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# Transactional bond in the novels of Charles Brockden Brown

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TRANSACTIONAL BOND IN THE NOVELS OF CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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Date

THIS DISSERTATION IS DEDICATED TO

My husband, Arthur P. (Jay) DiGeronimo, Jr.

My mentor, Dr. William F. Coughlin, Jr.

Ranger

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## ABSTRACT

### TRANSACTIONAL BOND IN THE NOVELS OF CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

by

Gretchen E. DiGeronimo  
University of New Hampshire, May, 1998

The six novels and various other fiction pieces Charles Brockden Brown wrote between 1799 and 1801 coherently demonstrate the operation and effect of literary and artistic representation in early Republican America.

In original close readings of Arthur Mervyn, Edgar Huntly, Ormond, and several other works, this dissertation identifies transactional bond and describes how Brown charted the establishment of the public and private individual self through transactional bond in three specific arenas: relationships between the developing self and written, visual, or reported representation; relationships between master/mentors and apprentices; relationships among women.

Bonds that begin, operate, and dissolve between male characters are exercises in constructing young Republican manhood. Through individual young male's experiences, Brown describes a process for certifying male suffrage. Through the mentor/protege model, Brown makes explicit the questions that surround his society's structuring of that autonomous citizen-self. Female bonds work toward impressing a female self into the useful mold of the good Republican wife/mother. Transactional bonds in Brown's novels are explorations of gender, authority,

and autonomy, complicated by the influence of written or visual gesture.

Brown actuates the competition among those forces by presenting explicitly visual "word portraits" in the narratives, employing techniques in text that parallel the directly visual techniques in paint of portraitists of the post-Revolutionary era.

## INTRODUCTION

"Every man is encompassed by numerous claims, and is the subject of intricate relations," Charles Brockden Brown wrote in 1799, "[and m]any of these may be comprised in a copious narrative."<sup>1</sup> Brown (1771-1810) explored the permutations of those "intricate relations" in his fiction and essays, most completely in the six novels he wrote and published in one productive spurt between 1798 and 1801. He also wrote for and edited several of America's earliest magazines and, late in his career, wrote political pamphlets. Yet Charles Brockden Brown's membership in the American literary canon has always been uncertain. If a claim is a statement, then Brown the writer himself is "encompassed by numerous claims," no single one of which seems stronger or more valid than another, though statements about him come easily enough. He was the first writer to transplant the European Gothic novel successfully to American scenes; he was an influential antecedent to Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville; he was one of the first American writers to attempt--deliberately, self-consciously, and, unfortunately, unsuccessfully--to make a living solely as a writer. All such statements "encompass" and define Brown,

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Brockden Brown, "Walstein's School of History," The Monthly Magazine and American Review August-September 1799, reprinted in Harry Warfel, ed. The Rhapsodist and Other Uncollected Writings by Charles Brockden Brown (New York: Scholars Facsimilies and Reprints, 1943) 152.

so far as such definition is possible. Brown uses the word "claim" in the passage above, however, in the sense of "demand," a demand that establishes encompassing relational definitions. It is the purpose of this dissertation to explore how Brown created and employed a specific variety of "intricate relation" in his work.

Like Charles Willson Peale in pictorial art, William Dunlap in theater, and Thomas Jefferson or Benjamin Latrobe in architecture, Brown was part of the post-Revolution cultural quest for a distinctly American art, an art that would reflect and advance worthy Republican ideals.<sup>2</sup> In the outlets provided by the new magazines, in all of the possibilities hinted at by the growing print medium of a mercantile society, Brown saw the writer's opportunity to influence and direct the fresh construction of a nation.<sup>3</sup> He did not merely recognize the opportunity; with his novels, "sketches," and essays, he took it. In the creation of American nationhood, fictional art, in addition to painting or architecture, was considered a potent tool for articulating and advancing the Republican ideals that would

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<sup>2</sup> See Kenneth Silverman, A Cultural History of the American Revolution (New York: Columbia UP, 1987); Joseph J. Ellis, After the Revolution (New York: Norton, 1979).

<sup>3</sup> Steven Watts, The Romance of Real Life: Charles Brockden Brown and the Origins of American Culture (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994), for example, argues for Brown as "consistently [engaging] questions raised by the emergence of liberal capitalism" (25).



make America the "new Athens".<sup>4</sup> In "Walstein's School of History," Brown came closest to declaring a fiction artist's manifesto when he declared, "To exhibit, in an eloquent narration, a model of right conduct, is the highest province of benevolence" (151). He intended his work to display "[t]he causes that fashion men into instruments of happiness or misery," causes which are "numerous, complex, and operate upon a wide surface" (152). The two richest sources of misery or happiness, the sources that can most easily apply to the greatest number of reachable, reading instruments, he identified as "property" and "the principles which regulate the union between the sexes" (152); in other words, economic assets and marriage. In itself this is nothing new, for in making such a declaration Brown situates his work in the traditions of the novel of purpose, alongside Jean-Jacques Rousseau and William Godwin, and the novel of sentiment, next to Samuel Richardson--all novelists Brown read and greatly admired.<sup>5</sup> For Brown, the artist--in particular, the novelist--has power to foster two desirable goals: justice in the conduct of public behavior ("property") and virtue in the establishment of domestic space ("sex"). Within these

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<sup>4</sup> Ellis, Chapter 1.

<sup>5</sup> See Watts, Romance 31, 69; Harry Warfel, Charles Brockden Brown (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1949) 27; David Lee Clark, Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America (Durham: Duke UP, 1952) 110-113; Kenneth Dauber, The Idea of Authorship in America (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990) 52.

two broad spheres of public and private activity, Brown's novels discuss the foundational generation of a circulating individual self.

Figures in Brown's novels move elastically in response to demands, and their responses take the form of structured transactions. Those transactions create bonds which make new demands and raise new questions. In the worlds inside Brown's novels, these selves are dynamic value-carrying elements that perform transactionary events with others. In the world outside the novels, I argue, Brown intended the novels themselves to be the elements that transact with and influence the culture.<sup>6</sup> Brown's novels are gestures that make demands on their readers--male or female--to think and read carefully, reflectively, actively. The transactional bonds that Brown creates in the relationships among characters and ideas in his fiction coherently emphasize the operation and effect of artistic representation in early Republican America.

Tracking Brown's characters and ideas through his plots is a sometimes difficult task. As an evaluation of the writer as historical man may be imagined as an equation built of numerous statements with the possibility of

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<sup>6</sup> See Cathy N. Davidson, Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America (New York: Oxford UP, 1986) 236-253; Michael Warner, The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990) 152-153; Jane Tompkins, Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860 (New York: Oxford UP, 1985) 43, 67, 79.

innumerable, differing conclusions, so an evaluation of his fictions' characters may also be thought of as an almost mathematical interplay of reliable statement and carefully based speculation---an "if X, then Y" premise. There can be no single correct answer. As Sophia Courtland in Brown's novel Ormond; Or The Secret Witness remarks,

To comprehend the whole truth, with regard to the character and conduct of another, may be denied to any human being, but different observers will have, in their pictures, a greater or less portion of this truth. No representation will be wholly false, and some though not perfectly, may yet be considerably exempt from error.<sup>7</sup>

According to the argument Brown makes in "Walstein's History" above, the individual is "subject," or elastic, in responding to claims that elicit responses that in turn generate new claims. That perpetual activity is the energy that drives Brown's narratives. Characters and plots provide areas where problems and solutions appear and are tested; they grow and develop or not along with the work itself.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Brockden Brown, The Novels and Related Works of Charles Brockden Brown, Bicentennial Edition, 6 vols., gen. ed. Sydney J. Krause (Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 1977-1987), vol. 2: Ormond; or The Secret Witness (1982), ed. with Historical Essay by Russell B. Nye, 111.

<sup>8</sup> See W.B. Berthoff, "A Lesson in Concealment": Brockden Brown's Method in Fiction," Philological Quarterly 37 (1958): 45-57.

Every interchange is an experiment.

Brown's choice to make writing a career was an unusual one, for the fifth son of a Quaker merchant faced clear family expectations that he follow a practical, respectable, and remunerative profession, whatever literary proclivities he may have shown from his childhood notwithstanding. Brown studied law in the office of Alexander Wilcocks from 1789 to 1792, but, as his contemporary and biographer William Dunlap concluded, "his intimate knowledge of the law created an insurmountable disgust to its practice."<sup>9</sup> Brown emphatically rejected law as a profession for himself, a decision his twentieth-century biographer David Lee Clark calls "the turning point of [Brown's] life" (31). The facile equivocation Brown saw and detested in the actual practice of law may have given him excellent training in the creation of equivocal fictional scenarios.

Equivocation is the one constant in Brown's novels; his characters exist as entities balanced between what Bill Christophersen has called "contending polarities."<sup>10</sup> A character's individual identity takes a defining shape

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Allen, The Life of Charles Brockden Brown (1814 MS; reprint Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1975) 40. For a brief but biting survey of Brown's career, see Matthew J. Bruccoli, "The Beginnings of Professionalism" The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870, Ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (Ohio State University Press, 1968) 24-28.

<sup>10</sup> Bill Christophersen, The Apparition in the Glass: Charles Brockden Brown's American Gothic (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1993) 171.

according to how he or she responds to the demands, consciously acknowledged or not, which those forces make. The forces change, the responses change, the identity changes. Every encounter provides new experience and thus the possibility for new knowledge. Within this flux of sense and idea, Brown creates provoking questions whose answers lead in all directions. Wieland; or, The Transformation: An American Tale (1798), his first published novel, is probably the best known example. Following my earlier "chemistry" analogy, in that novel Carwin's ventriloquism is a reagent thrown into the Wieland family group's isolated Schuykill social laboratory experiment. Each character's response to the "double-tongued deceiver"<sup>11</sup> is a different answer to the challenge of confirming sensory information in the face of logical paradox. Interactions between characters are often wildly improbable, too, a quality readers have dismissed as an example of Brown's clumsy technique in constructing plot or drawing characters.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Davitt Bell, "The Double-Tongued Deceiver: Sincerity and Duplicity in the Novels of Charles Brockden Brown," Early American Literature 9 (1974) 143; also, --- The Development of the American Romance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 46-48.

<sup>12</sup> Clark, for instance, comments that "while Brown had the power to build up incomparable scenes and striking episodes, he was never able to resolve those scenes and give them artistic meaning in the whole scheme of the work" (193).

Improbable or not, Brown's coincidences sharpen attention on the detail and structure of the associations established. Take, for example, the complex and sprawling family relationships in Brown's fourth novel, Edgar Huntly; Or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker (1799). Relationships in this novel cross continents, class, race, and even species (hunger spawns a brief transactional bond between Edgar and two panthers; the first wants to eat him, but with the second the story's ending changes), yet the broad reaches of relationships in fact serve only to describe a singular interiority. From Edgar's compulsion to discover the murderer of his friend Waldegrave (whose sister is Edgar's fiance and the unseen audience for the novel) through Clithero Edny's misguided allegiance to his surrogate mother (whose first and abandoned lover Sarsefield is also Edgar's father-figure "preceptor" in the Norwalk wilds), a multi-leveled bond between Edgar and Clithero is forged. That twinned bond between the novel's two main characters finally resolves itself down as a concentrated exploration of the bond between two aspects of one man's mind. The recurring images in Edgar Huntly of locked boxes and curtained beds suggest that there is always something more to discover; Brown makes the point that that "something" is ultimately undiscoverable.

