Sarsefield has sent Edgar letters telling him all about the matters covered in Clithero's narrative, although Edgar claims he has never received them. Nevertheless, since it is possible that Edgar already knew of the events of Clithero's interpolated tale, the reader is justified in suspecting that the real Clithero never revealed his secret to Edgar at all, that the tale imputed to Clithero is simply a rationalization of Sarsefield's version. I have argued above why it is symbolically necessary for Edgar to prove Clithero innocent. Therefore, while there is no doubt that Clithero Edny is real, the "Clithero" of the first half of the novel, the one who tells us his tale, may in fact be no more than Edgar's aberration.
proves illuminating, for Clithero himself says little, even when accused of Waldegrave's murder. It is Edgar's words that are significant:

"I am no stranger to your gnawing cares; to the deep and incurable despair that haunts you, to which your waking thoughts are a prey; and from which sleep cannot secure you." (31)

Surely these words are fraught with double meaning once we recognize the second-self relationship between Edgar and Clithero. When Edgar tells Clithero that he is no stranger to his guilt, Edgar is on one level simply informing the other man that he has learned his secret from Inglefield's servants (or possibly from Sarsefield's letters, the ones which Edgar claims later in the novel he has never received). However, Edgar's comment that he is no stranger to Clithero's "gnawing care" may be interpreted as a confession that he too suffers from a similar guilt and therefore understands the other man's dilemma. The latter seems a plausible reading in view of Edgar's subsequent remark that "Were futurity laid open to my eyes, and events, with their consequences unfolded, I might see reason to embrace the assassin as my best friend" (31).

This second-self relationship between Edgar and Clithero is emphasized by the way the two young men are characterized. They are approximately the same age, and both are adopted in their youth by benevolent foster parents. Clithero is taken from his real parents by Mrs. Lorimer, who treats him like a son, while Edgar, who is orphaned in an Indian raid, is adopted by an uncle and comes to regard his tutor, Sarsefield, as a substitute father. As one critic has noted, when
Sarsefield and Mrs. Lorimer marry, Edgar and Clithero will become, in a sense, brothers. More significantly, Edgar and Clithero seem to be of a single temper. Both are romantic youths fond of solitary rambles through the sublime wilderness of Norwalk. Their similarities of mind and purpose are most clearly exemplified by the fact that both young men are mechanists; each has built a secret box which can be opened only by working a hidden spring. Inside each box its owner places something he does not want the world to see: in Clithero's case, the manuscript composed by Mrs. Lorimer; in Edgar's, the blasphemous letters of his murdered friend. When Edgar learns that Clithero owns such a secret depository, he does not rest until he has violated its sanctity. However, in the process he irreparably damages its inner spring, thus making it impossible to close.

These two boxes in which Edgar and Clithero place hidden things are symbolic of their personalities, for both are in essence "hidden" men with motives and desires perhaps unknown even to themselves. When Edgar violates his double's secrecy by forcing his way into the other's box, Clithero is driven into an insane rage. However, by delving into Clithero's box (symbolically, his hidden identity), Edgar is forced to view his own secrets (his own hidden motives and personality), and shortly after violating his double's privacy, Edgar finds that his own box has been opened by some unknown hand and its contents stolen. With

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18 Bernard, p. 38.

19 Both Bernard and Ringe discuss the symbolism of the secret boxes at some length.
their privacy violated and their secrets exposed, each man is driven into the dark moral wilderness of Norwalk to view himself in a new light.

Even more intriguing than the doubling of personalities is the paralleling of Edgar's and Clithero's narratives. At first glance, the latter's narrative would seem to have little in common with Edgar's, the narrative which surrounds it, but there are important thematic similarities. First, both tales hinge upon the question of motivation; a careful investigation of each reveals how very ambiguous each man's motivation is. Second, the theme that Poe was later to call "the imp of the perverse," or "the desire of the soul to vex itself," plays a significant role in each narrative.

Edgar himself sees the paramount importance of motivation in Clithero's narrative, and it becomes very important to him to prove Clithero innocent, and thereby remove the guilt which weighs him down. If the two men are doubles, as I have suggested, Edgar's obsession with proving the other man innocent makes perfect sense, for it he can prove the other man innocent on the grounds that he intended no evil in killing Wiatte and attempting the murder of his benefactress, then Edgar himself may be acquitted on similar grounds for everything that happens in the novel, beginning with the murder of Waldegrave. Edgar's insistence on meddling in the other man's affairs makes a good deal more sense when it is seen to be selfishly, if subconsciously, motivated in this way.
Several features of Clithero's interpolated tale suggest that the young man's motives were at best ambiguous. Probably no reader of Clithero's story is as easily convinced as Edgar that Edny's attempted murder of Mrs. Lorimer was motivated purely by benevolence. Clithero tells Edgar that he only wished to spare his benefactress the pain of knowing that her beloved brother was dead; but surely such reasoning is specious. Furthermore, the details of Clithero's own narrative belie the truth of such an assertion. His attempted murder of Mrs. Lorimer is the culmination of a series of events which center around that lady and her evil twin brother, Arthur Waitte. Mrs. Lorimer despises Waitte's evil nature and refuses to defend him when she has the opportunity, yet she loves him as a brother and remains convinced, even after reports of his death, that their destinies are inextricably intertwined. She even believes that she and her brother must die at the same time. Clithero tells us that her superstition on this point has made such a strong impression on him that after killing her brother he sneaks into her room, half expecting to find the lady dead already. Furthermore, he is ready to blame himself if this be the case! He tells us that it is only after he discovers that the lady is alive that the idea of killing her occurs to him.

Any reader would certainly be justified in doubting Clithero's narrative at several crucial points. First, it hardly seems possible

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20 There is considerable "twinning" in the novel, which reinforces the second self theme. Edgar and Clithero hide things in twin mechanical boxes. The cave Edgar wakes up in is the symbolic twin of one the shadowing figure entered earlier. There are even two panthers.
that Clithero's killing of Arthur Wiatte can have taken place as reported. According to Clithero, he killed Wiatte when the latter accosted him in a dark alley. But the account is implausible in that Wiatte lacks a motive for such an attack. Granted, Wiatte is portrayed as an arch fiend bent on his sister's destruction, but he has no reason to attempt the murder of Clithero, a man he has never met and probably never seen, for we remember that Wiatte has been out of the country for nine years. On the other hand, Clithero does have a reason to want Wiatte dead, for his inopportune appearance on the scene threatens to destroy the young man's bright future as the husband of Mrs. Lorimer's daughter and the inheritor of a portion of his benefactress's wealth. Clithero tells us:

The future was no longer a scene of security and pleasure . . . . The existence of Wiatte was a canker that had blasted the felicity of my patroness. (63)

Although Clithero never mentions his own felicity, there can be little doubt of his concern for his own future. The only way out of the dilemma, he says, is "by placing my lady beyond the possibility of danger" (65). There is no way to accomplish this with Wiatte alive.

Motive aside, there are other reasons to question Clithero's version of events. Until he is killed by Clithero, Wiatte has seemed indestructable. After being deported, he engineered a mutiny on board the British vessel that was to bear him away. Frequent reports of his death prove false. We are also informed that he was a notorious and resourceful highwayman. Yet, we are asked to believe that when he takes
an unskilled and inexperienced youth by surprise in a dark alley, he
missed his target at close range and was himself killed by that youth.
If this were not enough to strain the reader's credulity, Clithero
never explains why, after his nameless nocturnal business with a banker
is concluded, he chose to wend his way through "a dark, crooked, narrow
lane," rather than through the populated, well-lit streets, or why he
himself happened to be armed. Finally, when we remember that Clithero
has previously instructed a servant to be on the look out for Wiatte
and to determine where he lodged, the young man's testimony becomes
highly suspect. The cumulative evidence suggests that Clithero has
purposefully hunted Wiatte down and killed him.

Similarly, we see that Clithero's attempted murder of his
patroness may not have been motivated by benevolence. He informs us
that after killing Wiatte he fell into a reverie, pondering the
consequences of his act. When he came to, he found himself standing in
the middle of his own chambers having arrived at the conclusion that
"thy lady, thy Clarice, thy friend, and thyself are, by this act,
involved in irretrievable and common ruin!" (73). He tells us that his
motive for sneaking into Mrs. Lorimer's chamber was to discover if she
had indeed perished by the same stroke as her brother, as she had
always feared she would. However, this stated motive rings false for
a number of reasons. First, if Clithero were genuinely interested in
simply determining the safety of his mistress, he would have done so
by waking the servant sleeping in the antechamber. Instead, he steals
past that servant into his lady's bedchamber. Later we learn from
Sarsefield, when he and Edgar compare notes, that Clithero entered the house without being seen by any of the servants, who later swear that he did not return after his visit to the banker. This testimony clearly undercuts Clithero's assertion that he awoke from a reverie to find himself standing in the midst of his own chambers without knowing precisely how he came to be there. However, the most telling evidence against Clithero is the fortuitous appearance of the murder weapon.

We might be willing to believe that the thought of killing Mrs. Lorimer first occurred to him when he stood over the sleeper, if it were not for the fact that the murder weapon, the dagger, inexplicably comes to hand exactly when he needs it to carry out the alleged impulse:

I moved with the suddenness of lightening. Armed with a pointed instrument that lay--It was a dagger. As I lay down the lamp I struck the edge. Yet I saw it not or noticed it not till I needed its assistance. By what accident it came hither, to what deed of darkness it had already been subservient, I had no power to inquire. I stepped to the table and seized it. (78)

Surely the reader is not expected to believe such a fortuitous coincidence as Clithero's discovery of a dagger in the lady's bedchamber at the propitious moment. The dagger, in all probability, is the one that Arthur Wiatte drew; at least Brown suggests such a reading by having Clithero ponder "what deed of darkness" the dagger may have already been involved in. Had Clithero killed Mrs. Lorimer with Wiatte's knife, suspicion would have been cast upon Wiatte, who had vowed revenge upon his sister. And with Wiatte himself dead, there would be no one to contradict Clithero's version of events.
Subsequent events bear out this reading of the circumstances surrounding Clithero's attempt on Mrs. Lorimer's life. After Edgar Huntly returns from his own harrowing journey and learns from Sarsefield that Mrs. Lorimer is still alive, he immediately communicates this information to Clithero, who still believes the lady to be dead. Edgar feels that the information will "dissipate the sanguinary apparition that haunted him, and cure his diseased intellect" (273). Again the second-self relationship is apparent, for Edgar himself has been haunted by the ghost of Waldegrave, who angrily appeared before him in a dream just prior to Edgar's disappearance in Norwalk. Edgar hopes that by telling Clithero that his intended victim lives, he can banish his double's sense of guilt (and, by extension, his own?). If Clithero's tale were true, we might expect just such an effect, because if the young man intended only good, as he claims, by attempting to take Mrs. Lorimer's life, he should be delighted to find her alive. The fact that Clithero is not happy, suggests that he has been tormented all these years not by a benevolent deed that somehow went wrong, but rather by a calculated, malignant, act of attempted murder. Even if Clithero's reasons for wanting Mrs. Lorimer dead were subconscious, they are, nevertheless, what has been torturing him over the years. His motives, which he has kept hidden from everyone, are more responsible for his guilt than his deed, which he has shared with Edgar.

If Clithero's motives are ambiguous, then what of Edgar's? Noting Clithero's murderous impulses towards his benefactress should cause the reader to re-evaluate Edgar's relationship with his
benefactor and friend, the murdered Waldegrave. Did Edgar also harbor secret, murderous impulses? The situations, we must admit, are startlingly similar. First, the death of each benefactor leaves the young man in question free to marry. The death of Wiatte and Mrs. Lorimer would have freed Clithero to marry her daughter Clarice. True, she had already given the young couple her blessing in this regard, but she did so before the arrival of Wiatte, whom Clithero rightly considers a threat to his future. And Mrs. Lorimer would surely have reconsidered her approval when she discovered young Clithero to be the murderer of her brother. But with both of them dead, Clithero is not only free to marry Clarice, but also stands to inherit through her a sizeable portion of Mrs. Lorimer's estate. That Clithero never mentions this eventuality should not keep the reader from recognizing its existence. Similarly, Edgar Huntly, who is betrothed to Waldegrave's sister, stands to inherit a considerable sum through Waldegrave's death. Edgar admits he could never afford to be married otherwise. When it turns out that the money Edgar and Mary Waldegrave have planned to use to get married actually belongs to another man, Weymouth, the letters (from Weymouth to Waldegrave) that would have proved Weymouth's claim to the wealth are discovered to be missing. It is Edgar, of course, who has been entrusted with Waldegrave's correspondence, and it must be accounted odd that amongst Waldegrave's letters only these, which would destroy Edgar's felicity, cannot be found.