The variety and unreliability of characters' conclusions about their experiences demonstrate Brown's

concern with the inadequacy of intellect and the tools of neoclassical Reason to master the unmaster-able in the human animal; his work consistently poses discomfiting questions to a Rationalist episteme struggling to re-form itself after the cultural earthquake of revolution. Critics of Brown have correctly focused on the dark and anxious strands that weave through his work, but there are also ideas and concepts that Brown's fictions affirm. I wish here to offer an amplification to the idea that Brown was articulating cultural anxiety in his works; his fictions of equivocation simply attempted to offer a native forum in which to chart and debate genuinely American questions. Inasmuch as Brown may justifiably be numbered among the first American practitioners of many literary subgenres--Gothic, psychological, landscape/pastoral--he also deserves identification as one of the first to establish the historically pervasive American literary trait of using art as a medium for talking to ourselves about things we, Americans, do not yet understand. Brown emphasizes art, specifically the written document but also painted representation in the form of portraiture, as one of the most reliable means of defining and making sense of what by all practical definitions is a new universe--post-Revolution America. For Brown, the written document has power as a solid reference; text is reliable. The act of writing, the written or printed document, and the publication/circulation

of that document are vital social and political acts that contribute to the health of an infant culture. The visual image as well directs, announces, or acts as a token. Brown's successful transactional bonds depend on their participants' successful reading of such representations.

Released from traditionally prescribed hierarchies of social and political covenant, America immediately after the Revolution was forced to develop new ways of establishing and certifying public and private behaviors. In Brown's work, a transactional bond is a temporary, dynamic combination of elements. It invariably involves representation--pictures, stories written or told, appearances, translations of direct experience. The bond is a responsibility or compulsion or duty one character feels toward another as a result of their interactions. Bond in this sense differs from the Puritan "covenant" because in transactional bond controlling authority is fluid and relocatable from source to source. It changes. Unlike the familiar religious "covenant," in which the mortal party to the spiritual negotiation takes a supplicant position toward an omnipotent and unquestionable God, Brown's secular transaction can vest authority alternately in either side. The relationships between the parties in any particular bond are always negotiable, and the bond-creating forces themselves are never stable. Transactional bond is also strongly individual, for where covenant may be metonymized



to the congregation or the nation,<sup>13</sup> transactional bond is specific only to the individuals who enact it. Conversation and story foster bond, visual information of the painted image complicates it, and written text affirms it. I mean the term "written text" to include personal letters in the form of traditional correspondence, private documents such as diaries, printed books, legal and newspaper notices, and recorded stories as they occur in the narratives. "Visual images" are either paintings that appear concretely in the text (as in Sophia's miniature portrait in Ormond) or the set "word pictures" the author draws in the course of constructing his narrative. Transactional bonding generally entails four sequential steps: encounter, exchange, production, separation or continuation. There are three criteria for a successful bond: ability, desire, and opportunity. A successful bond produces a change that then makes further, different bonding possible, and even unsuccessful bonds serve a purpose in revealing more information or new alternatives for action. In original close readings of Arthur Mervyn, Edgar Huntly, Ormond, and several other works, this dissertation describes how Brown charted the establishment of a public or private self through transactional bond demonstrated in three specific arenas: between the developing self and the phenomenon of

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<sup>13</sup> Sacvan Bercovitch, The Puritan Origins of the American Self (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1975) 90.

written, visual, or reported representation; relationships between master/mentors and apprentices; relationships among women. Underpinning all these relationships is Brown's affirmation of the powers of literary and artistic representation in early Republican America.

## CHAPTER I

### "Til you are what I am": Mentorship and Edgar Huntly

The new nation's construction of a social universe meant profound changes; what had once been known and reliable to the colonist became strange and unpredictable to the citizen. The nature of an entirely new entity--the United States of America--was being mapped in the perfectly named Constitution: "the arrangement or combination of . . . parts and elements, as determining . . . nature and character."<sup>14</sup> On a less abstract plane, the nature of the constituent parts of any organization were being reconsidered as well. Locke's and Rousseau's ideas on childrearing gained wider acceptance and transformed the power configuration of the family from strict patriarchal rule to affectional concern.<sup>15</sup> Cities grew as economic centers, eclipsing the generation-to-generation family farm as a source of livelihood and blurring the authority and support systems of the community that surrounded the farm.<sup>16</sup> The combination of these two broad shifts disrupted

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<sup>14</sup> Oxford English Dictionary (rev. ed. 1961) s.v. "constitution."

<sup>15</sup> Jay Fliegelman, Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800 (1982; New York: Cambridge UP, 1989). Also, Watts Chapter 1.

<sup>16</sup> James Henretta, The Evolution of American Society, 1700-1815 (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1973). Also, Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800 (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

traditional structures of family and economic life and made multiple the numbers of a figure Benjamin Franklin had conjured a generation earlier: the young man on his own in the big city. Charles Brockden Brown was himself a young man abroad in America's two largest cities, New York and Philadelphia, and the figure of the urban naif appears in his fiction in thematically important ways.

As commerce in an urban world became increasingly anonymous, the self that circulated there became dislocated, malleable. A self unmoored from traditional stays was vulnerable to influence and potentially dangerous. Brown's most recent biographer, Stephen Watts, explains that the new urban world presented two major challenges for that problematic individual: ascertaining a "self" to begin with, and navigating among other created "selves" in a marketplace where "success...involved not only objective calculations of risk and gain but also subjective calculations of personal interactions in [a] transactionary world" (23). Characters in Brown's fiction are parties to intellectual transactions that illuminate issues of authority and selfhood in the early American republic. One transactional relationship in particular found often in the novels and fragments is that between an intelligent, powerful older man and a young boy who is in some way dependent on him--the urbane mentor and the naive protege. The bonds that begin, operate, and dissolve between those male characters are exercises in

constructing manhood; through the mentor/protege model, Brown explores the questions that circle around his society's structuring of the autonomous citizen-self.

The most familiar early American apprentice figure, of course, is Benjamin Franklin. The Autobiography begins with the story of his Boston apprenticeship under his brother James, and the entire narrative has become a canonical blueprint for how a young man "makes good." The condition of indentured apprenticeship for young males in early America was freely recognized and accepted as a means to achieving some of the external qualities of manhood because being able to provide for oneself a "competency" through the independent practice and sale of a craft opened the way to achieving other external markers of male adulthood: property and marriage. These are precisely the two areas of experience that Brown in "Walstein's History," itself a kind of apprentice tale, identified as essential to human happiness and therefore the areas most productive as topics for an artist's literary exploration. Charles Brockden Brown had his own apprentice experience. Young Charles was the fifth son of what we would recognize today as a solidly middle-class family, and it was expected that as he approached adulthood the young man would enter some appropriate profession. He had attended Robert Proud's Friends Latin School from 1781 to 1787, and when he left the school at the age of sixteen, he was formally apprenticed to

Alexander Wilcox, a well-established lawyer in Philadelphia. Brown's biographers and critics agree that study of the law and the prospect of making it a lifelong profession were intolerable to him.<sup>17</sup> His first biographer, contemporary and friend William Dunlap, describes it thus:

Precedent forms a definable barrier to all further inquiry, to such as are willing to acknowledge no other than what their own reason establishes. Law, while it was merely a study, had with Charles all the enticements of other studies, and he laboured assiduously for its mastery. The subtle distinctions that described the boundaries between right and wrong, were sufficient to monopolize attention, and to stimulate inquiry; but when this ground was to be trodden over again, and the same dull succession of objects were presented to him for the remainder of his life, he was terrified by the contemplation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Clark makes note of Brown's "disgust with the profession of the law . . . [for] its narrowing effect on the mind" (32); Robert A. Ferguson, Law and Letters in American Culture, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984) 129-133; Warfel 28-30; Elliott 219; Watts 32.

<sup>18</sup> William Dunlap in Allen's The Late Charles Brockden Brown 40.

Brown was willing to acknowledge things other than what his own reason established; his assertion, in Wieland, that "[i]deas exist in our minds that can be accounted for by no established laws" (100) is the major premise in the argument that drives all his creative work. A frail, bookish aesthete before there was a word for it, Brown struggled with the demands of maturity, of adult manhood as his culture framed them, by attempting to frame himself as a literary artist. Dunlap's "ground . . . to be trodden over again" is a metaphor for another of Brown's strongest themes as he revealed it through his novels: the suffocation of the inquiring individual, both real and potential, by "precedent." Brown's characters often remark on the stultifying, deadening effect of repetition and habit. The horror of the plague scenes in Arthur Mervyn and Ormond, for example, is effectively heightened by their narrators' deliberate comments that they have become inured to shock or outrage by the repetition of some unpleasant spectacle. Combined with an anxiety over habit's numbing effect is a contempt for the equivocation and deceit Brown found in law as practice. Dunlap remarks, "[Brown] could not reconcile it with his ideas of morality to become indiscriminately the defender of right or wrong" (40). In a revealingly autobiographical "Series of Original Letters" dated 1794 (the year after Brown made his definitive break from law into letters) but published in The Weekly Magazine between

April 21 and June 2, 1798,"<sup>19</sup> Brown articulated those two sources of conflict.

The "Letters" are in the form of a correspondence between law apprentice Harry and his sister Mary. "[T]ied by an indenture" (104) to Mr. Beckwith's law office, Harry exclaims, "How momentous a thing is the choice of a trade! How much does it behove [sic] us to deliberate with accuracy and decide with caution!" (109). But of his choice he complains:

[T]he science I study is a jumble of iniquities and crudities. . . I have engaged in the study of that in which there is no end and no certainty; which is beset with temptations to abuse . . . in which success can be purchased at no price but that of our sincerity and honour; and which. . . is universally stigmatized as fraudulent and corrupt." (114 -115)

Harry/Charles, whose "memory may be considered as a stage, whose limits are those of the world, and which is filled with all the creatures of imagination and history," finds himself a copyist, forced to keep his attention on dry legal forms "among folios time-beslurred, and tables dust-besprent" (117, 109). From a biographical point of view, Harry's whine can be read as Brown's complaint about the parental pressures he felt in being forced into law:

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<sup>19</sup> Reprinted in The Rhapsodist 101-131.



Kingdoms and families are generally governed according to established methods. Rulers of both kinds are merely anxious to adhere to the footsteps of their predecessors, and are quite unconscious that any benefit would flow from deviation. There is an inveterate persuasion that the ancient system is best, and that change will only tend to injury (110).

Like that of the "Letters" Harry, Brown's apprenticeship was a sequence of opposites. During the day, he copied documents and studied the arcanities of English and American law; at night he wrote imaginative entries in his Journal and copious letters to friends.<sup>20</sup> He may possibly have written a fantasy self into the Letters; at the end of his final Letter, Harry describes a

young man [who] entered the apartment,  
deposited upon the shelf a book which  
he brought with him, took down another,  
paid me some civilities, and retired.

I find that he is a sort of student at large,  
is bound to no attendance at the office,  
and reads when and where he pleases. (131)

Scrivener by day, poet by night, Brown in his apprentice years played out a conflict between stifling replication and imaginative generation.

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<sup>20</sup> Clark 24; Watts 32-42.

Apprenticeship is a negotiation of power based on knowledge. The paradigmatic picture of apprenticeship offers a young man detached from the family of his childhood and attached to another surrogate "family," consisting at the least of an adult master who agreed to impart for remuneration the skills and secrets of a particular trade. The master conventionally provided shelter, food, and clothing to the boy who was now to become an unpaid laborer in the master's shop.<sup>21</sup> Ideally, the apprentice's experiences under the master's direction equipped the youth with knowledge of a marketable skill, whereupon he left the master to practice the craft independently, eventually becoming a master himself. Entering an apprenticeship was a triangular negotiation among father, son, and father surrogate, the trade master. The language of an indenture form common in the eighteenth century stipulates the participation of all three in the agreement to be signed:

This indenture witnesseth, [T]hat [ ]  
 hath put out and placed, and by these  
 presents doth put and bind out his son,  
 [ ] and the said [ ] doth hereby put  
 place and bind out himself, as an apprentice  
 to [ ] to learn the art, trade,

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<sup>21</sup> W.J. Rorabaugh, The Craft Apprentice: From Franklin to the Machine Age in America (New York: Oxford UP, 1986).

or mystery of \_\_\_\_\_<sup>22</sup>

With "doth hereby put place and bind out himself," the apprentice is privileged with at least nominal equality in the negotiation. It takes three to make an apprentice. Brown's young men, for various reasons, lack a father point in the geometry of the apprenticeship triangle, and that lack creates an imbalance. As Joseph Andrews and Candide had already shown, the consequences of beginning a life on such an unsteady base can be unfortunate. The apprenticed youth existed in an indeterminate space, between the parent who signed the documents of indenture and the master who would certify its completion and launch his apprentice into adulthood. Within this simple arrangement, however, could exist wide opportunities for tension; as youth approached and at times outraced age in knowledge and skill, the student who surpassed the master could become an economic threat. Economics aside, the master's authority over his charge rested in what the apprentice did not know, and during apprenticeship secrecy determined the balance of knowledge and therefore power between teacher and student. Rorabaugh describes it this way:

Traditionally, the master's authority had rested on his technical expertise and on an aura of mystery, captured in the language of

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<sup>22</sup> American Clerks' Magazine, "Useful Forms," Evans 27017 114-115.

the indentures, that surrounded that expertise. The boyish apprentice was to be in awe of the master both because he knew so much . . . [I]f a youth could read, he could discover the processes of his craft on the sterile printed page. (35-36)

Many of Brown's most complex characters exist in the tension between two competing forces, as the apprentice does, and Brown worked within the ambiguous spaces in the power structure of the mentor/apprentice bond to address the questions of identity and authority that he saw as so pressing. Brown used the apprentice paradigm in creating his male-male bonds for two reasons: first, its external aspects were a familiar and convenient template for illustrating his ideas about the internal development of the self; second, by extrapolation he could discuss the development of the virtuous new American citizen. As Jay Fliegelman expresses it in the Introduction to Prodigals and Pilgrims, "[t]he problems of family government addressed in the fiction and pedagogy of the period--of balancing authority with liberty, of maintaining social order while encouraging individual growth--were the political problems of the age translated into the terms of daily life" (5). For Brown, the apprentice learning his craft stands in metaphoric correspondence to the citizen learning to operate his citizenship.

In Arthur Mervyn; Or, Memoirs of the Year 1793 (1799-1800), Carwin, or Memoirs of a Biloquist (1803-1805), and Edgar Huntly (1799), instances of mentors and proteges are so frequent and similar that their plots fit a general summary. A young man travels away from an unhappy family life that includes an uncaring or abusive father. Alone and destitute, the boy meets an enigmatic older man who possesses wealth and/or social position. For vague reasons, the older man takes a custodial interest in the youth and makes simple yet mysterious requests of him that the youth finds puzzling but easy and apparently harmless to perform. The relationship progresses, the youth learns more about the character and intentions of his mentor, and then a complicating dilemma appears. The youth is faced with either obeying the wishes of the mentor against his own developing knowledge and conscience, or disobeying and thereby risking the loss of the benefits--physical, financial, social--of his "place." Boiled down this way, these plots seem almost painfully transparent, and we could easily fill in the rest of the sequence; obeying the mysterious benefactor means disaster, acting according to virtuous principle brings success, and the reader takes away an uplifting moral lesson. But nothing in Brown's fiction is so neatly resolved.

The young men in Brown's fiction, separated as they are from traditional sources of self-structuring and

confirmation, are forced to engage in Watt's "subjective calculations" (23) in their transactions with their elder mentors. Successful transactions produce a reliable (or at least the promise of a reliable) adult self that will be capable of independent action in the wider world. Unsuccessful transactions produce a continuation of the unmoored protege's confusion and drift. One way to shape an analysis of those transactions is through the lens of Rene Girard's "erotic triangle," as he explains it in Deceit, Desire, and the Novel.<sup>23</sup> Reading major European fictions, Girard uncovers a triangular schema of three points, a rivalry between two active elements for authority over the third. Most often, it is the erotic competition between two males for a female, simplistically a "lovers' triangle," but a geometry more revealing of the bond between the two competing males. In other words, the rivalry may ostensibly be over the hand of a maiden, but it's really about how the other two elements of the contest connect. The third, passive, "feminine" element of the triangle is the matter through which the two active, "masculine" other elements generate something new. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire, calls

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<sup>23</sup>Renee Girard, Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure Trans. Yvonne Freccero, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1966).

this activity the "traffic in women,"<sup>24</sup> a contest which binds the two males together; for the male-male bonds under discussion here, the bonds established derive from the traffic in "self." Sedgwick draws on Girard to chart the dimensions of male-male bonds on a continuum of desire that includes, but is not limited to, "genital homosexuality."<sup>25</sup> Sedgwick applies the triangle to relationships in canonical English literature to consider questions of sexual politics and meaning. The triangle seems to me usefully applied as well to questions of self-construction, not specifically sexual, as they work in the male-male bonds of Brown's fiction. Where Sedgwick, in an "antihomophobic as well as a feminist inquiry" (19) focuses on broad, ideological constructions of sexuality and the historical transformations of sexual identity, I wish to concentrate on the individual social information, the endorsement or rejection of particular ways of crafting a personal identity and conducting a public life for and from within that identity, as Brown may have communicated it in the relationships between his male characters. Sedgwick asserts, "in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desires and the structures for maintaining and transmitting

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<sup>24</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire, (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 5.

<sup>25</sup> Sedgwick, 6.

patriarchal power" (25). Brown's male-male bonds may also very well be seen to perpetuate patriarchal social power in their larger social operations, they may even be arguably "homosexual," but those bonds also indicate a way for the private, internal self, wherever it occurs on Sedgwick's homosocial spectrum, to institute and maintain reliable authority over itself.

Brown's unfinished Carwin, or Memoirs of a Biloquist (1803 - 1805)<sup>26</sup> is perhaps the clearest example of a replicative mentorship. Brown began the novel in 1798, but abandoned it in the panic of a yellow fever epidemic then occurring in New York. William Dunlap, one of Brown's closest friends and his first biographer, noted in his diary of September 14, 1798: "Read C.B. Brown's beginning for the life of Carwin; as far as he has gone, he has done well; he has taken up the schemes of the Illuminati" (Clark 169). What Brown managed to finish of Carwin was published serially in the Literary Magazine in 1803-1805. It was the last thing Brown ever published. Written from the point of view of a much older, reflective Carwin, the novel was intended as a prologue history for the same man whose "biloquism" ignited the family disasters of Brown's earlier, better known Wieland (1798). Critics generally agree that Brown's narrative goals for this half-novel made it too

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<sup>26</sup> Charles Brockden Brown, Wieland and Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist (1803; New York: Penguin, 1991).



unwieldy to finish, and he abandoned it at the first major crisis. That crisis is one of disclosure and its effects on the developing self that makes it, a topic discussed more fully in Chapter Two of this dissertation. For the point being made here, that Carwin ends with an unresolved conflict over disclosure (do I tell or not?) is important.

Ludloe, the mysterious villain of Carwin, is one of several Brown characters who are traditionally read as representing the Illuminati, a vague European conspiracy, fear of which spread through the American press and pulpit in the late 1790's.<sup>27</sup> Part of the tender American Republic's attempt to define itself was examination of the relationship between self and public interest; attached to and behind that examination was the larger question of what in individual, interpersonal, social, or political representation could be trusted. Federalist ideology held the traditional view that the virtuous individual's motives and actions could produce only beneficial results for the society in which that individual functioned. Jeffersonian

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<sup>27</sup> Gordon S. Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century," An American Enlightenment, ed. Peter Hoffer (New York: Garland, 1988) offers a clear explanation of the Illuminati furor in early Republican America; Robert S. Levine, Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville (New York: Cambridge UP, 1989) 17-24 specifically discusses Brown's "prescience about the expedient uses to which alarmist calls could be put" (17). Levine concludes, however, that "to reduce his writings to a series of political statements . . . would finally only crudely distort his literary intentions and methods" (25).

Republicans feared that the assumed unity between individual private morality and public action could be fractured by the ambitious citizen who practiced public deceit in pursuit of selfish expediency (Wood 433-435). The rumored nature of the Illuminati--European roots, secrecy, fraternalism, subversion, complete rejection of traditionally established bounds to human behavior such as religion, government, or marriage--exacerbated the Republic's legitimate fears for itself in the aftermath of such events as the French Revolution and the XYZ affair (Levine 9-13). Brown, the reflective intellectual living in the immigrant center of Philadelphia, was certainly aware of that anxiety.<sup>28</sup> In general, Brown's response to his contemporaries' fears of conspiracy and incipient national disaster was to assert that it is impossible to ascertain the consequences of any human action, however virtuous or beneficent its motives. In particular, Brown espoused the Republican compulsion to openness and transparency as perhaps the only defense against dangerous error, and he saw the achievement of that openness and transparency as possible through the act and fact of writing. Writing erases the subjective individual and makes possible a multiplicity of voices and "selves" that, because they exist only as entities set down in text to be read, become open, common, public--depersonalized.

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<sup>28</sup> Wood sees Brown's novels as "intellectual explorations into causality, deceptions, and the moral complexity of life" (437).

Brown played with this principle in obvious and not-so-obvious ways in his fiction; disembodied voices speak from thin air, characters suffer mistaken identities, complex layers of indirectly reported discourse make it almost impossible to be certain which character is speaking to which. In practically every case, however, the solution to the mystery lies in the act of disclosure--telling the story. The unfinished Carwin breaks off at the precise moment when such open disclosure is demanded of the hero.

Frank Carwin is the second son of an authoritarian farmer in western Pennsylvania. His childhood is stifling; his father, who "conceived that all beyond the mere capacity to write and read was useless or pernicious" (281) condemns Frank's imagination and curiosity, beats him, and destroys his books. Such treatment perversely sharpens the boy's natural talent for "the invention of stratagems and the execution of expedients" (282) in this case as a way of avoiding paternal abuse. Frank, curious and clever, is already predisposed to deception. Hiding from punishment one evening, he discovers a physical ability to ventriloquize, to "talk from a distance, and at the same time, in the accents of another" (288). This other invisible self, what Bill Christophersen calls "the unfettered voice" (166), is the product of the bond--unpleasant, oppressive as it is--between father and son. This unusual power demands control and direction, but his father's intractable nature and his

own youth are inadequate to the demand. Left to himself, Frank the child keeps the knowledge of this remarkable talent secret and uses it to get what he wants. He forms a plan to speak in the voice of his dead mother to his father as he sleeps, admonishing the father to allow Frank to go to an aunt who has promised Frank sanctuary in her Philadelphia home. At the moment Frank is about to enact his plan, lightning from a violent thunderstorm ignites the barn, the household is thrown into confusion, and Frank, who was hesitant about "counterfeit[ing] a commission from heaven" (290) to begin with, fails to complete his deception. Carwin's father's avarice (he does not wish to antagonize the aunt who will leave a slender patrimony) eventually persuades him to accede to Frank's wishes, and Frank goes to Philadelphia.