True, Edgar does openly advise Mary Waldegrave to honor Weymouth's claim, but the rhetoric of his letter to her is curious.
In a brief paragraph he tells her that if Weymouth's claim is just, "the money must be restored to its right owner," and Edgar feels confident that Mary will "not hesitate to act justly" (147). However, the long passages which follow emphasize the hardships that acting justly will entail. Edgar tells her: "I know the impatience with which your poverty has formerly been borne" (147), and he reminds her that returning the money will blast their hopes of marriage. Furthermore, he notes that "the love of independence and ease, and impatience of drudgery are woven into your constitution" (148). After again urging her to do the just thing, Edgar then reminds her of the calamity which is certain to result if she does so:

I know the precariousness of my condition and that of my sisters; that our subsistence hangs upon the life of an old man. My uncle's death will transfer this property to his son, who is a stranger and an enemy to us . . . . Marriage to thee was anticipated with joyous emotions, not merely on my own account but likewise for the sake of those beloved girls to whom the event would enable me to furnish an asylum. (149)

After this thinly veiled plea on behalf of his sisters, Edgar concludes that "wedlock is now more distant than ever. My heart bleeds to think of the sufferings which my beloved Mary is fated to endure" (149).

Edgar's letter, then, is a model of deceit in that it appears to argue in one direction, whereas it is extremely persuasive in the other. When we remember that Weymouth has no legal recourse, as he himself admits, we see that Mary Waldegrave is more likely to look to her own and her future husband's welfare than to that of a stranger, as the result of Edgar's seemingly altruistic letter.
Moreover, we have every reason to suspect that Mary Waldegrave may not be the kind of exemplary being her brother was, for although we learn nothing derogatory about her from Edgar, who intends to marry her, the information we are given through Weymouth is hardly flattering. When Weymouth returns to America and finds that Waldegrave, who held the former's bill of trust, has been murdered, he naturally seeks out Mary Waldegrave and finds that she has left the city for the country, although no one seems to know exactly where. Mary's gossipy neighbors, however, make clear their own feelings toward the young woman, feelings which Weymouth charitably attributes to "prejudice and envy." They inform him that Mary Waldegrave was "a topping dame, whose notions were much too high for her station" (141). They further hint that her morals were none too strict, for she "was no more nice than wise, and yet was one who could stoop when it most became her to stand upright" (141). They also insinuate that as a result of her moral posture, Mary has left the city secretly for "good reasons," because "some things [pregnancy, surely] were hard to be disguised" (141). If Mary Waldegrave is in fact a woman in visible trouble, then Edgar's letter to her, in which he warns that if she returns the money they will not marry, becomes an even more compelling instruction of how she should act toward Weymouth. But such a reading is supported by the fact that Edgar, who knows her whereabouts, will not reveal to Weymouth where she is.

Edgar's behavior is suspicious in another important instance, alluded to above. Just prior to Weymouth's arrival, Edgar, who has been spending his every waking moment following Clithero Edny through
Norwalk, is suddenly and unaccountably stricken by the urge to transcribe Waldegrave's letters. Returning home late one night with this task in mind, he opens his secret box and finds that the letters have disappeared. Later, it is discovered that he has hidden them in the attic and that it was he whom his uncle had heard pacing above in the long room. Sarsefield generously concludes that Edgar must have placed the letters there when he was sleepwalking; Edgar, not surprisingly, concurs. But the reader, even if he accepts that explanation, must recognize the subconscious motive behind the act. Whether awake or asleep, Edgar may have hidden Waldegrave's letters because they destroy Mary Waldegrave's claim to the money in question. Corroboration of this inference appears later in the novel when Edgar is caught in the act of stealing them from Sarsefield's room.

The fact that Edgar gains, or hopes to gain, materially from Waldegrave's death is not the only important consideration here, for considerable evidence suggests that prior to the murder all was not well between the two friends. Waldegrave, it seems, was recently a reformed man. He established a school for black children that brought him barely enough money to live on. However, he was not always so altruistic. In his youth Waldegrave had held radically dangerous tenets "with regard to religion and morals." Indeed, he wrote numerous letters to Edgar during that brief period of his atheism and glorified egotism. As Edgar explains:
His earliest creeds tended to efface the impressions of his education; to deify necessity and universalize matter; to destroy the popular distinctions between soul and body, and to dissolve the supposed connection between the moral condition of man anterior and subsequent to death. (125)

Waldegrave, however, soon abjured these radical philosophies, becoming exceedingly "anxious that the letters in their support should be destroyed" (126). In fact, Waldegrave, a "half indignant apparition," appears to Edgar in a dream to ask the young man to destroy them. Edgar is unwilling to do so, however, for he, interestingly enough, "did not entirely abjure the creed which had, with great copiousness and eloquence, been defended in these letters" (126). Not only does he refuse to destroy them, he actually intends to transcribe them for Mary Waldegrave. It need not be pointed out what their effect will be on Mary, especially in view of the altruistic act Weymouth requires of her.

Edgar, then, like Clithero, can be shown to have a motive to murder his kindly benefactor; indeed, he has method and opportunity as well. Nearly every critic has noted that the second half of Edgar Huntly illustrates the savage potential in the narrator and, some would have it, every man. From the time Edgar awakens in the cave, kills the panther, and drinks its warm blood, he becomes a killing machine, successfully destroying, single-handedly, five armed Indian warriors. These scenes also offer a symbolic explanation for an event which has already taken place, the murder of Waldegrave, which sets the entire plot of the novel in motion, for Edgar's murderous adventures in Norwalk may explain how it is that a young man lost in moral darkness can have
come to murder his best friend. In the second half of the novel Edgar is only saved from the reader's censure by claiming that events are thrust upon him, a civilized man at war with savagry.

However, Edgar is not as civilized as his protestations suggest. Although he always claims to abhor bloodshed, in his travels through Norwalk, Edgar proves to be as savage as the panther in the cave. In fact, he is frequently compared both to animals and his savage Indian adversaries. Late in the novel, after finding out how far he is from his home in Solesbury, he admits that to make the journey in one night "would demand the agile boundings of a leopard and the indefatigable sinews of the elk" (202). He then informs us:

... I disdained to be outdone in perspicacity by the lynx, in his surefooted instinct by the roe, or in patience under hardship, and contention with fatigue, by the Mowhawk. (202)

Edgar also informs the reader that he looks like the very Delaware Indians he is fighting, for he, too, is half-naked and carries a tomahawk. And he is mistaken for an Indian by Sarsefield and the rescue party, all of whom attempt to kill him. He tells us repeatedly that no one would recognize him in his present guise; indeed, it is only his voice that finally convinces his friend Sarsefield that he is indeed Edgar Huntly when the two men meet toward the end of the novel.

However, the fact that Edgar is like animals and savages in appearance is less significant than the fact that he acts like them. Symbolically, he becomes pantherlike after drinking the animal's blood. But Edgar would have us believe that he remains both human and humane
in the midst of the violence that pervades the second half of the novel. He kills the Indian at the mouth of the cave only in self-defense, in order to free himself and rescue the captive girl, who would otherwise have been killed. Again, when he kills the Indians in Deb's hut, the fact that he is defending both himself and the girl overshadows the fact that he kills the Indians from ambush. But Edgar's savage murder of the fifth Indian is a different story, and its ambiguity is disturbing.

The two different views we get of this incident—one from Edgar, the other from Sarsefield—raise doubts about the plausibility of the motive Edgar attributes to his actions. The incident takes place shortly after Sarsefield and his band of men leave Deb's hut, the scene of Edgar's massacre. After being mistaken for dead and left behind, Edgar awakens and continues his journey alone. While sitting in the darkness beside a tree, he spies the lone remaining Indian of the original warrior band he encountered in the cave. Again Edgar strikes from ambush and again claims self-defense. He tells us that although his very nature rebels against the thought of further violence, he must kill or be killed. According to Edgar, his aim, which had proven deadly in the past, is in this instance inaccurate; his first shot merely wounds his enemy. Compassion, he tells us, requires him to finish the job, and at close range, he levels his musket at the Indian's head; this shot too "proves ineffectual." Therefore, as a last "humane" gesture, he runs his adversary through the heart with his bayonet. Leaving the body on the spot, Edgar takes the Indian's tomahawk, and,
"prompted by some freak of fancy," plants the dead man's musket upright in the center of the road.

At the end of the novel Sarsefield gives a brief account of what he and the others find when they come across this scene, which he, after witnessing much bloodshed, refers to as a "startling spectacle." The body of the dead Indian, according to Sarsefield, was "mangled by repeated wounds of bayonet and bullet" (245). They find there the musket Edgar has stuck in the ground "by way of a beacon attracting our attention to the spot" (245).

Again, the ambiguity concerns motivation. Has Edgar placed the musket in the road through, as he terms it, "some freak of fancy"; or is it, as Sarsefield suggests, a "beacon," an act of arrogance and defiance of moral law? Is the mangled body of the Indian, repeatedly stabbed and shot, evidence of Edgar's humanity, as he would have us believe, or is it evidence of the opposite? Edgar tells us that he "ever aspired to transcend the rest of animals in all that was common to the rational and the brute" (202). The novel, of course, suggests that one of the things common to man and beast is violence, and the "beacon" Sarsefield finds in the middle of the road suggests that Edgar has indeed transcended in sheer savagery both the panther and the Indian savages he kills.²¹

²¹For a lengthy and comprehensive discussion of the theme of savagery in the novel see Kimball, "Savages and Savagism."
Edgar's behavior as he returns toward civilization after the brutal acts described above reinforces such a reading. The fact that he cannot easily return to the world of civilized men is symbolized by the fact that despite being an experienced wilderness traveler, and having been given explicit directions on how to reach Solesbury, Edgar loses his way and finds himself traveling a cliff that runs parallel to the road he seeks. The only way down is an extremely hazardous leap. Just as significantly, Edgar finds himself pursued not only by savages, but a band of civilized white settlers as well, suggesting that he is neither savage nor civilized but something inhuman to both Indians and whites. Interestingly enough, it is the civilized men who nearly kill him, mistaking him for a savage.

Even when Edgar does reach the road, a symbol of his return to civilization, he does not act civilized. Sneaking in and out of people's houses, he never announces himself and seems leary of being seen and identified. At the house of Selby, where he finds the drunken man, as well as the terrified mother and her infant, Edgar enters to procure food and warmth without awakening the family. When he discovers the wife, who along with her child has been driven into the barn by threats of violence from her husband, Edgar sneaks away unnoticed. His comment is peculiar for one who professes, as Edgar repeatedly does, the principles of benevolence: "This was no time to waste my sympathy on others. I could benefit her nothing" (219). Immediately afterward, upon finding a dead Indian warrior at the nearby gate, Edgar comments on his own callousness when he stops only long enough to steal the dead
man's musket. As far as he knows, the woman and her child are still vulnerable to Indian attack, as well as brutal assault from her drunken husband, but he leaves them to their own devices. In another case Edgar's behavior continues odd when he meets the servant of a man named Bisset, who is terrified of the way Edgar looks and the questions he asks. After receiving information which tends to confirm his fears regarding the safety of his family, Edgar plunges wildly into the river without so much as a farewell or a thank-you to his informant. Though he tells us he is frantic to reach Inglefield's dwelling to confirm the report, he is not so anxious that he cannot pause to enter clandestinely yet another house. After warming himself for "ten or twenty minutes," he resolves to explore the chambers, one of which Sarsefield happens to be staying in. When he is discovered there by Sarsefield, Edgar admits that his "deportment" was "that of a maniac" (231).

Indeed, after his sojourn in the moral and physical wilderness where Clithero and Edgar's own hidden personality has led him, he must gradually be restored to sanity and a civilized appearance by his

22The interpolated tale of the drunken Selby and his helpless wife and child serves as a microcosm for the entire novel. It illustrates that the kind of savagery Brown is concerned with is a matter of neither race nor geography. The Selby house is on the outskirts of civilization, bordering on the savage frontier. When Edger approaches the house, he notes that "It was a model of cleanliness and comfort" from which he infers that the inhabitants were "beings raised by education and fortune above . . . intellectual mediocrity" (216). Appearances, however, prove deceiving, for in this outwardly civilized dwelling lies the drunken Selby who is intent on killing his wife if he can only sober up enough to find her. Is this white man less savage, we are invited to ask, than the Indians who have so recently attempted to burn down his house? Do Selby's wife and child have less to fear from the one type of savagery than the other?
friend Sarsefield. The reader should note, however, that the reason Edgar has so much difficulty re-entering the world of civilized men is not that he has witnessed savagery so much as that he has willingly partaken of it, beginning with the murder of Waldegrave.

The interpolated tale of Clithero Edny, then, bears a striking resemblance to the surrounding narrative of Edgar Huntly in that both stories concern the relationship of the young man in question to a kindly benefactor. The motivation of both Edgar and Clithero in their relationship to these benefactors is highly ambiguous, and each man appears to harbor impulses and desires perhaps unknown to himself. Furthermore, each seems drawn to self-destruction. In the tale of Clithero and Mrs. Lorimer, Clithero's entire well-being rests upon the good will of his benefactress. Yet everything he does seems calculated in some bizarre, unconscious fashion to test her affection. When she encourages Clithero's friendship with her only son and allows him to accompany that son to Europe, Clithero quarrels with the young man over his behavior and piously writes letters to his mother criticizing him. When the young men part, Clithero, fortunately, is asked to become a member of Mrs. Lorimer's household, whereupon he promptly falls in love with her daughter Clarice, which would appear to be another self-defeating impulse, for she is his superior in both rank and fortune, and he has no reason to suspect Mrs. Lorimer's liberal views on the subject of marriage; he is, in fact, preparing to leave them when his benefactress informs him that she would be all too happy to receive him as a son-in-law. His future seems momentarily bright,
but then he kills Wiatte, an act certain to banish him from the good graces of Mrs. Lorimer.

Edgar Huntly's situation at the end of the novel is remarkably similar. With the death of his uncle, Edgar realizes that he must depend upon Sarsefield, who has married Mrs. Lorimer, for financial support; indeed, Sarsefield has informed Edgar that the primary reason for his return to America has been to find his young friend and relieve his poverty. But, like Clithero, Edgar does the one thing most likely to alienate his benefactor. Although Sarsefield has explicitly warned Edgar not to meddle with Clithero, Edgar cannot resist. Not only does he inform Clithero where he can find Mrs. Lorimer, he also writes a letter informing the Sarsefields of his rashness—a letter he is certain will fall into the lady's hands. Furthermore, Brown makes it clear that Edgar has not simply made an error in judgement. Sarsefield writes:

You knew the liberty that would be taken of opening my letters; you knew of my absence from home during the greatest part of the day, and the likelihood, therefore, that your letters would fall into my wife's hands before they came to mine. These considerations should have prompted you to send them under cover to Whitworth or Harvey, with directions to give them immediately to me. (279)

In addition, Sarsefield reminds him: "You acted in direct opposition to my counsel and to the plainest dictates of propriety" (279). As a result of Edgar's action, Mrs. Lorimer miscarries and nearly dies. His behavior seems at once malignant—for as Sarsefield points out, the young man surely knew better—and self destructive—for Sarsefield's opinion of Edgar and his intention towards him will undoubtedly change.
Again, the motives of Edgar and Clithero are complex, ambiguous, even paradoxical, not just inconsistent and contradictory. Although Edgar kills Waldegrave so that he can marry the latter's sister with Weymouth's money, he also perversely kills his friend because he loves him. Similarly, Clithero has his eye on Mrs. Lorimer's wealth (as well as her daughter) and he kills Arthur Wiatte to prevent losing them, but he also wants to destroy that which he most loves and respects—Mrs. Lorimer herself. Together, at the end of the novel they both assault in their own fashions the Sarsefields, the people they most love (and hate?), thereby hurting themselves in the process. Each man manages to "vex" his own soul.
CHAPTER 6

STEPHEN CALVERT AND THE EPISTOLARY NOVELS

Although much of *The Memoirs of Stephen Calvert* was written between the publication of *Edgar Huntly* (1799) and the second half of *Arthur Mervyn* (1800), *Stephen Calvert* is more like Brown's epistolary novels, *Clara Howard* and *Jane Talbot*, than it is like the works that precede it. In fact, *Stephen Calvert*, the second part of *Arthur Mervyn*, and the epistolary novels reflect the gradual shift in Brown's interest away from gothic romance, little understood phenomena like ventriloquism and somnambulism, and abnormal psychology toward conventional concerns of the epistolary novel, a popular eighteenth century form destined to be abandoned in the nineteenth century. As part of this shift, Brown's later works focus on the relationships between men and women. *Clara Howard* in particular borrows from both *Stephen Calvert* and *Arthur Mervyn* in that the novel's young protagonist, Philip Stanley, must choose between a homely, unattractive Mary Wilmot and the beautiful Clara, just as Stephen must choose between his homely cousin Louisa and the voluptuous Clelia Neville, and as Arthur Mervyn must decide whether to court Ascha Fielding, the mature, sallow-skinned Jewess or the pretty Eliza Hadwin.

However, while Brown's later works are certainly tamer than his earlier efforts, they are not as different as many critics suggest, nor
do they indicate any shift in Brown's goals as an artist that could be termed radical. As I have tried to show, Brown's use of gothicism in his earlier works is tangential to the real matter of his art. Somnambulism, ventriloquism, and the horrors of the plague are little more than his metaphors for the nature of man and his universe. Carwin's ventriloquism in Wieland, for instance, is of less moment than Clara's insanity, the real subject of the novel. The plague in Ormond and Arthur Mervyn is simply a metaphor for the condition of man in these novels; the true center of concern is the response of the narrator to the plague in this moral sense. Similarly, in Edgar Huntly sonmanbulism becomes a means for suggesting the hidden, sometimes contradictory motives governing the life of the protagonist which are the thematic center of the novel. What is essential to Brown's art is not the gothic trappings of the first four novels so much as his vision of the ambiguity of the universe we inhabit, a philosophy which is aptly developed through the kind of unreliable narrative Brown characteristically employed. In this sense it can be demonstrated that there is no radical shift between the four major novels and the ones discussed below. They represent a continuum of design and vision, for even these comparatively conventional later works are not "straight" reliable narratives.

Stephen Calvert is the most difficult of the late works to discuss because of its fragmentary nature. If Brown is to be believed, the portion of Calvert published in Dunlap's biography, which runs nearly two hundred pages, was only the first of five acts. It is therefore not merely an unfinished novel, but a novel scarcely begun. Yet even in what we have, there is considerable evidence that the narrative is unreliable in much the same way as the earlier novels. First of all, there is the customary emphasis on deception and concealment. "How invisibly faint are the boundaries of truth and falsehood" (393) wonders the narrator, who admits to deceiving the other characters in the novel not only with omissions but with "positive untruths" (440). But is he telling us, the readers, the truth in his narrative? Even here the matter is doubtful for a number of reasons. The narrator admits to being self-deceived and often ponders "the imposture which men practice on themselves" (329), noting that "the constitution of man is compounded and modified with endless variety. The wisest and soberest of beings is, in some respects, a madman" (377), and he further concedes that "hypocrisy and artifice are easy" (421). But perhaps there is more involved than self-deception. Louisa Calvert, the narrator's cousin, suggests that there are often pragmatic reasons for deception: "How numberless and irresistible are the inducements to

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conceal what, if known, would redound to our shame? How easy to disguise the real motives of our conduct!" (417). And what she further remarks concerning another character, Clelia Neville, applies equally well to the narrator: "How very slender must be those talents which will not enable the possessor to frame a plausible tale; and how easily may looks of innocence and candour be assumed by a guilty heart" (419).

Although there is no reason to doubt the veracity of the early portion of the novel which deals with the narrator's father and his involvement in Sir Stephen Porter's aborted attempt to restore the Stuarts to the English throne, these events serve as a prologue to the principal narrative, much as the events surrounding the death of the elder Wieland serve the earlier work of that name. In Calvert, as in the earlier work, the narrator's father also dies a mysterious death, which leaves his son Stephen to be brought up by his mother. As a result, the young narrator becomes a decided mama's boy who throughout his narrative has great difficulty dealing with the opposite sex.

Stephen's problems, as well as the complexities of the narrative, begin when, as a young man, he enters the action of the novel by inheriting the property of a distant uncle he has never met. This uncle, whose name is also Calvert, was a reputed drunkard who brutalized and then disinherited his own daughter Louisa. Although she is befriended by Stephen's mother, the young man himself has never met her when he sets out for Philadelphia with the idea of restoring her father's property to its rightful owner. However, his motive is, by
his own admission, not entirely altruistic, for Stephen conjures up visions of his cousin, falls in love with her sight unseen, and even foresees marriage. However, when he actually meets Louisa and finds that she is "Minute in size, inelegantly proportioned, and dun in complexion" (314), he concludes that his hasty decision to restore her property had been "influenced by other motives" (315). Furthermore, he admits that "I could scarcely conceal from myself that marriage would restore to me what I should have thus given away" (315).

Although Stephen concedes that "Love is a motley and complex sentiment . . . the growth, not of reason, but of sense" (311), he nonetheless attempts to reason his way into love with Louisa, who physically repulses him. He rationalizes that her moral qualities are ample recompense for a lack of physical attractions, even telling himself that physical attraction is transitory—that conjugal familiarity rapidly destroys it. Successfully duping himself in this way, he continues to visit Louisa without making any move to restore her father's property. He admits that "I did not love her, but I drew pain from thinking of her as belonging to another. I did not wish her to be mine, but I believed that no human being was so worthy to possess her as myself" (318). The difficulty of the situation is compounded by the fact that Louisa is clearly in love with him, a "circumstance that ought to have been pregnant with delight," but which leaves him "tinctured with dejection" (321).

Ultimately, the struggle is an unequal one, and despite the fact that Louisa is "contemplated without rapture," the narrator
decides to marry her; while he never says that his decision has been influenced by her father's property, the reader has every right to infer that it may have been. He is at the point of proposing to his cousin when a fire breaks out in a nearby residence; leaving her, he races to the scene, where he finds a large crowd watching the house burn. When it is suggested that someone may be asleep inside, Stephen tells us that he climbs a ladder and enters the building, ignoring the protests of the frightened crowd. Once inside, he finds a sleeping girl who, judging from Stephen's description of her, is not fully clothed:

Closed eyes and the wanness of death, were not all that the pale reflection of the flames enabled me to discover during the moments which she lay in my arms. There were features, and neck, and bosom, which were stamped upon my memory and fancy in eternal characters. Though seen for an instant, they refused to disappear... (324)

No sooner is the event concluded (Stephen having given the girl over to the care of others) than he begins to doubt his "precipitation" with regard to Louisa, for he is convinced that in the rescued girl he has discovered "ideal beauty," which "burst upon my senses with all the enchantment attendant upon novelty, as well as loveliness" (324). He continues to dwell upon this remembrance until he hears that the rescued girl was a mere servant, whereupon he became dejected because "the idol I had worshipped proved to be of worthless stock" (327). Thus he returns "with satisfaction, to the path of love and honour to which my cousin had invited me" (327).

The trouble with this episode is that textual evidence suggests Stephen is lying, that he in fact has had nothing to do with the rescue.
First of all, the rescued girl cannot identify him because "Involved in the darkness and the smoke, she saw me not in her chamber, and, before she reached a station where my features could have been distinctly noticed, she was sunk into insensibility" (325). We are asked to accept that the flames illuminated the girl well enough to etch her features permanently in the narrator's brain but were too weak to allow her even to identify him. Nor can anyone in the crowd identify him as the girl's rescuer for "it was more probable that I was totally unknown to the nearest spectators" (325).

Stephen's behavior after the incident reinforces our suspicions that he is making a claim without foundation. He says that he grew "nearly passive" after accomplishing the feat and refused the aid of bystanders even though "Coals and cinders had lighted in my clothes, and penetrated, in several places, to my flesh" (323-24). He has also suffered, he says, "no small contusion" as a result of hitting his head on the window sill. Nevertheless, he immediately returned home and doctored himself, explaining that "the pain could be allayed by simple applications within my reach, and I forebore to disturb any of the family" (324). Such oddly secretive behavior continues the next day when Louisa and her friends are discussing the fire. Stephen tells no one of his part in the events, commenting to the reader that he was greatly amused at how many supposed "eye-witness" accounts and descriptions were wrong. More strangely still, no one notices the head wound he claims to have sustained. But the most telling evidence against Stephen's version of the story is the eyewitness reports he
scoffs. True, some of them are far-fetched; one witness claims the rescuer was a middle-aged negro. But a few days after the event, a newspaper report identifies the girl's rescuer as "Mr. Felix Calvert, a young gentleman lately from Europe." When the narrator's acquaintances confront him with the report, he admits to being the hero (we remember that he is called "Felix" after his supposedly lost twin brother), although he cannot comprehend how the newspaper can have got the idea that he has just arrived in the country. The reader, however, remembers the twin, whose name is Felix and who has been left behind in England when the Calverts came to America. As if to confute such an inference, the narrator provides an involved explanation of how the newspaper error must have come about. According to Stephen, one of his slaves, who has clandestinely left the plantation, witnessed the rescue and identified his master, telling the reported that Stephen came "obba da watta," by which he meant the Schuylkill River, not the Atlantic Ocean. This slave will not admit to making the identification, however, because he fears punishment for being absent from the plantation. The narrator tells us that the misinformation is further evidence of the "fallacy of rumor," but the reader suspects that "though many different representations will be given of every incident, yet it always may be, that one among the number shall be true" (329). The interpretation which satisfies the known facts is that Stephen's twin brother Felix has in fact rescued the girl. This understanding particularly explains both the narrator's silence about his "heroism" and the failure of anyone to notice the wound he says he has sustained.
The girl that the narrator tells us he has rescued from the fire turns out to be Clelia Neville, a beautiful orphan girl recently emigrated to America. It is the character of this mystery woman and the narrator's relationship with her that gives the book its momentum. One day, as Stephen is walking along a city street, he hears a scream coming from a high window. Without inquiring into its origin, he proceeds about his business, but upon returning to his lodgings finds a message begging him to return to the very address where he heard the scream. He complies with the entreaty, but before entering the building he visits a shopkeeper across from the address to inquire about the lady who lives opposite. He tells us that the shopkeeper was surprised at his curiosity and implies that he already knows the answers to his own questions. This woman tells him that the young lady lives alone but that a sweetheart may have something to do with her seclusion. The reader might be tempted to infer that the shopkeeper has seen the narrator's twin in the company of Miss Neville, but this inference would not account for the narrator, after leaving the shop, making a "circuit of half a mile" before entering the house across the street. One must logically assume from this behavior that he does not wish the shopkeeper to see him going into Miss Neville's, especially after she has already made clear her suspicions.