At leisure for three years with his aunt, Frank revels "in the unbounded indulgence of [his] literary passion" (289) and hones his biloquism. He trains his dog to respond to innocuous physical signals and amazes his friends further when the dog actually seems to understand and even to speak English. He leads a group of friends, gathered to hear a female singer, to believe that another, disembodied voice is singing from above the place where they sit. Carwin at this stage of his development is a mass of potential at rest, playing with an unusual skill he does not know what to do with. His parlor trick at the garden party has, however,

revealed him to one who can calculate very well the uses of the power that resides in Carwin's throat. Ludloe, an Irishman of some wealth and mysterious background, had been at the musical gathering and, when sometime later he meets Carwin, Ludloe hints that he knows Carwin was responsible for the hoax. Ludloe alludes to "the uses to which a faculty like [biloquism] might be employed...No more powerful engine...could be conceived, by which the ignorant and credulous might be moulded to our purposes; managed by a man of ordinary talents, it would open for him the straightest and surest avenues to wealth and power" (300). As Carwin trained his dog, so Ludloe will train Carwin. Ludloe is the "man of ordinary talents" who will seek to manage Carwin's extraordinary talents for his own purposes.

Ludloe is a manipulative mentor; he seems to be in control of an exercise, an experiment to prove a theory or employ a tool the validity or usefulness of which is already assured. Predatory, he has observed Carwin's talent and character, and he knows exactly what to offer him in order to bring him further under his influence and make him useful in his own schemes. Carwin is penniless; Ludloe supports him. Carwin is fascinated by books; Ludloe gives him full access to an enormous library. By his own admission, Carwin's moral conduct lacks firm direction; Ludloe, "the eulogist of sincerity," attempts to shape the boy's moral sense by leading him to discoveries, that, "when made,

[appear] to be a joint work" (312-313). Carwin is directionless, too, in the choice of a craft or profession, and he speaks at length of his own desire to find "some path in which my talents might be rendered useful" (309). But he is not a simple dupe, following dog-like his master's commands. Affinity, like the natural, determinate attraction of specific atoms for others, is necessary for any bond to form. Carwin's next use of his skill, in a plan to defraud his now-deceased aunt's servant of an inheritance, displays his ready affinity for Ludloe's brand of equivocation.

As he did with his father, Carwin plans to speak with the voice of his aunt to the servant and persuade her, in a "mandate from the dead" (302) to give over the inheritance. While the incident with his father was a child's simple trick to gain parental permission, this second act displays a maturing aptitude for deceit. A developing talent for intellectual equivocation appears when Carwin muses that to defraud the servant and her husband of the money

would...be a benefit both to them and to myself; not even an imaginary injury would be inflicted. Restitution, if legally compelled, would be reluctant and painful, but if enjoined by Heaven would be voluntary, and the performance of a seeming duty would carry with it, its own reward (302).

At this point in the narrative Ludloe and Carwin, mentor and protege, deserve each other.

Ludloe takes Carwin with him when he returns to his home in Dublin, and he continues to build the mystery that binds the boy more firmly to him. He reveals nothing about himself to the boy, and answers Carwin's questions about why he deserves the man's munificence by explaining that "[t]he rectitude of [Carwin's] principles and conduct would be the measure of [Ludloe's] approbation, and no benefit should he ever bestow which the receiver was not entitled to claim, and which it would not be criminal in him to refuse" (304)-- an answer that isn't an answer. Ludloe's remoteness and secrecy foster a response in Carwin that sounds today eerily similar to cult indoctrination: "I felt myself removed to a comfortless and chilling distance from Ludloe. I wanted to share in his occupations and views" (309). Such is this unmoored youth's wish, even though he does not yet know what those principles, occupations, or views are. Once in Ireland, Carwin is "admitted as a member of [Ludloe's] family" (307) and "enjoy[s] the privileges of a son" (310). When Carwin anxiously requests some direction as to how he can repay his benefactor's support of him, Ludloe offers the position of intellectual apprentice:

[b]ooks are at hand . . . Read, analise (sic), digest; collect facts, and investigate theories; ascertain the dictates of reason, and supply

yourself with the inclination and the power to adhere to them. You will not, legally speaking, be a man in less than three years. Let this period be devoted to the acquisition of wisdom.

(310)

Ludloe places himself in the role of father as director in this boy's life, and by accepting Ludloe's offer, Carwin implicitly binds himself to the intellectual mystery that Ludloe has been dangling in front of him. He becomes an apprentice. Carwin's reading is accompanied by lengthy conversations with his mentor, through the course of which Ludloe continues to shape Carwin's malleable intellect by persuading him that "the value of all principles, and their truth, lie in their practical effects . . . since men in their actual state, are infirm and deceitful, a just estimate of consequences may sometimes make dissimulation . . . duty" (311, 312). Carwin imbibes Ludloe's philosophy of expediency over truth, of virtuous ends justifying duplicitous means. As a practical experiment of this doctrine, Carwin travels in Spain within an entirely fabricated identity, as a Spanish pilgrim, the same pilgrim that Wieland's Pleyel meets and later introduces to the Wieland family. In Spain, Carwin amuses himself with various exercises of his ventriloquism, but in an otherwise explicit correspondence with Ludloe, keeps that part of his adventures secret.



Ludloe is far ahead of him in the secrecy game. He has been preparing Carwin as a replacement for himself in a mysterious "fraternity . . . leagued together for an end of some moment" (321). Here is the Illuminati note, complete with threats of instantaneous death for any member who reveals its existence. Ludloe offers Carwin membership in the society on the condition that Carwin disclose completely all the facts of his life to Ludloe, his "confessor" (347). A neat paradox appears; to discover Ludloe's secret Carwin must reveal all his own, and once Carwin possesses that secret, he must never reveal it on pain of death. "I regard you only as one undergoing a probation or apprenticeship[, ] as subjected to trials of your sincerity and fortitude"(333), Ludloe tells Carwin; "[y]ou cannot know, till you are what I am, what deep, what all-absorbing interest I have in the success of my tutorship" (350).

Any craft is a variety of mystery, and the apprentice process is an initiation. The major governing principle of that initiation is the measured acquisition, keeping, and disclosure of information. Secrecy is the most powerful method the master has for maintaining authority over his apprentice; for as long as the apprentice remains ignorant of all the secrets of a craft, he remains dependent. The printer's apprentice may stir the ink, but as long as he remains ignorant of the recipe, stirring is all he can do (Rorabaugh 13-14). It is the promise of a future

independence that keeps the apprentice working. He obligates himself to complete disclosure before his master, since in signing the legal form of indenture, he has agreed to keep whatever secrets he may learn, and also to "do no damage to his said master, nor willfully suffer any to be done by others; and if any to his knowledge is intended, he shall give his master seasonable notice thereof" (American Clerk's Magazine 115). The apprentice who learns the secrets and skills of the trade may not reveal them, but he also must disclose anything else "to his knowledge" that affects his master's interests. The master's control over his apprentice is proportionate to the information he holds back, and the apprentice's access to authority is dependent on the information he gives forth.

Benjamin Franklin's tone of condescending pity for his second master, Keimer, in Philadelphia (Autobiography 504), springs from what he knows and Keimer doesn't, an imbalance of knowledge in favor of the apprentice that creates the humor in Franklin's anecdote. When Andrew Bradford's father first introduces Franklin to Keimer, Franklin sees the older man craftily draw important information about business from the printer, since Keimer does not recognize (nor does the old man announce himself) the father of a competitor. "I who stood by and heard all, saw immediately that one of them was a crafty old Sophister, and the other a mere Novice. Bradford left me with Keimer, who was greatly surpris'd when

I told him who the old Man was" (504), reports Franklin. Franklin may make his disclosures to Keimer, but the master has lost some of his authority before the apprenticeship even begins, and Franklin knows it.

While Carwin is not apprenticed to a liberal or mechanical profession (Ludloe calls them, respectively, "perverting the understanding" and "vicious . . . destructive to the intellect and vigour of the artizan" (307)), when Ludloe demands the complete life history of his protege as earnest at the start of his initiation, Carwin is unwilling to reveal his ventriloquist skill. Such a disclosure would make Ludloe "master of a secret which was precious to [Carwin] beyond all others" (325). David Lyttle, in an essay titled "The Case Against Carwin," remarks, "Since biloquism is part of the very soul of Carwin which Ludloe wishes to own, Ludloe cannot force him to divulge his secret: one must consign his soul to the devil voluntarily" (266). The secret is not so much Carwin's soul as Carwin's ability to fabricate another, alter self that could function independent of Ludloe's influence or control, not as a replication or tool of its master. That Carwin holds back is a gesture, one that he himself does not completely understand, toward self-authority and autonomy. Ludloe probably already knows about Carwin's ability; it's not the secret, it's the act of telling it that is important. Complete disclosure to a replicative mentor means complete

submission.

There are other instances of the apprentice who creates a second self. Benjamin Franklin, wishing to try his hand at writing for his brother's Boston newspaper, slipped his Silence Dogood Letters under the door of the print shop and was delighted to hear the praise they received. Franklin was officially apprenticed to his brother James, and when James was jailed for refusing to "discover [the] Author"<sup>29</sup> of some politically unpopular essays, the apprentice (who got off with a warning because "as an Apprentice . . . [he] was bound to keep his Master's Secrets" (500)) took his master's place. After James was forbidden to publish a newspaper, he continued to produce the New England Courant under his brother Benjamin's name. The brothers kept two sets of indentures: one that was returned to Benjamin as "Discharge[d]. . .to be shown on Occasion" (500) (since an apprentice could not himself publish) and a second, secret set that continued Benjamin's servitude. Thus print makes possible other selves, since Silence Dogood came into existence through Franklin's anonymity, and the convenient elision of his identity with his brother's made it possible for James Franklin to continue his newspaper, even three years after Benjamin had left Boston. Another, contrasting example of the printer's apprentice who shapes and defines

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<sup>29</sup>Benjamin Franklin, The Autobiography, The Norton Anthology of Literature, ed. Baym, et al, 2nd ed. Vol 1 (New York: Norton, 1979) 499.

an identity through what he prints is the case of Vermonter Simeon Ide, detailed in Carl Rorabaugh's The Craft Apprentice. A solid Jeffersonian, Ide was forced by the collapse of the business where he had first been apprenticed to find another place, this time with the publisher of a solid Federalist paper, the Washingtonian. In taking the position, Ide stipulated that he would work only on non-newspaper jobs such as books. When his father sternly remonstrated with him for putting his energies into a "loathsome Press" that promoted views so contrary to the family's, Ide returned, "You yourself cannot have a greater antipathy for the Washingtonian and the cause its editor is engaged in, than I have."<sup>30</sup> In this case, the senior Ide conflates his son's character with his son's profession, and Simeon's response makes it very clear that what he prints is not what he is.

Brown offered an alternative to the dangers of replicative mentorship. Consider the two opposite mentors Brown presents in Arthur Mervyn (1799-1800). As in Carwin, the protege's potential for exploitable otherness--for Carwin, his ability to speak in other voices; for Arthur Mervyn, his physical resemblance to another figure in the older man's scheme to defraud--attracts the predatory replicative mentor. Like Carwin, too, Arthur displays an

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<sup>30</sup> Rorabaugh 37; Flanders, Simeon Ide 28-30, Ide, A Biography of William B. Ide

affinity for the deceptions his mentor practices. What is important to replicative mentors is not what is, but what can be made to seem; with these characters, Brown is touching on his readers' nonspecific distrust of appearances to explore just what about human social interaction and the selves that enact it can be trusted. Brown abandoned Carwin as Carwin was pondering to himself the consequences of telling Ludloe everything about himself. Arthur Mervyn's act of making just such a complete disclosure forms the narrative substance of Brown's third novel, Arthur Mervyn, or, Memoirs of the Year 1793. The novel and Arthur's adulthood develop simultaneously under the generative nurture of a mentor who has no pre-established plan. Arthur Mervyn has its replicative mentor in the evil schemer Welbeck, but Brown here also offers an alternative mentor in the figure of Dr. Stevens.

Arthur Mervyn's Welbeck, like Ludloe, is wealthy without visible source, foreign in appearance, mysterious. When Arthur arrived in Philadelphia, Welbeck took him in as a penniless wanderer and made him over, down to the clothing and haircut, into a facsimile of one named Clavering. Just as Ludloe's protege Carwin the ventriloquist is called in Wieland the "double-tongued deceiver," so Welbeck might be described as "double-voiced." Everything about his character resonates with imposture of appearance, of voice, or of text. Welbeck's wealth is a sham. He is a forger; because

he can speak French, he is called to the deathbed of the Frenchman Lodi and steals the dying man's work in order to publish it as his own. Welbeck's greatest feat of duplicity occurs when he fakes his own death and then attempts to prevent Arthur's discovery that he is still alive by imitating the voice of another fair-seeming but foul villain, Colville. The narrative energy of Arthur Mervyn springs from Arthur's discovery and rejection of Welbeck's brand of expedient show and his growth as an original, independent entity with the support of another mentor, Dr. Stevens. The two older men form a vivid contrast. Like Welbeck, Stevens shelters Arthur and offers him a place in his home, on the condition that Arthur tell his complete story. Unlike the manipulative Welbeck, however, Stevens' interest in Arthur is not about how Stevens can control what Arthur is, but how Stevens can help his protege discover what Arthur might be. Similar to Ludloe, Stevens leads his young friend through conversations, asking questions, raising objections, thinking with him about various topics. In their first conversation, Stevens tells Arthur, "[T]ake the word of one who possesses that experience which you complain of wanting, that sincerity is always safest."<sup>31</sup> In

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<sup>31</sup>Charles Brockden Brown, The Novels and Related Works of Charles Brockden Brown, Bicentennial Edition, 6 vols., gen. ed. Sydney J. Krause (Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 1977-1987), vol. 3: Arthur Mervyn; or Memoirs of the Year 1793, 2 parts, ed. with Historical Essay by Norman S. Grabo, 13. Subsequent references to Arthur Mervyn will refer to this edition and will appear in parentheses in the text.

place of the reclusiveness of a Welbeck or a Ludloe, Stevens goes out gathering information on his own about Arthur from several sources. Stevens never acts alone; every gesture he makes or idea he has is discussed with others before it is attempted. Instead of the authoritarian mentor who demands silence and unquestioned obedience during an "apprentice" period, Stevens is a Rousseau-ean preceptor, offering supportive responses to his student's spoken thoughts and asking the questions that lead his protege to his own conclusions. It is the difference between repeating a known exercise and performing an experiment for the first time, an illustration of Brown's own passionate wish for innovation over precedent. Stevens, acting as a directive sounding board, makes it possible for Arthur to craft himself through "an honest front and a straight story" (349). The act of disclosure in this instance does not arbitrarily obligate the protege to his mentor; on the contrary, as Arthur tells over the experiences of his life to the listening Stevens, he shapes a new, autonomous self capable of choice without compulsion in his actions.

Another example of the self seeking autonomy is the eponymous hero of Brown's fourth novel, Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker.<sup>22</sup> Early in Arthur Mervyn, as he pondered his relationship with Welbeck, Arthur had mused,

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<sup>22</sup>Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker (1799; New York: Penguin, 1988).



"It seemed as if I were walking in the dark and might rush into snares or drop into pits before I was aware of my danger" (70). Edgar the sleepwalker actually does walk in the dark and drop into pits, in no small part because he has no consistent or reliable mentor present, not even a manipulative one. The absence of a consistent mentor from the triangle that fosters self-invention cripples Edgar's progress. His attempts to form a coherent, functioning self without a sufficient interpersonal web to direct the process create instead a boundary-less confusion. Arthur Mervyn began to shape a reliable identity because, under the generative influence of Stevens, he could take control over the story and the telling of the story of his life. Victim of the sleepwalking that creates a self he is unaware of, Edgar does not know the story of his. Through his mentors, Arthur had to learn the self-confirming value of the exchange and interchange of conversation in any form, or what Wieland's Clara called the "agitation and concussion . . . requisite to the due exercise of human understanding" (25). In contrast, Edgar very much wants to find self-confirmation in the act of disclosure or conversation, but he cannot do it alone. Without an authoritative mentor, Edgar is left to mentor himself, repeating and enlarging errors that threaten everything he thinks he knows. Viewed this way, Edgar Huntly's experience is the obverse of Arthur's.

Edgar Huntly is Brown's most dramatic novel. Young Edgar, deeply affected by the murder of his friend Waldegrave, suspects a local hired man, Clithero Edny, of the crime. He confronts Clithero, and Clithero answers Edgar's demand for confession by confessing a story quite different from what Edgar had expected. Clithero then disappears. Edgar's pursuit of Clithero sends him into the caves and desolations of the Norwalk wilderness, where he fights Indians, swims a torrential river, and eventually returns to civilization to discover an earlier mentor, Sarsefield, returned almost miraculously to counsel him. Clithero, too, reappears, but his final interview with Edgar again leads to unexpected results. Along with conventional Gothic doubling of character, paralleling the literal adventure is a figurative trek through Edgar's increasingly distorted mental landscape as he tries to make sense of what is happening to him.

The novel's deployment of archetypal myth and dark human psychology has been much and richly discussed, from Leslie Fiedler's Love and Death in the American Novel (1966) to Bill Christophersen's The Apparition in the Glass: Charles Brockden Brown's American Gothic (1993). Edgar Huntly's readers have principally agreed with Fiedler's assessment that "Brown's novel is an initiation story, the account of a young man who begins by looking for guilt in others and ends finding it in himself[;] who starts out in

search of answers but is finally satisfied with having defined a deeper riddle than those he attempted to solve" (157 - 158). The shape of that "riddle" has been charted as, variously, uncontrollable psychological impulses (Elliott, 266); the insoluble, interrelated complexities of America's "dark Indian and light Christian"<sup>33</sup> or "savage behavior and civilized rationale";<sup>34</sup> the dangers of "rational individualism" (Watts 123); or the paradox created by a self-examination that forces self-justification (Christophersen 140-141). The novel provides no solution to its puzzle; Edgar Huntly is probably the most vivid demonstration of Brown's well-recognized habit of setting out multiple sides to a question and then offering multiple solutions. For my purposes, I wish to move outside Edgar's psyche to examine the relationships he forms with two other significant male characters in the novel: Clithero and Sarsefield. Edgar's attempt at self-invention takes two directions, neither of them wholly successful. He attempts to mentor Clithero, and he is mentored by Sarsefield.

Each male-male bond in Edgar Huntly springs from the event of disclosure or storytelling. For Arthur Mervyn, storytelling established a fixity from which he could begin

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<sup>33</sup> Richard Slotkin, Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860 (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1973) 390.

<sup>34</sup> Larzer Ziff, Writing in the New Nation: Prose, Print and Politics in the Early United States (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991) 180.

the process of self-creation; for Edgar Huntly, too much disclosure destabilizes an already precarious operating self. Edgar is overeager to know, understand, and most of all incorporate the elements of his experience into a coherent whole, and he tries to do it alone. To oversimplify, perhaps, for Edgar too much knowledge gained without sufficient authority or direction over the process is a dangerous thing. The others he does consult often do not respond as he expects, and the results of these exchanges are disastrous. His first encounter with Clithero early in the novel demonstrates this deictic short circuit.

Edgar wrongfully abrogates a master/mentor's authority when he tries to be a mentor to Clithero:

That Clithero was instrumental to the death of Waldegrave, that he could furnish the clue, explanatory of every bloody and mysterious event . . . there was no longer the possibility of doubting. He . . . is the murderer. . . yet it shall be my province to emulate a father's clemency, and restore this unhappy man to purity, and to peace. (32)

Like the manipulative Ludloe who knew of Carwin's ability without Carwin's direct disclosure of it, Edgar thinks he knows the answer to his request before he makes it. Edgar inverts the metempsychosis expressed by Ludloe's "till you are what I am," (Carwin 350) and imagines that restoring

Clithero to "peace" will do the same for himself by putting an end to Edgar's tormenting suspicions with one answer. His act accomplishes just the opposite, however, for Clithero answers Edgar's demand with the entirely unexpected tale of Mrs. Lorimer's benevolence toward him and his attempt on her life, the act that led to Clithero's hiding in America. Edgar's demand for Clithero's story does not unify or resolve anything; it divides. This first instance of exchanged stories in Edgar Huntly resurrects a self for Clithero that the hired man had thought safely hidden, if not erased, by his masquerade as a simple bound servant to farmer Inglefield, and it calls into existence Edgar's second, unknown self, the sleepwalker. Edgar's impulse to "emulate"--copy--a "father's clemency" through benevolence toward Clithero is the immature and directionless youth's grasp at adulthood; it is a variation of replicative mentorship, with Edgar putting himself in the position of mentor. Driven to know at any cost, without any reliable other who might restrain or direct him, and only partially aware of the forces he is triggering, Edgar sets in motion his own "tissue of destructive errors" (35).

Clithero's story is not entirely unrelated to Edgar's; both men have Mr. Sarsefield in common. Each of the three men's stories is adjacent to the others', since Clithero can tell Edgar Sarsefield's pre-America history, and Edgar can tell Sarsefield Clithero's experiences in America after

Clithero left Ireland. When Edgar reaches the center of this story triangle, he is balanced between Clithero and Sarsefield. Once that moment passes, however, it is his excessive drive to disclose and discuss everything and the absence of any force that might rein him in that sends the equation once more off balance and proves him still an apprentice in need of a master himself. That triangular point of intersection is built, disassembled, and built again with a different foundation in the final five chapters of Edgar Huntly and the three "Letters" that close the novel.