The mystery of the second half of Stephen Calvert centers on the ambiguous character of Clelia Neville, and when this fragmentary novel ends with the introduction of Stephen's twin brother, that mystery is still unresolved. According to Stephen, Clelia Neville is
a fine, moral, upright girl who has been abused by a brutal husband whom she married to save her father from ruin. Her husband, according to her account, is a homosexual, and this, in addition to his cruel treatment of her, so horrifies the young girl that she abandons him and flees to America. Thus, when the narrator asks her to marry him, she refuses because she already has a husband. She claims that the charges leveled against her by others have originated with her husband, who is bent upon her defamation. To Stephen, Clelia is everything his cousin Louisa is not. She is "voluptuous," whereas Louisa is "diminutive"; an artist, Miss Neville is an accomplished singer and musician, whereas his cousin has a voice that is "course and monotonous, wholly unadapted to music" (321); and, Clelia represents "sense" (sensuality), Louisa "reason."

Stephen informs us that he believes Miss Neville's story, but she may not be the abused, virtuous girl he presents her as. It is interesting to note that the name "Clelia Neville" echoes "Helena Cleves," the name of the voluptuous illicit lover in Ormond, and several parallels suggest that Brown had her in mind.\(^3\) Both women are artists, accomplished musicians, and sensualists. The language used to describe Miss Neville also suggests that she is to be regarded as a loose woman. Mrs. Rivers, the shopkeeper, refers to her as "a topping dame" (the same words used by the neighbors of Waldegrave's sister in Edgar Huntly whom they consider to be a woman of low morals). Moreover, when Stephen visits Clelia in her house, he often finds her "in a garb of elegant

\(^3\)See my analysis of Helena Cleves-Constantia Dudley above in Chapter 3.
negligence" (374); and to the student of Brown's fiction, this phase too echoes an earlier work (Arthur Mervyn), in which the narrator speaks of prostitutes "arrayed with voluptuous negligence."

However, such verbal echoes by themselves cannot render Miss Neville's virtue doubtful. It is the text of Stephen Calvert itself which raises this doubt. Clelia's tale of her husband's brutality and perversion, related via Stephen, is undermined by contradictory reports. Sidney Carlton, who attempts to befriend the narrator throughout the novel, discovers through his friend Mr. L----, a distinguished character, that Miss Neville is a profligate and her story about her husband completely false. This is learned from a witness "whose integrity and means of knowing the truth, are unquestionable" (419). According to this witness, her husband's character is not as Miss Neville has painted it, nor has she married him to save her father from ruin as she claims. Rather she has abandoned her husband after establishing an illicit affair with her father's clerk. Moreover, she is rumored to have taken up with this same young man in America. (The parallel here to the Constantia Dudley--Thomas Craig relationship in Ormond is clear.)

Miss Neville's behavior with Stephen reinforces such doubts of her virtue. Stephen claims that their relationship is chaste, but there is much evidence to the contrary. To begin with, he visits her only at night and admits to remaining late, acknowledging the impropriety of such conduct; nevertheless, he protests that no other improprieties occurred.

"AM, p. 102.
He also informs the reader that during these nocturnal visits, he and Clelia are unattended by others. From Sidney Carlton we learn that Miss Neville's house is always locked at night to prevent untimely intrusions. Yet Stephen's own visits are so routine that Miss Neville does not require him to knock, whereas other visitors are barred completely. Furthermore, the two usually meet privately in a latticed "summer house . . . at the far end of an extensive garden" (374). (This secluded summerhouse is reminiscent of the one in the hidden recess of the river band in Wieland.) The rendezvous in Calvert is:

   embowered by a vine . . . whose purple clusters were plucked by [Miss Neville's] waiting maid, and presented on a China plate, accompanied with nectarines or peaches, produced in the same garden, and with lemonade or sherbert. Except at these times, our interviews were wholly unmolested by the presence of the fear of intruders. (374)

This setting, so clearly suggestive of the Garden of Eden and the idea of a "fall," also places in doubt Stephen's protestations about the innocence of his visits, for if they were innocent, why should they "fear" intruders?

In addition to the ideologically significant setting of their "interviews," Stephen's own secretive behavior with regard to Clelia Neville further suggests an illicit relationship, for he keeps her existence secret from his friends until their relationship is discovered by Sidney Carlton. Not only is he silent with Louisa about his new romance, he tells Miss Neville nothing of Louisa or their engagement. Even after he is discovered and promises Louisa never to see Miss Neville again, he visits her three more times. He always gives a
seemingly innocent reason for these visits, but he nevertheless continues to make them under the cover of darkness and in private. There is no innocent reason, however, to explain why he did not take Sidney or someone else with him to avoid the accusations that would certainly follow if he were detected in violation of his oath to his cousin. Stephen agonizes for the benefit of the reader about the invariable consequences of concealment and duplicity but rationalizes that he has the best interests of both girls in mind. Only when the reader remembers that at this point the narrator still has not returned Louisa's father's property to her does Stephen's predicament become clear. He must not openly admit to Louisa that he loves another girl, because he intends eventually to marry her, to avoid a loss of property. On the other hand, Miss Neville must not learn of the existence of Louisa, to whom he is still engaged. The dilemma that Stephen poses for the reader, that of having to decide which girl he really loves and of having to discover what kind of girl Clelia Neville really is, is actually nothing but posturing for our benefit, for he is using both girls. In the end Stephen is forced to admit that he has not only been guilty of "concealments" with regard to both girls, but that he has been guilty of "positive untruths" (440). The exact nature of his lies Stephen never reveals; no doubt they would have been clarified in the remaining portions of this unfinished novel.

The ending of the fragment, which introduces Stephen's twin brother Felix, purports to clear up many of the novel's mysteries and ambiguities, but it does not do so. Stephen, who has been accused by
Sidney and Louisa of lying and villainy, is restored to their good graces when Carlton discovers, quite by accident, the narrator's twin. Although the fragment breaks off before the brothers can compare notes, the reader infers that it is Stephen's brother Felix, and not the narrator, who has been Miss Neville's illicit lover and that perhaps he is the very clerk she is rumored to have absconded with. The narrator would have us believe that Clelia Neville was meeting this brother on the evenings that she was not entertaining Stephen himself. However, these conjectures do not bear close examination.

For instance, after promising Louisa that he will have nothing more to do with the profligate Clelia, the repentent narrator returns to his mother's house in Burlington where he writes his cousin long letters deploiring his past conduct. Louisa and Sidney, however, accuse him of having the letters mailed from the country while he himself is actually in the city and visiting Miss Neville in disguise. When Sidney discovers the twin brother, he feels that this confusion of identities is explained. It is the twin who has been seen visiting Miss Neville, not Stephen. However, Sidney's inference makes little sense. The disguised man seen visiting Miss Neville must be Stephen rather than his twin because his brother, having recently arrived from Europe and, knowing no one, has no reason to assume a disguise.\(^5\) It is

\(^5\)Nor can we say that the person witnessed outside Miss Neville's house is simply Felix (the European) in his own clothes, for these could scarcely be said to constitute a "disguise." When Sidney Carlton later sees the European Felix in the park, he immediately recognizes the young man simply as Stephen, not as Stephen in disguise.
Stephen, not Felix, who has a reputation to protect. It is Stephen who has from the beginning been secretive about his whole relationship with Miss Neville. And it is Stephen who, after visiting Mrs. Rivers' shop, walks a "circuitous half mile" before entering Miss Neville's dwelling, clearly for the sake of appearances. Therefore, when Stephen informs us that he was staying at his mother's house at the same time he was witnessed skulking about Miss Neville's in disguise, and then informs us that his assertions cannot be verified because his mother happened to be away from home during his visit, the reader requires more than the timely appearance of a twin brother to explain things.

Stephen's behavior on yet another occasion also supports the conclusion that he has lied. He tells us that when he finally returns to the city from Burlington, ostensibly to obtain from Clelia Neville an explanation of the charges leveled against her, he enters, as always, unannounced, only to find her in conference with Sidney Carlton, who has come to warn the young lady of his suspicions concerning her conduct. Instead of joining them, as we might expect him to do if he had a clear conscience, for Sidney is discussing the very issues Stephen himself is supposedly desperate to resolve, he informs us that he ducks into a bedroom and waits until Sidney leaves before confronting Miss Neville privately. He does this, he says, to avoid "a great and mutual embarrassment" (434), but such reasoning is clearly specious, for he admits that it would have been far more embarrassing to be found lurking in Miss Neville's bedchamber.
In fact, the introduction of the narrator's twin at the end of the fragment does little but confirm the reader's suspicions. The reader knows from the first mention of Stephen's twin that no writer would include such a tantalizing and consequential fact unless that brother were to figure somehow in the narrative proper. Thus when the reader discovers that Miss Neville has drawn a portrait of Stephen which does not include the facial that the narrator has borne since childhood, he knows that it is only a matter of time before the twin (whom she has drawn) surfaces. But the eventual appearance of the twin does not resolve the ambiguities generated by the narrator. That he lies repeatedly to friends, he himself admits, and he shows himself, like many of Brown's narrators, capable of rationalizing himself into self-deception. In order for the novel to make real sense, the reader must realize that Stephen has lied not only to his friends and himself, but indeed, blatantly, to us.

Brown's epistolary novels, *Clara Howard* and *Jane Talbot*, have been largely ignored by critics. Admittedly, they are less interesting, less complex, less intense, less provocative than the fictions that preceded them. But it may be that *Clara Howard* and *Jane Talbot* are ignored for another reason as well, for only by ignoring them can the conclusions about Brown's art that critics have been disposed toward be reached. For as stated above, nearly every critical assessment of

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6The only two lengthy discussions of the novels are afforded by Ringe in *Charles Brockden Brown* and Witherington in "Charles Brockden Brown's Other Novels."
Brown informs us that his principal flaw as an artist was his inability, due to haste, to construct tight, coherent narratives. Allegedly, he was first and foremost a thinker and only secondarily a novelist, a man in love with ideas who was unable to render those ideas in coherent narratives having consistent characters. His fictions are mere testing grounds for ideas, according to one popular hypothesis, and he himself was more interested in the ideas his characters represent than in characterization.\(^7\)

The epistolary novels present an enormous stumbling block to this conclusion, because they exhibit the kind of simple, coherent narratives that Brown is supposed to be incapable of writing and because they are neither philosophical nor psychological in nature. Although lip service is occasionally paid to the philosophical and psychological concerns explored in greater depth in the earlier novels, Brown's last two novels are nearly devoid of "idea." Critics are therefore content to label them "radical departures."\(^8\) But in what sense are they departures? True, they are a good deal simpler in both form and content, lacking as they do the web of intricate subplots as well as the lofty philosophical and psychological foundations of the four major novels. This relative simplicity has even been equated with coherence. But I have argued throughout this work that even Brown's


\(^8\)Fielder, p. 140; Ringe, p. 128.
earlier, more complex novels were coherent—that what appears to many critics as confusion and incoherence results from lies told by Brown's narrators, not from Brown himself. Such an authorial design, I argue, is the crux of Brown's narrative technique. And in this important sense, Clara Howard and Jane Talbot are not departures, for despite their relative simplicity, they exhibit the same tokens of narrative unreliability as the earlier works; indeed this type of narrative is the soul of Brown's technique in his fictions. Both epistolary novels demonstrate Brown's continuing fascination with human beings who lie to their acquaintances, to themselves, and to the reader.