In Chapter 23, Edgar is on his way back to civilization. On the road, he asks a passing farmhand for news of whether the Huntly farm had been attacked by the Indians he has been battling. Of the dullard's response-- "Yes. No. He did not know. He had forgotten" (225)--Edgar extrapolates, wrongly, the destruction of his entire family. This minor interchange with the Bisset "clown" is emblematic of Edgar's central problem; without someone to answer his gestures of disclosure and discussion appropriately or correctly, Edgar is left to create and believe stories for himself that turn out to be enormously incorrect; e.g., Clithero's guilt and potential for rehabilitation, or the Indian massacre he thinks has destroyed his family. Bruised and still covered with Indian gore, Edgar heads for the Inglefield house. Norman Grabo has interpreted the series of

houses which Edgar visits as Edgar's move "from frontier wilderness to settled order. . . ignorance to knowledge, from survival to ease, from isolation to society" (63). Dennis Berthold, in "Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Huntly, and the Origins of the American Picturesque" <sup>35</sup> analyzes Huntly's travels through the wilderness as achieving a civilizing "moral and aesthetic equilibrium suitable to both the scenery and the society of the rugged American frontier" (83); Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds goes further in "Charles Brockden Brown's Revenge Tragedy: Edgar Huntly and the uses of Property" to see the sequence of houses as reflective of "systematic inheritance" (58) to be defended or their loss revenged, emblematic of the "shift in power, during the American 1790's from a landed to an entrepreneurial class" (58, 52).<sup>36</sup> Before he gets to Inglefield's, however, lighted windows attract Edgar to another house, and he enters. All along, Edgar has been explicit in his descriptions and genealogies of the people he encounters; he knows and is happy to detail the situation and family background of the Inglefields, the Selbys, the Bissets, and even Queen Mab. Yet we never meet or even learn the name of

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<sup>35</sup> Dennis Berthold, William and Mary Quarterly 41.1 (January 1984) 62-84; Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds, Early American Literature 30:2 (1995) 51-70.

<sup>36</sup> See also Steve Hamelman, "Rhapsodist in the Wilderness: Brown's Romantic Quest in Edgar Huntly" Studies in American Fiction 21: 2 (Autumn 93) 171-190; George Toles, "Charting the Hidden Landscape: Edgar Huntly" Early American Literature 16 (1981) 133-153).

the person whose house is the site for the resurrection of all Edgar had thought dead: Sarsefield, Clithero, and, metaphorically through the recovery of his lost letters, Waldegrave. In this nameless house, this indeterminate space, all of Edgar's stories are pulled together.

Mr. Sarsefield, in a scene very similar to the one in which Welbeck reappears in Arthur Mervyn, re-enters Edgar's life with italics and exclamation point at the end of Chapter 23. Four years earlier, Sarsefield had been the "preceptor" (89) who with "moralizing narratives or synthetic reasonings" (92) had provided Edgar with generative mentoring of a kind. But Sarsefield disappeared before he could successfully nurture Edgar to a reliable integration, and it is his habitual absence from the boy's life that prevents Edgar from any real growth. After the initial surprise and identification of roles ("My master! my friend! . . . your pupil, your child . . . speaks to you" (232-233) from Edgar), paternal Sarsefield tells Edgar's story back to him, explaining the blank spots in Edgar's memory of events. Sarsefield's account begins to bring Edgar back to lucidity; where Edgar has feverishly imagined the death of his uncle and sisters by "the destroying hatchet and the midnight conflagration," Sarsefield coolly explains that yes, his uncle is dead, but also that he was an old man who "fell a victim to his own temerity and hardihood" (235); that a log cabin was burned but considered



no terrible loss; that Edgar's sisters are safe with Inglefield. "Everything is safe and in its ancient order," Sarsefield says. He then requests a full disclosure of Edgar's experiences, and there follows an interlude in which the two men fit their stories together. Edgar tells everything he knows, and then asks Sarsefield for help in understanding the rest:

What has eluded my sagacity may not be beyond the reach of another. Your own reflections on my tale, or some facts that have fallen under your notice, may enable you to furnish a solution. (236)

What Carwin could not give Edgar must. Edgar's quest for self-knowledge requires active assistance from another, and here Sarsefield meets the demand. "You have amply gratified my curiosity," he tells Edgar, "and deserve that your own, should be gratified as fully. Listen to me" (237). For this one moment, Edgar and Sarsefield trade their stories evenly, youth to mentor and mentor in return.

Sarsefield's story carries through to Chapter 26, and Edgar eventually manages to figure out that his own sleepwalking has been responsible for the night's heretofore incomprehensible events. As the lighted window led him to this house, so the "light" of Sarsefield's comforting rationality now illuminates yet another choice for Edgar. Sarsefield announces that he has returned to America with

"parental affection" (249) toward Edgar, and offers the boy a ready-made slot in his family as son to him and Mrs. Lorimer (now Mrs. Sarsefield) and husband to Clithero's Clarice. Such a move would simultaneously fix Edgar safely under the direction of Sarsefield's resumed mentorship, provide him with a wife and an income, and erase both Clithero and Mary (Waldegrave's sister and Edgar's fiance) from the scene. But not all the stories have been told; in this anonymous upper room, Edgar raises the last unsolved mystery: what about Clithero?

Edgar deduces the connection between Clithero and Sarsefield, but when he asks Sarsefield about it, he gets another surprise in the latter's violent response. For Sarsefield, Clithero is "a thing for which no language has yet provided a name" (253), an entity that cannot be mediated, translated, represented. Yet the dominant theme of Edgar's attitude toward Clithero has been integration. Clithero must be "restored" (32), "[brought] together, [won] . . . from his solitude. . . and restore[d] to communion" (255-256) by "mutual efforts" (257-258) with and of those he has offended--Mrs. Lorimer, Clarice, and Sarsefield himself. Sarsefield's language regarding Clithero is in rhetorical balance also; "I will not occupy the same land, the same world with him" (254). Clithero is finally discovered, injured but alive, and brought back to the house where Edgar and Sarsefield are; Edgar now is balanced, too, between his

mentor, Sarsefield, and his erstwhile protege, Clithero. As Clithero lies bleeding on the floor, Sarsefield the physician refuses to help him and demands that Edgar leave with him for an adjoining farm. The chapter's closing image of Edgar resisting Sarsefield's pull on his arm and then standing "rooted . . . to the spot" (259) above Clithero in the house without a name gives us an Edgar poised in the apprentice's half-world between autonomous adult and dependent child. At this moment he is not rooted at all, but suspended in a null space between two forces: the rationality of Sarsefield and the return to civilization represented by moving to Walcot's house, and the compelling mystery of the doppelganger on the floor. Edgar stays, still convinced that to know everything is to understand everything, and, after hearing Clithero, he possesses all the information it is possible to have: Sarsefield's complete history, Clithero's, and the missing details of his own.

Knowing all the stories, however, cannot guarantee the restoration of either coherence or the reliable operation of the laws of cause and effect. The outcome of "a series of ideas mutually linked and connected" (87) and now known is still unpredictable. Edgar thinks that his recital of Clithero's story to Sarsefield will change Sarsefield's opinion, but it does not. Still trying to fit the mad Clithero into a sensible universe (and mirroring

Sarsefield's own storytelling strategy of Chapters 25-26), Edgar seeks out Clithero and tells his own history back to him, including the information that Mrs. Lorimer is still alive, with deadly consequences. Undisciplined disclosure, however laudable and pure its motive, is still unpredictably dangerous.

The ironic conflict between Edgar's wish for integration through disclosure and Sarsefield's willed, conscious rejection of that integration lays out the novel's central theme; there are unknown, unpredictable forces at work in individuals and in the systems they create that, once discovered, cannot be denied and must be controlled. The force which cannot be mediated poses the most profound threat to the stability of self, of community, of nation. Sarsefield knows this, and his refusal to aid Clithero is a harsh but epistemologically necessary act. "To prolong his life, would be merely to protract his misery," he says of Clithero; "[c]onsciousness itself is the malady; the pest; of which he only is cured who ceases to think" (267). Edgar is an apprentice with an overactive, untrained consciousness (and, sleepwalking, unconsciousness) whose wish for knowledge must be cultivated within boundaries. Sarsefield the preceptor could create and enforce those boundaries, but his own self-preserving refusal to acknowledge the forces that exist in his protege means that Edgar's will to know, and knowing, to act, can be only partially controlled.

Sarsefield fails as a mentor to Edgar, and the result is an Edgar left at the end of the novel still looking for ways to make sense of his world and of himself. All three men-- Sarsefield, Clithero, and Edgar--are extremes that cannot be reconciled, and the bonds created by the interrelationships of their stories are not strong enough to contain the forces they unleash.

Edgar Huntly's plot ends without revealing whether in fact Edgar returns to Ireland as Sarsefield's protege and son, or whether he remains in America to marry Mary Waldegrave, or even whether Edgar and Sarsefield will have any further contact at all. A source of productive discipline for Edgar is, like the plot resolution, left ambiguous. Brown does however suggest a direction in the form of the novel's conclusion.

Critic Bill Christophersen has read the end of Edgar Huntly as Brown's declaration that "[w]e must not try to understand. . . our inner nature . . . we must chain it fast" (150). While I agree that in Edgar Huntly Brown was exploring the mysterious and savage underside of human consciousness, I would argue against Christophersen that the end of the novel suggests the only way to survive is to "chain" that which cannot be understood. Chains may deny and subdue, but in another sense they may also develop. Just before Sarsefield's reappearance in Chapter 23, Edgar had mused, "Passage into new forms, overleaping the bars of time

and space, reversal of the laws of inanimate and intelligent existence, had been mine to perform and to witness" (229).

The form of the end of Edgar Huntly suggests that one way to navigate those passages, leaps, and reversals and organize them into something manageable is to write them down.

Unknown, uncontrollable entities (physically, the wilderness; psychologically, the subconscious; emotionally, rage; socially, the mysterious stranger; politically, the subversive--all of which appear in some form in this novel) may be terrifying in their raw form, but their transformation through story alters them just enough to be acknowledged, mastered, and subsumed into the entity that discovers and must recognize them.

Christophersen approaches this idea in his discussion of the panther meal in Chapter 16 of Edgar Huntly. He argues that just as Edgar's body manages to digest the panther that "self-preserving and involuntary impulse" (Edgar Huntly 161) has compelled him to eat, so Edgar's "psyche assimilate[s] repulsive truths," an act that makes his descent into savagery and "the evolution of a rationalizing mechanism capable of justifying savagery" (Christophersen 140) possible. In addition to reading Edgar's repast as metaphoric fuel for his transformation into savage, however, I would offer that "eating the panther" stands also as a metaphor for writing and reading. Writing can be the creator of horrors and also the

"rationalizing mechanism" that digests that horror and transforms it. In the structure of Edgar Huntly, Brown presents writing as the simultaneous expression of those two explosively opposite forces. Taking a larger view and borrowing Christophersen's metaphor, in Brown's master/mentor relationships, writing as "chain" functions as the manipulative mentor's restraint and the generative mentor's progression.

Edgar Huntly purports to be a collection of four letters: the main corpus of the novel a letter to the invisible fiancée, Mary Waldegrave; two letters from Edgar to Sarsefield; and a final letter from Sarsefield to Huntly. "I sit down, my friend, to comply with thy request" (5) writes Edgar at novel's beginning, and he acknowledges the power of that act to affect the still-fresh "emotions. . . incompatible with order and coherence" (5) connected with his experiences. As he begins to write he fears the re-examination and re-presentation of events that Mary's request demands, not so much for the pain he may be reigniting, but the diminution of it. He worries that "[i]n proportion as I gain power over words, shall I lose dominion over sentiments" (5), that the writing down of his story will irrevocably change it. The element of text in Edgar Huntly displays the property of doing just that; it resurrects its writer or its subject in a changed form. Sarsefield's return to America and his resumed role as

mentor to Edgar is signalled by his writing materials (and Edgar's lost Waldegrave letters) spread on the writing desk in the anonymous house; Mrs. Lorimer's irreproachable character is preserved in the packet Clithero conceals; Edgar's hopes for the future are rocked to their foundation by the resurrection of a Waldegrave he did not know when Weymouth arrives to request the receipt for the money he put into Waldegrave's trust.

The three letters that close Edgar Huntly resurrect Edgar into a written self, a text that is just as dangerous as the physically present murderer he became during his journey. Brown rehearsed such a transformation in the matter of Waldegrave's letters in Chapter 13, where he sets up a contrast between self as written and self as physically present and performing. Waldegrave's letters were "subtle and laborious argumentations . . . against religion. . . contained in a permanent form" (126), faintly suggestive of Ludloe's Illuminati expediency. They were Waldegrave's written attempt to seduce Edgar into the same errors. Listening, however, to the "reasonings and exhortations of Mr. S---- [(Sarsefield?)] whose benign temper and blameless deportment was a visible and constant lesson" (126) and holding subsequent "transient conversation" with Edgar, Waldegrave managed to reject the errors of his youthful intellectual adventures. Waldegrave, it may be said, died right with God, or at least the prevailing ideology. He



requested that Edgar destroy those letters, since "with respect to others, [they] would communicate the poison when the antidote could not be administered" (126). What is written gains both a permanency and a "life" the consequences of which cannot be foreseen. Edgar's letters at the end of the novel are also living "poison," and the precise chronology of their reception--who reads them and when -- demonstrates that life and again points to Sarsefield as the mentor who could provide the corrective antidote.

The three letters that close Edgar Huntly demonstrate Sarsefield as a generative mentor in two ways. First, Sarsefield is the stimulus for the letters that translate Edgar from writer to text. If the mentoring Sarsefield is not physically, immediately available, then Edgar, whose self-defining gestures demand response, creates him as an audience for "Letter One." The Edgar Huntly who has been rushing madly about for the entire novel stops, specifically "in the bar of the Stagehouse" (273) to disclose to Sarsefield the news that Clithero is abroad and seeking Mrs. Lorimer. Christophersen persuasively argues in the case of another word that using a "sophisticated pun . . . refute[s] the frequent contention that Brown was a slapdash craftsman" (197n28). Brown's use of the word "bar" here also deserves closer attention. Sarsefield becomes the boundary-setter by becoming the audience for Edgar's letter. Second, the

letters make Edgar's text, not Edgar's self, a murderer that Sarsefield must control. "Letter Two" reveals that Edgar's story to Clithero about Mrs. Lorimer has reawakened Clithero's madness, and "Letter Three" shows that just as Sarsefield directs the physical apprehension of Clithero (the magistrates, the people posted to watch) in order to "debar him from the perpetration of new mischiefs," (283), so must he direct the apprehension of Edgar's killing letter. "Letter Three" opens with a short, dramatic story describing Sarsefield snatching "Letter One" out of his wife's hands at the moment she was about to read it. He is not so successful in controlling the chain of evidence, as it were, with "Letter Two." Brown meticulously details Sarsefield's too-little-too-late gesture of control in the final letter of Edgar Huntly:

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 into mine. These considerations should have prompted you to send them under cover to Whitworth or Harvey with directions to give them immediately to me. (284)

Even Edgar's letters must circulate "under cover" through Sarsefield's mentor surrogates. Sarsefield loses his last chance to establish a productive bond with Edgar as he did

in Chapter 23 when, despite Edgar's direct announcement of his submission to Sarsefield's authority ("Clithero is a maniac. This truth cannot be concealed . . . I imagined that Clithero was merely a victim of erroneous gratitude. . . that his understanding was deluded by phantoms in the mask of virtue and duty, and not as you have strenuously maintained, utterly subverted" (280 - 281)), Sarsefield refuses the gesture. He fails to answer story with story and, in such holding back at the very end of Edgar's trials and the possible start of a real adulthood, leaves Edgar another opportunity to create disaster. Edgar fails as apprentice because his need to know and to tell is uncontrollable; Sarsefield fails as a generative mentor because his refusal to acknowledge anything outside the strict boundaries of his own epistemology makes impossible the flexibility so necessary to successful generative mentoring.

Text is the manipulative mentor's restraint; a written document, like Waldegrave's letters, has power. Ludloe in Carwin had used the promise of books to draw Carwin closer, and as the youth approaches the moment of full disclosure, he uses two other items of written matter to both advance and consolidate his influence over his protege. Ludloe apparently allows Carwin to discover a map, only partially finished, in the library, and Carwin imagines that it is a map of an island where Ludloe's Illuminist utopia is to be

established. Finding the map leads to Carwin's speculation that ". . . if [Ludloe] had a double key to [the library], what should hinder his having access, by the same means, to every other locked up place in the house?" (344), including the "locked up" secrets of his apprentice. "We are frequently in most danger when we deem ourselves most safe," continues Carwin in a passage that follows immediately and states one of Brown's strongest themes, "and our fortress is taken sometimes through a point, whose weakness nothing, it should seem, but the blindest stupidity could overlook" (344). In another instance, as Ludloe and Carwin are discussing Carwin's act of full disclosure as final proof of membership in the mysterious brotherhood, Ludloe shows his apprentice a slip of paper that had figured in one of Carwin's adventures in Spain. Carwin had thought the paper destroyed, and the discovery that Ludloe seems to possess complete knowledge of everything about Carwin frightens the young man. Echoing Carwin's own earlier reflections, just before he produces the slip of paper Ludloe warns Carwin, "The sword may descend upon our infatuated head from above, but we who are, meanwhile, busily inspecting the ground at our feet, or gazing at the scene around us, are not aware or apprehensive of its irresistible coming" (352). Both examples offer only partial knowledge, a lure to draw the young man closer to the mystery and under stronger domination.

Concrete text and the act of writing itself are important elements of the bonds Brown's men establish with each other and of each individual's process of self-construction. Those bonds illustrate the dilemmas between authority and liberty, between established social order and innovative personal growth. Malevolent or replicative master/mentors demand complete disclosure and unquestioned allegiance from their proteges within the sacralized space of their mysteries. There the master's authority is complete and the apprentice can hope to achieve selfhood only by copying what is put before him--the master. Benevolent or generative masters demand disclosure of a kind from their proteges as well, but the generative mentor's aim is the establishment of another kind of space where the protege can use the materials of his disclosure to build an entirely independent, original, separate self. For the protege of the former, disclosure reinforces the mentor's hold over him and preempts any chance of change, growth, advance. For the protege of the latter, disclosure leads to a more fully realized and autonomous self. Such generative disclosure opens up a host of tremendously important cultural questions: what influences are reliable? How much personal freedom is safe before we cross the boundary between independence and anarchy? What we read and write has unimagined effects; can that power be controlled? If so, how? Brown used the two-way gesture of disclosure--

storytelling--in contradictory ways within the apprenticeship model to explore those questions. For the apprentice/citizen circulating in a bewildering world, apprenticeship evolves into mastery when the apprentice learns to write for himself.

## CHAPTER 2

### "An Honest Front and a Straight Story": Arthur Mervyn

#### I

Charles Brockden Brown's third novel, Arthur Mervyn or Memoirs of the Year 1793,<sup>37</sup> lays out a contest for authority between oral or visual presentation and textual representation in defining and inculcating virtuous republican citizenship in late eighteenth-century America. Set during the yellow fever epidemic of 1793 in Philadelphia, the novel overtly addresses questions about the nature and operation of virtue in a universe where even the most basic bonds of society have been severely loosened, if not broken. Behind those questions, however, is a complex thematic exploration of oral and visual information versus the written word in establishing and regulating an individual self, a self that can acquire and in turn promote the benefits of virtue. Brown emphasizes this competition by presenting explicitly visual "word portraits" in the narrative, employing techniques in text that parallel the directly visual techniques in paint of portraitists of the post-Revolutionary era. While Brown's novel characteristically

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<sup>37</sup> Charles Brockden Brown, The Novels and Related Works of Charles Brockden Brown, Bicentennial Edition, 6 vols., gen. ed. Sydney J. Krause (Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 1977-1987), vol. 3: Arthur Mervyn; or Memoirs of the Year 1793, 2 parts, ed. with Historical Essay by Norman S. Grabo. Subsequent references to Arthur Mervyn will refer to this edition and will appear in parentheses in the text.

leaves a resolution to the contest ambiguous, Arthur does acquire virtue and self through the acquisition of measured reflection and text. The example of Arthur Mervyn suggests to its readers, then and now, that the most reliable and virtuous self is that which a person rehearses through reading and writing.

Arthur Mervyn enacts the contest in two simultaneously operating arenas. In the events of the plot, Arthur Mervyn the character relies solely on verbal and visual cues both to draw conclusions about his experiences and to present himself to others. His confusing adventures in Philadelphia illustrate the danger of trusting and acting upon immediate, unreliable sense impressions, and only when he discovers and gains control over his imagination can he achieve the virtue he claims to seek. He accomplishes that mastery over the imagination through a mastery of written text. In the experience of reading the novel, the reader of Arthur Mervyn must untangle and keep organized the novel's bewildering multiplicity of speaking voices and plot twists, a task that emphasizes the mediating, deliberative influence of the written word over its perceiver. Arthur Mervyn achieves his virtue when he learns to write himself; contemporary readers of Arthur Mervyn can discover, confirm, and (ideally) circulate their virtue when they read his story.

Brown announces his novel's intention in the Preface to Arthur Mervyn:



Men only require to be made acquainted with distress for their compassion and their charity to be awakened. He that depicts, in lively colors, the evils of disease and poverty, performs an eminent service to the sufferers, by calling forth benevolence in those who are able to afford relief, and he who portrays examples of disinterestedness and intrepidity, confers on virtue the notoriety and homage that are due to it, and rouses in the spectators, the spirit of salutary emulation.

(3)

The tale of one youth abroad in the perilous universe that was Philadelphia in 1793 is to be the spark that starts a perpetual motion machine of public benevolence. This passage is a succinct example of the Scottish Common Sense philosophy's "innate moral sense" at work, the idea that human beings are naturally equipped with an impulse toward benevolence and sociability, and that the mere recognition or perception of virtue is sufficient to cause action.<sup>38</sup> We can interpret this section of the Preface on two levels. The ambiguous "he" in the passage above refers both to the author of the printed book in the reader's hands and to the fictional "author" of the tales to be told inside. First, and because earlier in the Preface Brown has called himself

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<sup>38</sup> I take my understanding of "innate moral sense" from Garry Wills, Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) Chapter 13.

"the moral observer" who has "methodize[d] his reflections" into a report of "incidents...instructive and remarkable" (3), we hear a novelist's fairly conventional statement of purpose and hopes for his work." Second, we have a concise description of the novel's protagonist, Arthur Mervyn himself, as "[he] that depicts" and "portrays examples." That is exactly what the young man spends most of this novel doing, as he rushes intrepidly about to tell his stories to selected listening audiences. In the novel, Arthur Mervyn, storyteller, naively believes that once people hear and believe the stories he tells, they will of course be moved to benevolent action. Of the novel, Brown, or the voice of the Preface, holds the same hope.

The language of the Preface emphasizes visual, aural, and communal ways of perceiving over the experience of reading written text. Perceivers are "spectators" to Arthur's performance of disinterested and intrepid virtue. These incidents are offered "in lively colors" intended to "call forth" benevolence. The words "notoriety" and "homage" carry connotations of public and communal perception; their appearance here suggests the public-ness of display.<sup>40</sup> Such "virtue" is therefore not a static and

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<sup>39</sup> Norman Grabo, "Historical Essay" Arthur Mervyn 463.