In tone and theme Clara Howard resembles the second part of Arthur Mervyn, for both concern the trials of a young man without fortune who must choose a spouse. In each novel the young man in question is prone to prevarication and rationalization of his motives. The narrator of Arthur Mervyn tells us that he prefers Ascha Fielding, a homely woman many years his senior, because she is more "mature" and her views more compatible than those of the younger, physically attractive Eliza Hadwin. The reader, however, has every reason to suspect that Miss Fielding's wealth—and Eliza's penury—have determined the narrator's choice, for previous to his discovery of Ascha's wealth, he seemed oblivious to any of Eliza's comparative shortcomings. Similarly, Philip Stanley's shifting affections in Clara Howard seem to be influenced by money. Donald Ringe is correct in pointing out that Philip first becomes interested in Mary Wilmot when she inherits the five thousand dollars from her brother; when the rich and beautiful
Clara happens along, he quickly transfers his attentions to her. Ringe concludes that "Philip Stanley—like Arthur Mervyn or, indeed, Stephen Calvert when he first wooed Louisa—is at least as much interested in the money as he is in the girl."\(^9\) Yet Ringe, who asserts that we are justified to "question the purity" of Philip Stanley's motives, backs away from the implications of his argument, warning us that "one must be cautious . . . in seeing Brown as a conscious ironist."\(^{10}\) I maintain, however, that it is only by seeing the questionable motives of Philip Stanley as a conscious design by the author that we can solve the two mysteries upon which the plot of Clara Howard hinges.

The first mystery concerns the origin of the five thousand dollars which Mary Wilmot inherits from her brother. Brown incorporates this entire subplot from his earlier novel, Edgar Huntly. The parallel is nearly exact. In Huntly, when Waldegrave is murdered, he is discovered to possess a large sum of money which cannot be accounted for. His sister Mary and Edgar plan to use this money to get married, until Weymouth appears, claiming that it is his. Circumstances favor Weymouth's claim, for the amount he says was held in trust for him is the exact amount that the dead Waldegrave had in his possession. In Clara Howard, Mary Wilmot comes into such a sum upon the death of her brother. Like Waldegrave in Edgar Huntly, Wilmot was a teacher, and when he is drowned, both his sister Mary and his friend Philip Stanley

\(^9\) Ringe, pp. 118-19.  
\(^{10}\) Ringe, p. 119.
are surprised to find him in possession of five thousand dollars, the existence of which he never alluded to. When a traveler named Morton appears (like Weymouth, Morton is involved in mercantile enterprises) and claims the money, the mystery of the money's origin is supposedly solved and Mary Wilmot surrenders the money although, as in the case of Mary Waldegrave, it will leave her destitute. When Mary Wilmot departs with Sedley, she leaves Philip Stanley a money order which, according to Philip, is mislaid. Curiously enough, Morton does not reapply to Philip for the money and later changes his mind about asserting his claim.

Odd though all this may seem, the reader does not become suspicious of being deceived until much later in the novel when he is informed that the five thousand dollars was in fact given to Wilmot by Sedley, Mary's secret admirer. Sedley, aware that Miss Wilmot would never accept such a gift, gave it to her brother anonymously, in the hopes that it might relieve their poverty. This story is undoubtedly true, coming as it does from Mrs. Valentine, who could gain nothing by lying. Here then is the final explanation. However, the reader should note that it does not clear up the mystery so much as raise a new one. For if the five thousand dollars was a gift from Sedley, then Morton's claim must have been fraudulent, unless we assume there were two identical sums, one of which disappears without a trace. The inference of Morton's fraudulence is inescapable, but Morton cannot have perpetrated the fraud on his own, for he could have had no knowledge of the exact amount Mary Wilmot inherited without an accomplice.
Only Philip Stanley and Miss Wilmot herself know the exact amount. That Stanley is behind Morton's fraudulent claim is also suggested by the fact that Morton, according to Stanley, seems unaccountably to lose interest in the money when Clara Howard appears on the scene and **Stanley himself shifts his interest from Mary to Clara**.

Everything is easily explained if we distrust Stanley, the writer of letters that convey all of the vital information. It is through him that we meet Morton; no other character, including Mary Wilmot, does. We have only Philip's word for Morton's claim (and, indeed, his very existence). Surely Morton's reported change of heart is odd, especially since he claims (through Stanley) to have been nearly ruined by his mercantile losses. Yet, a short while later, when he is informed that Miss Wilmot has disappeared (with his money, for all he knows), he is not only unsuspicious, but indeed unconcerned about the money he earlier claimed stood between him and destitution. Such vacillation, taken at face value, makes no sense.

In fact, the only explanation that does make sense is that the author of the fraud is none other than Stanley himself, who has both opportunity and motive. Young and poor, he had been abandoned, he thought, by his previous benefactor, Mr. Howard, and became indentured to a "parsimonious master." He has contemplated marrying a girl he admittedly does not love partly because her inheritance will make life easier for himself and his two sisters. However, if he can convince

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11 Edgar Huntly, the reader remembers, has two sisters in an identical situation.
Miss Wilmot that the money is not rightfully hers, he can acquire the money without marrying her. He only abandons the scheme (which accounts for the curious vacillation in the character of the fictional Morton when the Howards, who are better game for the ambitious young man, reappear on the scene.\textsuperscript{12}

The other central mystery of Clara Howard is the reason for Mary Wilmot's sudden departure. Here again the parallel with Edgar Huntly proves instructive. Edgar's fiancee, Mary Waldegrave, also disappears when Weymouth tries to locate her so that he can claim his money. While searching for her, he talks to several of Mary's neighbors, who are unanimous in their disapproval of her; they insinuate that she is less than strictly moral and that she has left the city because her "condition" (pregnancy) could no longer be concealed. Oddly enough, the same charge is leveled against Miss Wilmot. According to Stanley, for the story is transmitted through him, Miss Wilmot may have absconded

\textsuperscript{12}As soon as Mr. Howard appears and Philip is introduced to Clara, the young man ignores Miss Wilmot completely. She, in a letter to Stanley which announces her intended departure, complains that he has not visited or written her in over a month despite her frequent inquiries. Furthermore, Stanley keeps the existence of Mary and his betrothal to her a secret from both Mr. Howard and Clara until he has insinuated himself into the confidence and business affairs of the former and the heart of the latter. And when he finally does tell Clara about the existence of the other girl, he slyly casts aspersions upon Miss Wilmot's character by relating the abruptness of her departure and his mock concern over the fact that she is seen leaving with Sedley, whom Stanley implies may be a seducer. In view of all this, he little expects Clara to remain convinced of Clara's purity, nor does he expect her to banish him until he can find Miss Wilmot and renew his previous offer of marriage.
with Sedley after becoming pregnant. An old nurse, he says, has overheard a conversation in which:

Sedley dealt in hints and inuendoes which imported that he was on as good terms with Molly [Mary] Wilmot as he desired to be; that all his wishes with respect to her were now accomplished; . . . that she would speedily resume her customary station in society, as the cause of her present disappearance was likely to be removed. ¹³

Philip's willingness to believe and transmit this slander is curious, for until this point he has professed the deepest admiration for his former fiancee. Even Clara accuses him of using the slander as an excuse for not giving back the five thousand dollars Mary has left with him. Later, when Philip visits the house of the lady where the above quoted conversation was to have taken place, the lady informs him that the nurse misinterpreted the entire discourse; she says: "there is not a man in the world of stricter principles!" (357) than Sedley. Indeed, this opinion of Sedley is corroborated by everything the reader has already learned of him. It was he who made the anonymous gift to Miss Wilmot's brother in the first place. In fact, far from making insinuations about Miss Wilmot, Sedley may have been hinting that the two intend to be married:

Sedley certainly talked as if he knew more of Miss Wilmot than he just then saw fit to disclose. What he said was accompanied with nods and smiles of some significance . . . (357)

In view of the fact that the two later marry, this reading seems much more plausible.

Nevertheless, regardless of the way we interpret Sedley's comments about Miss Wilmot, we must consider the possibility that she did in fact abscond to conceal pregnancy. She departs on November 11, hinting to Stanley that disaster is imminent:

Thy Mary is hastening to the grave with a very quick pace. That is her only refuge from humiliation and calamity .... Poverty, contempt, and labour are a burden too great for me. (296)

The diction of the passage is highly ambiguous, for she may simply be referring to Morton's claim to her fortune, the loss of which will leave her destitute. But such does little to explain what "humiliation" she refers to. Similarly, why does she feel that poverty will make her the subject of "contempt"? Such terms make sense only if we see that Mary Wilmot is pregnant, in which case the "labour" she refers to must be read as a conscious pun. Her return to the scene of the action in early May (seven months later) further supports such a reading. But if Mary did abscond to conceal her pregnancy, who then was her seducer? Clearly, Philip Stanley would like Clara (and us) to believe that Sedley is the villain, and he attaches much weight to the fact that she leaves the city in his company. But Mary has written the letter warning of her downfall to Philip, not Sedley. Until she leaves the city with
Sedley, she has been in the company of Philip Stanley. Indeed, until that point, she is Philip's fiancee.\(^{14}\)

The interpolated tale of Miss Wilmot's unhappy mother lends further support to the hypothesis developed above, for that lady too was seduced and abandoned. The interpolated tale closely parallels what I am suggesting happens in the novel proper. Miss Wilmot's mother, whose name was Mary-Anne, was seduced by a man named Wilmot, with whom she was openly in love. Like her daughter with Philip Stanley, Mary-Anne was undetered by the fact that Wilmot never professed to requite her love. When Mary-Anne discovered herself to be pregnant, she decided to sacrifice her own happiness and reputation, for Wilmot has since become engaged to a young lady with great fortune (like Clara Howard). The only difference between this interpolated tale and the novel proper is the outcome, for the sense of tragic justice in the interpolated tale (wherein Wilmot is forced to marry the girl he seduced, leading to the unhappiness of all concerned) gives ways to the comic injustice of the novel proper, in which Philip Stanley, who always watches the main chance and who cons everyone in the novel, comes away with all the rewards of virtue. He even uses the real virtue of Sedley and his sister, for Sedley, who confesses that he does not like Stanley, cannot explose him as a seducer and an adventurer

\(^{14}\)If my analysis is correct, the reader will note a similarity between this situation and one in *Arthur Mervyn*. In the earlier novel, young Arthur, according to Mrs. Althorpe, is said to have accused Betty Lawrence, his stepmother, of being a woman of low morals; the young man admits that he himself was the first to degrade her and therefore knows whereof he speaks.
without humiliating and degrading the woman he has long loved and
intends to marry. Brown's theme, the one we have seen so frequently,
remains the same: the appearance of virtue is a perfectly adequate
substitute for the real thing.

Jane Talbot is a better novel than Clara Howard. Its principal
characters--Jane, her brother Frank, and Henry Colden--are richer than
the one-dimensional characters in the previous work. The early portions
of Jane Talbot, which revolve around the title character's childhood
and the schemes of her nefarious brother contain both drama and tension;
however, when brother Frank disappears, the novel rapidly declines and
finally disintegrates long before its conclusion. Jane Talbot also
differs considerably from Clara Howard in having a vacillating focus.
Despite its title, Clara Howard is Philip Stanley's story and it is he
that concerns us. On the other hand, in Jane Talbot the first third of
the novel focuses entirely on Jane. The letters that we read are hers,
and they recount her stormy childhood with a villainous brother and
weak father. In this part of the work the reader's sympathies are
entirely with her. However, the emphasis changes considerably in the
next third as Henry Colden's role become more significant. It is not
just that he writes more of the letters, but that more of the important
features of the plot are revealed to us through his, rather than Jane's,
correspondence. It is doubtful whether the reader ever truly
sympathizes with the indolent, whining Golden, but Jane's increasingly
passive role surrenders our immediate attention. In the last third of
the novel, which is almost entirely devoid of interest, Jane becomes completely passive, and Colden, the reader realizes, is the center of everything of consequence. Although the novel closes with one of Jane's short letters to Henry, Brown in the latter portions of the novel has focused our attention almost exclusively on her lover. Many of this novel's obvious apparent weaknesses may be attributed to the fact that Brown, in the final analysis, was unsure whose story he was telling.

In addition to the shifting focus in *Jane Talbot*, the novel exhibits the same kinds of narrative ambiguity as Brown's previous fictions. In a sense, the entire novel is little more than a self-exoneration on the part of Jane and Colden for the crimes attributed to them by others, and for this reason it becomes difficult for the reader to accept the letters themselves as evidence of the lovers' innocence, aware as he is that the writers of those letters intend for him to do just that. At times, the reader may even suspect that the supposedly private letters of Jane and Colden were composed for the benefit of those who might accuse them. For instance, when the novel opens, Jane writes Colden three long letters about her childhood and adolescence. "I am not surprised that calumny has been busy with my life" (5), she tells her lover. But the story she recounts completely vindicates her. Colden has been told that Jane was responsible for the ruin of her father and brother when she refuses them a loan that would

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have staved off their creditors long enough for their mercantile speculation to succeed. According to popular report, she has instead spent a large portion of her inheritance on baubles and trinkets from a disreputable jeweler. Jane's letters to Colden, however, tell a different story. According to her, Frank has simply been squandering their father's money and has used a signed note from Jane to buy those very trinkets for his own mistress. With her father now dead and her brother in Europe at the time she writes the letters to Colden, there is no one to deny her version of events. As a result of her letters Colden writes, "Need I say . . . that I acquit you of the guilt laid to your charge?" (52)

But Jane's letters and Henry's reply do more than inform the reader that she has exonerated herself in his eyes. They also tend to exonerate her before the reader. The question which the reader then has every right to ask is whether the writers intended for this to be the case. Who were the letters really written for? For each other? Or a larger audience? But the reader may be less than fully convinced, because Jane herself has admitted that her brother has a reputation throughout the city for being a shrewd businessman, and this does not square with her story that he has simply squandered her father's large fortune. In addition, there is the fact that Mrs. Fielder, Jane's godmother, who dearly loves her adopted daughter, suggests Jane has a history of imprudent behavior. In an early letter Mrs. Fielder complains that Jane has "consulted my pleasure but little. I have all the rights,
in regard to you, of a mother, but these have been hitherto dispised or unacknowledged" (58). Later, when that lady hears that Jane has been unfaithful to her husband, she writes, "I have heard what I cannot believe; yet considering your former conduct, I have misgivings that I cannot subdue" (57), (italics added).

The most serious charge leveled against Jane Talbot and Colden is that of adultery. The charge hinges on a letter allegedly written by Jane to Colden immediately after the adultery. However, the lovers claim that the incriminating portions of the letter were forged; much of what follows in the novel deals with their "solving" the mystery of who "forged" the letter and why. The pros and cons of this issue will be discussed in detail below, but it is important to note that the letters themselves are inconclusive evidence of the lovers' innocence. Colden advised Jane that they may hope to acquit themselves of the charge "by showing all the letters that have passed between us, the contents of which will show that such guilt is impossible" (84). According to Jane, Mrs. Fielder is finally convinced, just before her death near the end of the novel, of their innocence, partly in consequence of reading Colden's letters to Jane.

Of course, the letters do protest the innocence of the lovers, but again the reader is justified in questioning them as evidence simply because the writers of those letters may have written them for that very purpose. The guilty would have found them as easy to compose as the innocent. Such a possibility is enhanced by the awareness of
Jane and Colden of their letters' utility in this regard. For instance, when Colden reportedly receives a letter from Miss Jessup, in which she confesses to the forgery, he immediately "transcribes" it for his relations, who have heard the charges against him. Later, when Jane is taken from him by Mrs. Fielder (seemingly, she is lost to him forever), he uses the letters to convince a "new friend," Harriet Thomson, that his dealings with Jane, have been strictly honorable. And Jane herself sends copies of their letters to the Montfords as evidence that she and Colden have been maligned. The letters, then, which purport to be private, in reality have a rather large audience. One recent critic has pointed out that even Brown's contemporaries would have thought it unusual that the letters would have been passed around so freely, but indeed this is the point.\textsuperscript{16} If the supposedly private letters have in reality a considerable public audience, who is to say that they may not have been composed for that audience?

Aside from the fact that the "private" letters of Jane Talbot may have been composed with a larger audience in mind, there are other reasons to believe that Jane and Colden have been indiscreet and that the latter in question is no forgery. Jane herself admits to writing the first half of that letter, and in this early portion she alludes to Colden's spending the night at her house when her husband was away. She explains, however, that this situation is occasioned by a violent storm. Aware of the seeming impropriety involved, Jane arranges to

\textsuperscript{16}Witherington, p. 267.
sleep with her servant girl, but her prudent precaution, she says, is rendered ineffectual when she converses with Colden until three-thirty in the morning so that the servant cannot testify on her behalf.

The tone of the letter is even more incriminating than the information it affords the reader. Even in the portion that Jane admits to writing, there are ambiguous allusions. She confesses that "What passed last night has left my mind at no liberty to read and to scribble as I used to do" (75). Furthermore, the audacious tone of this particular letter does not square with the meekness and subservience of all her other correspondence. Even in the portion she admits to writing, she upbraids Colden for not returning to her immediately and hints that he may have another romantic interest. However, she says, "... I should be glad to see that creature who would dare to enter into competition with me" (75).

The second half of the letter, which Jane claims was forged, alludes to her invitation to Colden to meet her that evening, at which time they will again be alone. It also refers unfavorably to her absent husband and expresses her fear of pregnancy: "I am terrified of certain consequences. What may happen if--No, last night's scene must not be repeated; for a month at least to come" (75). Jane and Colden finally attribute this "forgery" to Miss Jessup, who, according to Jane, confesses the entire matter to Mrs. Fielder before the latter dies. But since we learn of this confession through Jane after Mrs. Fielder's death (and Miss Jessup's), there is no way to verify the account. Indeed, it is difficult to believe that Miss Jessup did forge
the second half of the letter for a number of reasons. She is supposed
to have visited Jane (entering unannounced), spied the unfinished letter
(which Jane has left in plain sight despite the confidential nature of
its communication), immediately hatched a devious plan with regard to
it, and stolen it, thereupon retreating so quietly that Jane and her
servant were never aware of her entrance. Then she is to have forged
the second part of the letter so carefully that Jane's own mother is
unable to detect the splice even after she is informed by her daughter
that part is a clever forgery. (Jane herself is also unable to detect
the splice, so similar is the handwriting.) Besides all this, the
motive ascribed to Miss Jessup is her love for Jane's husband, a
secret so well kept to this point, that no one, including Jane herself,
was aware of its existence. The validity of Miss Jessup's "confession"
is undercut when we remember that Colden has previously given Mrs.
Fielder a letter, supposedly written by Miss Jessup herself, in which
the latter confessed to the forgery. But when Mrs. Fielder suspects
that Colden himself has written the letter and investigates the matter,
Miss Jessup informs her that the letter Colden has given her is a
forgery.

The situation, then, is ambiguous. Either Jane and Colden are
lying and have forged the letter containing Miss Jessup's original
confession, or Miss Jessup is lying, having forged the second half of
Jane's letter to Colden. Jane's and Colden's version is far more
complicated, however, and requires a much greater suspension of dis­
belief, involving as it does a doubtful motive (Miss Jessup's), a
scarcely credible forgery, and a curious change of heart (on the part of Miss Jessup, who supposedly confesses, then denies her confession, only to confess a second time at the end of the novel).

In addition to the fact that the novel becomes much simpler and clearer with regard to both action and motivation if we suspect that Jane and Colden are lying about the "forgery," other evidence supports such a hypothesis. The reader should remember that Jane does not immediately deny the charges leveled against her by Mrs. Fielder, nor does she deny, at first, that she wrote any of the letter in question. Her immediate response to her mother's charges, the shortest letter in the novel, does not in any way protest her innocence but rather informs Mrs. Fielder that she (Jane) will comply with all of her mother's wishes and vows an "eternal separation" from Colden. Jane's lack of moral indignation at being falsely accused implies guilt, and the reader is rather surprised later when Jane changes her tone completely, giving an improbable account of how half the letter was a clever forgery. Colden himself, days later, seems to understand this very difficulty when he writes to Mrs. Fielder that "To suffer your charges to pass for a moment uncontradicted would be unjust not more to ourselves than to you" (89). But many such "moments" have already passed for Jane, who procrastinated far too long for her later tone of outraged innocence to be entirely convincing. Even the letter she writes to Henry Colden (shortly after the one to her mother), in which she tells him she intends to comply with her mother's wishes, does not confute the charges
but instead speaks of "a blasted reputation, poverty, contempt, the
indignation of thy friends" (80).

If all this is not clearly enough, Mrs. Fielder suggests that the transgression alluded to in the "forged" letter is not the first of Jane's improprieties. According to her mother, it is simply the latest and most flagrant of her daughter's transgressions. The lady informs us that, (like Clara Wieland) Jane has a "sensibility that required strict government" (66) and an "impetuosity of feeling which distinguished" (69) her at an early age. Her behavior with Colden has been from the start far from exemplary, as Mrs. Fielder points out:

It was therefore, perhaps, somewhat indiscreet to permit such very frequent visits, such very long walks. To neglect the friends whom you lived with, for the sake of exclusive conversations and lonely rambles noon and night, with a mere stranger . . . you, too, already a betrothed woman; your lover absent . . . (68)

Brown's careful development of Jane's character in the early portions of the novel clearly suggest that we are to interpret events in the way I have argued above. When Jane says at the beginning of the novel, "I am very far from being a wise girl" (3), she is far closer to truth than false modesty; the first three chapters of the novel bear her out. Admittedly, she is smart enough to suspect her brother Frank's motives, as well as his chicanery, long before her witless father does, but her very levelheadedness in this regard is undercut when she allows herself to be duped by Frank even after she has firm evidence against him. Yet it is not so much her admitted foolishness as her motivation that is ultimately revealing. She remains firm in the face of her
beloved brother's insults and cruel mockery, proving her courage and endurance, but she is totally undone by Frank's rare moments of feigned kindness. When he cries, she is "thoroughly subdued" (38) and completely blind to the fact that his tears are quite obviously calculated. She admits that "My heart . . . is the sport, the mere plaything, of gratitude and pity. Kindness will melt my firmest resolutions in a moment" (32). Is the reader not thereby justified in suspecting that her "firmest resolution" is later "melted" by Colden, the man she loves? Clearly, Jane is a feeble-minded romantic, a fact Mrs. Fielder is also aware of, for while her stepdaughter's transgressions mortify the lady, they do not surprise her. She writes to Jane that "it was only requisite to meet with one contemplative, bookish, and romantic as yourself" (69).

Mrs. Fielder's judgment should be the reader's, for Jane Talbot is unique in the Brown canon in the sense that it deals with two wavering weak-willed romantics. They lie, just as the narrators of the earlier novels did, but their lies are petty, concealing an all too human transgression. Of Brown's "The Man at Home" the author once said, "Give me a tale of lofty crimes, rather than honest folly." In Jane Talbot, the lovers' lies are no longer the grand, soul-revealing lies of Arthur Mervyn, Edgar Huntly, Ormond, and Wieland.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The question, of course, is why.

The five previous chapters have attempted to demonstrate the kind of narrative that Charles Brockden Brown characteristically employed. The cumulative evidence in favor of my thesis is, I think, difficult to dismiss. However, if Brown was in fact writing fictions that were, in effect, mystery stories without a detective to unravel the clues, what was his purpose? Why did he choose to write such tales? Was there something in his background or personality which might help to account for such puzzling, hide-and-seek fictions? Or was there something inherent in America at the turn of the nineteenth century that contributed? Just as significantly, we must ask what such fictions imply about the relationship of Brown to his readers. These questions are not easy to answer, but some sort of answer to them is needed to understand Brown's work.

I have already suggested one important solution to the problem. Quite clearly, Brown's use of unreliable narrators and the complex, ambiguous narratives that resulted from them complement the theme of Brown's major works: the ambiguity of the world in which his characters live. Brown's world bears a striking resemblance to that of Melville's Confidence Man. At the end of the Melville novel, the author presents us with a situation reminiscent of the kind we repeatedly meet in Brown.
An old man is given a counterfeit-bill detector by a young boy (who may himself be a swindler). By comparing the bill to the detector, the old man will supposedly be able to ascertain whether any bill he has accepted is genuine. The problem is that the pamphlet admits that while there are many clues to look for, any of which may indicate that the bill is a fake, no single test is infallible. The bill seems to be Melville's symbol of men and the world they live in: there are ways to tell a fraud, but none of them are foolproof. Each man, therefore, faces a dilemma: he can distrust all bills, including the good ones, or, he can have faith. The latter, of course, is exactly what the confidence man urges the old man to do. And such is precisely the appeal of Arthur Mervyn and Brown's other narrators: "Trust me." Part of the reason that critics have been willing to do so is that to distrust is ultimately much more complicated and difficult, as the allegory of The Confidence Man attests. For if we distrust, we much check all the bills; it is easier simply to trust, but it is also more costly.

Kenneth Bernard argues that it is only Arthur Mervyn's innocence and truthfulness which "shines a beam through the ambiguous and ambivalent rush of events." To distrust Mervyn, Bernard implies, is to surrender to the chaotic world of the novel. Yet this, for Brown, and for Melville, is exactly what the reader must do. It is only by confronting the complex deceptions that the truth can be discovered. "Look a lie

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and find the truth . . . ," the boy in *The Confidence Man* suggests.²

In a world full of deception, the only possible road to truth is the one that acknowledges the existence of lies and attempts to discover them. Brown is not interested in telling us who lied, as the conventional detective novel does. Such a convention would, ironically, falsify the final truth of Brown's fiction—that men, their motives, and the very world they inhabit are complex and ambiguous. If Brown's narrators were exposed in their lies and self-deceptions, and failed to prosper as a result, how could the author demonstrate the theme that recurs throughout his major fiction: that the appearance of virtue is often a substitute for the real thing?

However, to say that the form of Brown's novels derived from their content is to do little more than beg the question, or perhaps to pose it over again. If Brown's insistence upon the device of the unreliable narrator was grounded in his view of the world in which he lived, then how did he come to form such a skeptical, almost cynical, view? To answer such a question is enormously difficult because we know so little of the man. The various biographies of Brown are inadequate for a number of reasons. Paul Allen's *Life of Charles Brockden Brown*, which was commissioned by Brown's widow, was long thought to have been lost.³ Its recent discovery and publication serves only to emphasize


the predicament of scholars with regard to Brown's life. The book contains little pertinent information about Brown himself. The vast majority of the volume presents selections from Brown's unpublished fiction. In addition to unsound judgments and criticism, Allen exhibits appalling ignorance of his subject, claiming, for instance, that *Ormond* was Brown's first novel. Although Brown and Allen may have been acquainted, there is no reason to suppose that the latter was privy to Brown's private life or writing process. Allen's thesis concerning Brown's haste and faulty craftsmanship was nothing more than an inference he drew from the texts he examined. In fact, his *Life* repeatedly asserts that it is the writings of an author that comprise the "events" of his life, and in this fashion Allen justifies his ignorance of the man himself and the resulting paucity of the volume's biographical detail.

William Dunlap's biography, from which modern biographies derive, is little better. Dunlap was commissioned to take over Allen's *Life* when the latter failed to deliver what he had promised in the prospectus. Brown's widow, Elizabeth Linn, no doubt expected a conventional memorial, whereas what Allen gave her was an unconscionably brief account of Brown's life, a selection from the author's unpublished work that, due to what she considered salacious, offended her, and a sharply critical appraisal of her husband's work. Dunlap knew Brown as Allen did not, for the two were personal friends. Nevertheless, though Dunlap and Brown corresponded and frequently visited each other, the two men spent most of their lives apart, and there is no substantial
evidence to suggest that even Dunlap was privy to Brown's creative process. From numerous entries in Dunlap's Diary we learn that Brown often used Dunlap and Elihu Hubbard Smith as sounding boards for his novels in progress, but he never seems to have discussed his work with either of them. In fact, Brown, from all evidence, was extremely secretive and sometimes sensitive in this regard. A long letter from Smith, to be discussed in detail below, bemoans the fact that Brown's fictions were filled with inexplicable mysteries and riddles, dark hints rather than plain meaning, and Smith urges his young friend to make his purpose more clear. There is, however, no reason to suspect that Brown ever explained his novels or their inner workings to either Smith or Dunlap, and he quietly disregarded their advice when they pointed out what seemed to them to be incongruities in his novels."

Both the letters and the journal entries of Smith and Dunlap convey the sense that their young friend remained essentially a mystery to them.

Perhaps even more significant is the fact that while Dunlap knew Brown better than Allen did, Dunlap did not have a free hand in revising the Allen biography. Because the first volume of the Allen Life had already gone to the printer, Dunlap found that he was required to follow the Allen format. He was allowed to delete those extracts from Brown's unpublished fiction that Elizabeth Linn Brown objected to, provided he could substitute other unobjectionable passages of the same

"David Lee Clark in Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America (Folcroft, PA: Folcroft Press, 1969), p. 159 points out just such an instance where Dunlap calls into question the fortuitous appearance of the dagger."
length. He could tone down Allen's critical commentary, but if he deleted two lines of Allen's text, he had to replace them with two lines of his own. For this reason, Dunlap did not change much. As Charles Bennett, who has written a scholarly introduction to the recently published Allen biography, puts it: "Most every word of the first volume of the Life not Brown's own is Allen's."\(^5\) The resulting situation is ironic, for Dunlap, who was Brown's intimate, remained fettered to the declarations and pronouncements of a man who knew the author, in all probability, only slightly. The Dunlap revision is not so much an attempt to correct Allen's errors as it is an attempt to render the biography less objectionable to Brown's widow.

Modern scholars, of course, inherit this legacy, for beyond Dunlap's Life, the journals of Smith and Dunlap, and a handful of related documents, critics have little to go on. Most disturbing is the fact that for the decisive years of 1793-1797, Brown disappears almost completely. There is an hiatus in Dunlap's Diary for these years, and there is little else to fill the void. Brown gave up the study of law in 1793 and indicated that he would devote himself to authorship, and there can be little doubt that he was writing, but we know very few details about these years that must have been crucial to the development of Brown's art. When he surfaces again in 1798, he has completed Alcuin, begun Wieland and several other novels. Only Harry Warfel, in Charles Brockden Brown: American Gothic Novelist, attempts to trace

Brown's movement during the previous five years, but the evidence is scanty. Perhaps the fact that scholars know so little of the years preceding Brown's flurry of literary activity has encouraged the notion that the major novels were so hastily conceived and carelessly written, whereas common sense would dictate that Brown was probably working and reworking his fictional materials throughout these intervening years, though perhaps unsuccessfully. The materials for *Arthur Mervyn* and *Ormond* no doubt churned in Brown's brain from the time of the plague in 1793, and while the final draft of these novels may have been composed quite rapidly, the entire creative process would seem to have been a good deal slower. The intermediary stages we simply know nothing about. Similarly, *Edgar Huntly* derives from the earlier *Skywalk*, but considering the genesis of the earlier novel, we know next to nothing. The final draft of *Wieland* appears to have been written rapidly in 1798, but that does not prove that its genesis was hasty. Almost certainly, Brown had been mulling the matter of the Yates murders over in his mind since 1796. *Wieland* might even have had an unsuccessful prototype similar to *Skywalk*, or several such prototypes, for all we know.

The glaring gaps and inadequacies of the biographies become an enormous handicap when we consider the relationship between Brown's life and his art. Every writer draws upon personal experience for his fiction to a greater or lesser degree, but what little we know about Brown suggests that personal experience may have been the staple of his art. We know that the plagues of 1793 and 1796 weighed heavily on his
mind, and, of course two novels grew out of these experiences. Nevertheless, it is difficult to say just how much of Brown's fiction is autobiographical. Paul Allen relates the anecdote of Brown's uncle, one Charles Brockden, an Englishman apprenticed to a lawyer during the reign of Charles the Second. Young Brockden supposedly overheard a group of conspirators plotting the overthrow of the king, and he narrowly escaped with his life after being discovered. For this man, according to Allen, Brown was named. What is significant is that Brown made use of this incident in Stephen Calvert, where the narrator's father learns of just such a plot and flees to America, fearing for his life. Do we infer from the fact that Brown invested the fictional Calvert with his own personal history that the author identified with his character? Is Brown's rather unsympathetic depiction of Calvert a self-portrait? Did Brown identify with his other protagonists, perceiving himself as he portrayed them, a self-deluded con man hiding behind a facade of benevolence? A large portion of the limited, available evidence points toward such a conclusion.

Brown, from early childhood must have learned to view himself as an outsider. He was a sickly child, seldom able to join other children in games. As one might expect, he became an avid reader and developed a vivid imagination. As a young man his health continued poor, and Brown grew increasingly introspective. Nevertheless, he was by no means an outcast, and in fact he formed fierce attachments. William Wood Wilkins, Brown's first close friend, is a case in point. The two men lived together briefly and corresponded until Wilkins' death
in 1795. Brown's epistles could almost be classified as love letters, desperately seeking reassurance and affection from his friend. The letters are also riddled with self-deprecation and the young man's customary avowals of gloom and alienation:

I seize anything, however weak and dubious, by which I can hope to raise myself from that profound abyss of ignominy and debasement into which I am sunk by my own reflections.\(^6\)

Unfortunately, Wilkins seems to have been of much the same temper, and it is to be doubted that the two friends were good for each other. A considerably healthier relationship was later to develop between Brown and two new friends, Elihu Hubbard Smith and William Dunlap, and these men, despite the fact that they genuinely admired their young friend, were less tolerant of his morbid moods. But regardless of their admiration, both Smith and Dunlap recognized that their friend was weak, and Warfel tells of their frequent visits to a tripartite tree which they viewed as symbolic of their friendship.\(^7\) The weakest and smartest trunk they designated as Brown's.

There is even reason to suspect that Brown was at times suicidal. He wrote despairing letters to Wilkins, stating that "Had I never had friends and relations, I am convinced that before this time I had ceased to exist, or to exist as an inhabitant of America."\(^8\) With


\(^7\)Warfel, p. 66.

\(^8\)Warfel, p. 31.
Rousseau-like paranoia, he often suspected that his best friends, the people he claimed were his only reason for living, no longer cared for him. To Dunlap he wrote:

> What a dead and absolute vacuity has diffused itself between us! Not an event however momentus, which may have happened to you is known to me. I make no demand upon you. As I am you despise me. How can I remove the burden of your scorn but by transforming myself into a new being.⁹

Smith was particularly concerned about Brown's mental state, accusing Brown of dwelling upon imagined misfortunes:

> You began to fancy that these fictions were real; that you had indeed suffered, enjoyed, known, and seen all that you so long pretended to have experienced; every subsequent event became tinctured with this conviction and accompanied with this diseased apprehension; the habit was formed; and you wandered in a world of your own creation.¹⁰

Smith's diagnosis (he was, in fact, a physician) is all too clear. In his opinion, Brown was not always in touch with reality:

> Why do you so much delight in mystery? Is it the disease of will? or of habit? Do you, of choice, give to the circumstances the air of fiction or have you long accustomed to deal with visionary scenes to intertwine the real with the imaginary . . . that your pep involuntarily borrow the phraseology of fancy . . . .¹¹

Smith not only accused Brown of not being able to separate fact from fancy, but of concealing some dark secret in his past. Evidently, in one of Brown's letters to Smith, he had presented his friend with a

⁹Warfel, p. 88.

¹⁰Warfel, pp. 63-64.

¹¹Warfel, p. 58.
series of ambiguous hints, claiming to have been "a slave to passion and inconsistency," as well as having "desires which cannot be honorably gratified," and "that are no less criminal than fantastic." Smith responded by urging Brown either to confide in him the particulars or conceal the matter altogether, rather than deal in hints and inuendoes. Brown also appears to have given Smith a vague account of some personal experience so full of internal contradictions that Smith did not know what to make of it, especially in view of the fact that Brown hinted that some of the details might have been falsified. While there is no doubt that Smith and Brown were personal friends, we may infer from the above evidence that their relationship may have been more complex. Smith, who was interested in the theories of Benjamin Rush concerning mental illness, may even have viewed his young friend as a patient. In the same letter in which he warned Brown about Brown's propensity for mingling fantasy and reality, Smith says:

> He deserves not the name of physician, who, thro' fear of giving pain, temporizes with his patient, when the ulcer threatens his life and requires instant extirpation.\(^{13}\)

Smith's diagnosis, even if he was speaking metaphorically in the above quotation, is not as extreme as it may first appear. Granted, all writers are "imaginative," but Smith, in addition to being a physician, was also an author and man of letters, and as such he was familiar with

\(^{12}\)Warfel, p. 62.

\(^{13}\)Warfel, p. 57.
the workings of the creative imagination. Nevertheless, both he and
Dunlap were concerned about Brown's abnormal and all too frequent fits
of dejection, as well as his habitual, morbid self-analysis.

Brown himself was acutely aware of his mental state, and
indeed his favorite pastime seems to have been self-analysis. "I am
conscious of a double mental existence," he wrote, saying further that
he saw in himself both a social and a literary personality. The social
part he claimed had "more of light than darkness upon it," but the
genius that drove him to write was of another character altogether,
and it urged him "to steep . . . [his ideas] in shade."14 Like
Hawthorne, another genial man in public, Brown was simply incapable
of writing a happy book. Smith's advice to Brown—that he should
surrender his dark side, with its secrets, self-doubts, ambiguities,
and alienation, may have been medically sound, but Brown's very
creativity may have derived from the darker side of his nature, for,
as Brown himself put it, "When I am sufficiently excited to write,
all my ideas flow naturally and irresistibly through the medium of
sympathies which steep them in shade."15 It is interesting to note
that Brown's morbidity, self-deprecation, and gloom disappeared from
his correspondence upon his engagement and subsequent marriage to
Elizabeth Linn, at which point he also gave up fiction writing. It has
often been supposed that Brown abandoned fiction as a result of a

14Warfel, p. 11.

15Warfel, p. 11.
growing disillusionment with novel writing, just as he earlier grew disillusioned with his study of the law. But it may have been that his marriage and the subsequent birth of his children convinced Brown in a way that his friends never could that perhaps he was not quite as unfortunate as he fancied himself. However, the removal of Brown's self-doubts, along with the removal of his alienation, may have dried up the spring of his creativity as well, for as he himself suggested, his writing was born of his darker side. *Clara Howard* and *Jane Talbot*, which were written while Brown was courting Elizabeth Linn, seem to signal the transition, for they betoken Brown's new-found self-confidence and mental health, just as they exhibit a waning imagination.

If Smith was correct in inferring that Brown concealed some dark secret that was the seed of the young author's morbidity, his theory would go a long way toward explaining Brown's cloaked, hide-and-seek fictions, which are narrated by men and women who themselves have secrets. However, the cause of Brown's "double mental existence" must remain a matter of conjecture. Regardless of its origins, the duality Brown himself noted may have manifested itself in a number of ways. Allen notes its existence in Brown's journal where "we behold him entering into a colloquy and examination of himself! questions are asked, and answers given, where to all appearance, two persons were present."¹⁶ Similarly, the "Henrietta G" letters, published by David Lee Clark, are almost certainly the result of Brown's mental state, which was

¹⁶Allen, p. 16.
characterized by a mingling of fantasy and reality. Clark insists that the letters discovered in Brown's journal (written in Brown's hand) truly represent correspondence between Brown and a girl named Henrietta G. But Eleanor Tilton has argued convincingly that both sets of letters were composed (not just transcribed into his journal) by Brown. While there can be little doubt that Tilton is correct, for the style of both sets of letters is identical, she may be mistaken in her inference that since Henrietta did not write the letters, they must therefore represent an attempt on the part of Brown to write an epistolary romance in the grand style. First of all, one of Brown's letters to "Henrietta" is much more openly salacious than anything Brown ever wrote expressly for publication. In addition, the Henrietta letters contain nothing that even remotely resembles a plot. For an early attempt at an epistolary novel, one need look no further than "A Series of Original Letters," which must have been written shortly after Brown decided to give up his study of the law, and approximately the same time as "Henrietta G." In "A Series of Original Letters" the marks of fiction are all too apparent, even though the plot and conflict vacillate a good deal. Furthermore, there is the fact that a girl named Henrietta is once mentioned in a letter to Wilkens. The

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17 Clark, pp. 55-107.


19 Clark, p. 27.
theory that best accounts for the known facts is that Henrietta G. may, in fact, have existed, but that the letters in Brown's journal represent his private fantasy concerning her. Only in this way can we explain why he would have signed his own name to the clearly fictitious letters (which he would not have done in writing an epistolary romance for publication). The letters are pure fantasy (even though they may concern a real girl), and they exhibit Brown's desperate longing for love and affection, and in tone they do not differ greatly from the young author's despairing epistles to Wilkens. In the Henrietta G. Letters, which were never intended for publication, Brown could be more openly erotic, suggesting specifically the nature of the "criminal desires" he only hinted at in his letters to Smith, than the rigidly moral tone of his public fictions would allow. In this private exercise we catch Brown in the very state Smith warned against; it exhibits the young Brown living dangerously between fantasy and reality, creating a fiction, yet calling it real. These years that we know so little about (1793-1797) must have been most crucial for Brown in terms of both his private life and his art. In fact, novel writing may have been his temporary savior, for soon after the Henrietta G. compositions, he would write genuine fictions, not flimsy personal fantasies. And even if he continued to identify strongly with his protagonists and their "criminal desires," he would at least call them by their names, not his own. If his later marriage would completely restore him to health, his fiction would at least keep him from total despair during the interval.
The America of the late eighteenth century also may have contributed to the kind of fiction Brown wrote. He made much of the fact that he was an American, writing for American readers. Fiercely nationalistic, he argued throughout his career in favor of American cultural independence. He did not obtain copyright in England for his American novels, as Cooper and Irving later would, nor did he write with a European audience in mind, this despite the fact that he gained more recognition abroad than he ever did at home. The prefaces to his novels stress that the subject matter is American and imply that such fictions will somehow benefit his countrymen. But Brown must have sensed, as one British reviewer claimed, that if Brown's novels had been written by Walter Scott in England, they would have been received with much wider critical and popular acclaim.\(^2\)

According to David Lee Clark, in the sixteen years subsequent to American independence, fewer than one hundred books were published in all of the United States.\(^2\) And while Americans proved to be avid readers of newspapers and pamphlets, they had not yet developed a taste for fiction. Novel writing itself, to the Puritan mind, was highly suspect, and many Americans regarded novels as frequently immoral, probably dangerous, and certainly frivolous. Well aware of the pervasive prejudice against fiction, Brown felt compelled to assert again and again that he was a moralist. Nevertheless, despite such avowals,

\(^{20}\) Clark, p. 297.

\(^{21}\) Clark, p. 137.
Warner Berthoff may be correct in suggesting that, oddly enough, for a self-proclaimed moralist, Brown's tales often refuse to surrender a moral. Just how much of Brown's moralistic tone in his prefaces and reviews was heartfelt and how much was occasioned by what he must have regarded as a potentially hostile audience, we may never know.

At any rate, Brown must have been very aware of the nature of that audience. The Henrietta G. letters, which contain undisguised eroticism, he seems never to have attempted to publish. His every word, he must have known, would be scrutinized by a public all too ready to condemn any real or imagined licentiousness. After Brown's death, his wife required Dunlap to replace several of the excerpts Allen had selected for his biography because they contained anatomical references or allusions to bastards and prostitutes. The good lady would brook no impropriety, even in the cause of truth and art. Brown must also have known that his novels would be open to attack on yet another score, and his own brother advised him that such bizarre, violent, and gloomy tales as *Edgar Huntly* could hardly be expected to instruct or improve the reader. Yet, if my readings of Brown's novels are correct, how much greater would have been the hue and cry if Brown allowed his narrators to be recognized in their true lights. What would have been the reaction of Elizabeth Linn, or even Percy Shelly, to the Constantia Dudley of my hypothesis? Brown's "hidden" fictions may have allowed him to tell the truth without fearing unwarranted censorship, just as he

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had earlier attempted to do by writing letters to Smith that were riddled with ambiguous hints and innuendoes.

If this be the case, Brown's relationship to his readers was intricate in a special way. Perhaps every writer is aware to some extent of the contradiction inherent in the creative process itself. As Paul Ricouer suggests, authorship involves both an attempt at truth and a desire for falsehood, which causes the writer to hide from and exhibit himself to his audience simultaneously. Thus Hawthorne introduces himself into the text of The Scarlet Letter via the Custom House sketch, while at the same time couching the principal narrative in such tentative diction, suggesting what could and might be true, that he seems deliberately to avoid authorial responsibility for the fiction. Both Hawthorne and Brown clearly believed that truth can only be stated through indirection. In Brown, this essential paradox must have been greatly intensified, because for the alienated man, the urge to confess, to sing himself, as Whitman would put it, to undress before the reader, is profound, yet so too are his apprehensions that he will be misunderstood or ridiculed. Thus we see Brown throughout his career vacillate between his urge to write, to seek the truth, and to achieve fame on the one hand, and his fear of authorship, his disillusionment with writing, and his disenchantment with his audience on the other.

Brown began his career optimistically enough, assuming that he would be able to make a living with his pen. This he was actually able to do for a short time, although he was later to admit that any American writer could reasonably expect little more than to be reimbursed for his necessary expenses. He desired fame and fortune, and in the prefaces to several of his novels, he appealed directly to his public for support. We can only speculate as to just how bitter he became after he learned that the fame he would achieve was minimal, the fortune practically nonexistent. Nevertheless, for a while Brown's optimism approached wishful thinking on the subject of authorship. In addition to the proceeds from his fiction, he anticipated a healthy revenue from the newly created Monthly Magazine, which he would edit, this optimism despite the dismal track record of previous literary magazines. Brown wrote his brother:

Four hundred subscribers will repay the annual expense of sixteen hundred dollars. As soon as this number is obtained, the printers will begin and trust to punctual payment of these for reimbursement. All over four hundred will be clear profit to me; one thousand subscribers will produce four thousand five hundred dollars, and deducting the annual expense will leave two thousand and seven hundred. If this sum be obtainable, in a year or two you will allow that my prospect is consoling.\footnote{Clark, pp. 128-29.}

Brown would soon learn that such calculations did little but fuel his fantasy life, for the thousand subscribers never materialized, and those who did subscribe frequently had to be coerced for payment.
By 1804 Brown had soured on nearly everything concerned with authorship, even his own fiction. His defense of novel writing in general lacked conviction, and while he still maintained that fiction could be instructive, he admitted that many novels were not, adding weakly that if those who read novels were to stop, "they would be employed in a way still more trivial and pernicious."\textsuperscript{25} According to Allen, Brown came to view his own works as "mere matters of recreation and amusement."\textsuperscript{26} He is even to have remarked to a friend who proposed reading one of his novels that "he might save himself such a needless expenditure of time and trouble, and take the word of the author that the work was not worth a perusal."\textsuperscript{27} In The Literary Magazine and American Register Brown would claim that "I should enjoy a larger share of my own respect at the present moment if nothing had ever flown from my pen, the production of which could be traced to me."\textsuperscript{28} It is difficult to say just how seriously we are to take Brown's later opinions, but there can be little doubt of the writer's disillusionment. In a poem ascribed to Brown he wrote:

\begin{quote}
Fame! I abjure thee, hate thee, thou hast nought Worthy calling into life . . . Come, blest Obscurity! Thy numberless delights around me shed! Give me to walk in privacy, to know
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{25}Clark, p. 241.
\textsuperscript{26}Allen, p. 388.
\textsuperscript{27}Allen, p. 389.
\textsuperscript{28}Warfel, p. 222.
The joys that hover in thy friendly shade,  
The sweet possession of a name unknown.²⁹

Yet, in the last analysis, Brown's disillusionment may have had little to do with his failure to obtain immediate wealth and fame. A more probable cause may have been his own alienation coupled with a profound distrust of his American audience. We can trace the author's apprehensions concerning this audience to the very beginning of his career. As early as 1794 Brown admitted to being terrified by the prospect of exhibiting himself before the public. After viewing his friend Dunlap's new tragedy, The Fatal Deception, in Philadelphia, Brown wrote:

My sufferings during that evening were such as to make me unalterably determined never to be an author. That, indeed, was not before scarcely possible, but if every other circumstances were favorable, the dread of being torn and mangled by the playhouse gentry, either of the stage or pit, would sufficiently damp my ardor.³⁰

Despite Brown's inherent patriotism, he came to realize that his American audience was a poor one, and as his own career progressed, it surely dawned upon him that the danger of being ignored altogether was far greater than that of being "mangled." When The Monthly Magazine failed, Brown wrote bitterly that the magazine might have added "something to the literary reputation of their country, and tend, in some degree, to refute the censures of foreigners on the

³⁰Warfel, p. 53.
apathy and disregard apparently shown by America to literature and science . . . . 31 Brown had learned that through experiences this alleged apathy was all too real. In 1806, he wrote, concerning America's neglect of Benjamin Franklin:

Nothing . . . can show more clearly the singular want of literary enterprise or activity in America than that no one has yet been found in that flourishing republic to collect and publish the works of their only philosopher.32

Thus we note a second paradox at work, for Brown sustained throughout his career a love-hate relationship with his audience. Like Melville two generations later, he could fall in love with the ideal America, yet despise and distrust his unsophisticated American readers. Melville too, after his early successes, would be ignored by an unworthy public, and, like Brown, his reaction would be contradictory, even paradoxical. Desperately desiring to be appreciated, Melville would make it increasingly difficult for his audience to comprehend him, challenging, while at the same time ridiculing, his readers, giving them his vision of truth in a form he must have known would prove incomprehensible, as well as unpalatable, until finally, in The Confidence Man, he appears more interested in deceiving his readers than illuminating them. Such, I suggest, was Brown's relationship with his own audience between 1798 and 1801. Only in this way can we explain the young man's attitude towards his art, for while he always

31 Clark, p. 132.
32 Clark, p. 242.
claimed that his fictions were intended to instruct, yet he also delighted in fabricating tales that would baffle, fictions he must have known would be misread. According to Allen:

The author was often asked by his friends, when he proposed to elucidate the mysteries with which his works of fancy abounded, to which he would give some sportive reply, plainly intimating that he considered it a matter of perfect indifference whether this task was ever accomplished or not. He seemed to consider the curiosity of his readers as an engine in his hands which he might play upon for his own amusement merely, and relinquish when he was tired of the sport.33

Indeed, Brown has sported with more readers over the years than, I suspect, he ever dreamed would be his.

It has been the purpose of this work to describe the nature of Charles Brockden Brown's fictions and finally to suggest some possible reasons why Brown chose to write his series of hidden narratives. The matter of re-evaluation will be left to others, but this much is clear, if my arguments have been persuasive. Given my readings, Brown was perhaps a less versatile writer than has been supposed, for all of his major works may be seen to deal with the same theme (deception) and employ essentially the same formal device (the unreliable narrator). In a sense, he was writing the same book again and again. For many readers, this fact may diminish his stature. But, on the other hand, if Brown was not the careless, hasty, undisciplined writer he has often been portrayed as being, then his work is certainly worthy of a more attentive, fresh appraisal.

33Allen, p. 389.
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