<sup>40</sup> Oxford English Dictionary (rev. ed. 1961) s.v. "notoriety" and "homage." See Bill Christophersen, The Apparition in the Glass (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1993) Christophersen reads Arthur Mervyn's Preface

self-inhering element but a dynamic, self-conscious, and purposely crafted-for-effect performance. The public gesture of virtue is an interactive process that requires an answer to its gesture, a response to complete its transaction. If the exercise of benevolence requires an object, does virtue demand an audience? Arthur Mervyn's brand of virtue seems to answer "yes," and, to push the question even further, the novel asks: if the depiction of virtue is a sufficient catalyst for the bond that produces benevolent action, which mode of depiction is more effective, oral or print? Just as within the text Arthur's oral performance of his tales is intended to create benevolence in his hearers, so might the printed document of Brown's novel, circulating in the world outside the created text, be intended to awaken "compassion . . . and charity" in its readers.

By what process? In the Introduction to Authority, Autonomy, and Representation in American Literature, 1776 - 1865, Mark Patterson offers explanations of authority and autonomy as they operate in the public and private relationships. Authority is the ability to direct and control the actions of another; autonomy is the self's unchallenged power of making its own rules. Balanced interaction between the two powers means negotiating authority's external demands and the "internal drives of our

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as a "gem of ambiguity . . . that indicates the dual mask that virtue will wear throughout the novel" (91).

ambition or vanity."<sup>41</sup> The compromise, as Patterson explains it, is in the representative quality of the written literary document. By allowing a space in which the independent, autonomous individual may choose to submit to authority's demands, representation creates "conditional authority and conditional autonomy for both commander and subordinate" (xxvii). This is supposedly a positive, fruitful situation. The representing text is an accommodating mediation between absolute authority and the "abnegation" of a self, and absolute autonomy, or the total isolation of the self from any identifying limits.

To begin exploring the nature of "authority" within the purposely narrowed context of one novel's operations, reconsider the first sentence of the passage from Arthur Mervyn's Preface, quoted earlier: "Men only require to be made acquainted with distress for their compassion and their charity to be awakened." One way to read this is as a direct statement of the Scottish Common Sense philosophy's concept of man's innate moral sense, an instinct that moves man toward benevolent action with or without rational reflection. It is not, as it tries to appear, a statement of fact but the opening premise in a persuasive argument. We can imagine an understandable resistance to such a

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<sup>41</sup>Mark Patterson, Authority, Autonomy, and Representation in American Literature, 1776 - 1865 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988) ix.

statement--that knowledge alone is not sufficient cause to arouse benevolent feelings, that "compassion" and "charity" are not universal reactions to knowledge of suffering, and so on--but in that very resistance itself the competition for authority is engaged. If we argue with the premise or set aside our exceptions, and if we continue to read, we have submitted ourselves to the authority of what the text is going to tell us. In the experience of reading a document, the repetitive clues or clear lines of plot that verbal transmission of information requires are unnecessary. We can always go back and check, and the complexity of Arthur Mervyn's speaking voice simply makes manifest that quality of written discourse. The two Parts of the novel impose an unusual demand on their readers. The Second Part, which appeared in 1800, (more than a year after the First) begins with, "Here ended the narrative of Mervyn" (219), a curious move that assumes very specific prior knowledge in its reader and reinforces the interconnection of the two volumes.

Arthur Mervyn, First Part was published in Philadelphia in May 1799; Arthur Mervyn, Second Part came out in New York in July 1800. The plot is as intricately twined as the stockings his old neighbor, Mrs. Althorpe, teases Arthur for knitting (234), and the trope of "thread" representing narrative appears frequently in the novel's language. Conventionally read as one work, the novel is a

series of repeated scenarios in which the protagonist enacts variations of the same scene.<sup>42</sup> Arthur, a young man about eighteen years old, leaves the family farm after his mother dies and his father marries the milkmaid. The young man travels to Philadelphia, where he is befriended by the duplicitous Welbeck, a financial speculator who trades on forgery and misrepresentation of appearances. Welbeck, noting Arthur's remarkable resemblance to a figure in one of his ongoing schemes, employs the boy ostensibly as a secretary, but secretly plans to use Arthur's appearance to further his own evil plans. Plans fail, and Welbeck stages a suicide that forces the credulous Arthur to flee to the countryside. There he is taken in by good Quaker farmer Hadwin and his two daughters, but Arthur soon returns to the city, which has now become a chaotic, frightening hell in the grip of the yellow fever. He meets the amazingly resurrected Welbeck again and contracts his own case of fever. Sick, Arthur wanders the streets of Philadelphia until a physician, Dr. Stevens, finds him, takes him home, and cures his illness. During Arthur's convalescence, Dr. Stevens hears conflicting information regarding his guest's

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<sup>42</sup> Jane Tompkins, in Sensational Designs, reads the pattern of Arthur Mervyn as a "round of rescues" (68), a series of "abstract propositions . . . whose intent is to change the social reality" (67). Such is the intent stated by the Preface, a part of the novel my reading attempts to problematize along with the text proper. Tompkins does identify the transactional nature of Arthur's "scenarios" (67). See also Berthoff, "A Lesson on Concealment" 47.

reputation, and Stevens asks Arthur to give an account of himself. Arthur does so, and Dr. Stevens convinces Arthur that he must repair whatever damage he may have unwittingly inflicted while in Welbeck's employ. Arthur thus begins a series of repair missions: returning lost money; securing the safety of Clemenza, a young girl Welbeck had seduced and abandoned; protecting Hadwin's orphaned daughter, Eliza. In his career of virtue amended, Arthur meets the beautiful and mysterious Ascha Fielding, whom he eventually marries. Each of the characters has his or her own story (sometimes several at once), and ambiguity of motive, outrageous coincidence, and confused identities abound.

It is the ambiguity of Arthur's character and motivation that has most fascinated the novel's critics. R.W.B. Lewis has called him a "foolish young innocent: the first of our Adams."<sup>43</sup> Leslie Fiedler numbers him among a group of "dependent boys in search of motherly wives," and Norman Grabo sees Arthur's character as built of a "network" of others' stories, resolving itself finally as "not faultless, although he behaves as if he were." Patrick Brancaccio, in an essay titled "Studied Ambiguities: Arthur Mervyn and the Problem of the Unreliable Narrator" concludes that Arthur is "a young American on the make in a

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<sup>43</sup> R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence and Tragedy in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955)

competitive, moralistic business culture" (26)"

The work of three recent critics provides the most useful framework for my argument. In Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance (1993), Jay Fliegelman interprets Thomas Jefferson's composition of the Declaration of Independence as an event in "the elocutionary revolution" (2). One of the many cultural consequences of the Revolution was a change in the nature of public speech. Sermons well-built according to the stylized conventions of classical oratory and delivered by an authoritative, learned minister slowly give way to seemingly spontaneous presentations from a public, common-man "self" whose performance, as opposed to the content of the message or the pedigree of its bearer, becomes increasingly more important. How a speaker presents himself,

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" Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (1966; New York: Doubleday, 1992) 151; Norman Grabo, The Coincidental Art of Charles Brockden Brown (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981) 87, 126. Secondary material on Arthur Mervyn is extensive. See also James H. Justus, "Arthur Mervyn, American" American Literature, 17 (1970) 304-324; W.B. Berthoff, "Adventures of the Young Man: An Approach to Charles Brockden Brown" American Quarterly, 9 (date?): 421-434; Daniel E. Cohen, "Arthur Mervyn and His Elders: The Ambivalence of Youth in the Early Republic" William and Mary Quarterly, 43 (1986): 362-360; Watts, 101-115; Davidson 238-253. James Russo, "The Chameleon of Convenient Vice: A Study of the Narrative of Arthur Mervyn," Studies in the Novel II (1979): 381-405, offers a demonstration of what Paul Lewis, in his recent "Charles Brockden Brown And the Gendered Canon of Early American Fiction" Early American Literature 31: 2 (1996) 167-188 has called "arguments that . . . do more to establish the critic's ingenuity than the novelist's" (177-178).



including his posture, gesture, and facial expression, becomes more meaningful than what he says. Fliegelman's primary focus significantly antedates Brown, of course, and the critic treats Brown only briefly in Declaring Independence, but the characteristics of Revolutionary "natural theatricality" (87) Fliegelman identifies also describe the behavior of Arthur Mervyn and other characters in Brown's novel. The transformation that Fliegelman describes sets up a polarization between what is "natural" and what is "represented" not only in the public performance of individual speech, but in the certification of a reliable private self. Larzer Ziff, in Writing in the New Nation: Prose, Print, and Politics in the Early United States (1991), argues the impossibility of the separation of immanent "true" self from represented "public" self; the latter, he argues, constantly re-creates the former in the continuum of personal and interpersonal event.<sup>45</sup> Ziff explores early Republican America's almost universal anxiety over distinguishing reported information from that directly experienced. He offers a brief interpretation of Arthur Mervyn, but his analysis of the power of public reputation to establish "self" as it applies in this particular novel can be expanded. Michael Warner, in The Letters of the

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<sup>45</sup> See also Christophersen, 90; Shirley Samuels, Romances of the Republic: Women, Family, and Violence in the Literature of the Early American Nation (New York: Oxford UP, 1996) 30; and Watts, 103.

Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America (1990) identifies and assigns to print the powers of "supervision" and "disclosure" over the public individual. As he turns to discussion of fiction in his book's final chapter, "The Novel: Fantasies of Publicity," Warner locates Arthur Mervyn as an "exemplary public instrument" that figures "culturally dominant assumptions and desires about the value of printed goods" (154-156). The forces Warner identifies as operating through Arthur Mervyn outward to the culture at large also operate inward on Arthur Mervyn as he makes progress through "fantas[ies] of publication" (165) toward a core self. All three critics extrapolate interpretations of their chosen texts into interpretations of the cultural, social, and political worlds in which those texts appeared. Connected to these extrapolations is an analysis of the transformations of power and authority in the new nation from a vertical hierarchy to an organic republicanism, from law imposed to law consensual. Arthur Mervyn clearly takes its place among the important texts of the period as it interrogates the tension between oratorically created identity and what Warner calls the "performative virtue of literature" (170).

Arthur consistently interprets to himself what he sees or hears and makes immediate decisions based on that information. Such immediacy can be dangerous, as Brown's earlier novel, Wieland, demonstrates. Both novels take as a

major theme a warning against "the folly of precipitate conclusions" (AM 57).<sup>46</sup> In a society where an individual's actions have been freed from the constraints of a hierarchical system and hence become susceptible to individual error, conclusions based on bonds established "on the notices of sense"<sup>47</sup> are rightly suspect and demand careful evaluation. Independence requires an individual's alert responsibility for his actions and their consequences. What to listen to, what to believe? Representation can equal artifice which, in a society so dramatically destabilized as the plagued Philadelphia Brown depicts, demands careful examination, if not outright suspicion. If the portrayal or representation is deliberately intended to direct the actions of those who perceive it, if it is intended to exercise power, the necessity for caution becomes even greater.

The influence of visual representation is apparent from the beginning of Arthur Mervyn. Our introduction to Arthur occurs through Dr. Stevens, the First Part's primary reporting voice, and it is both visual and compelling. "[M]y attention was attracted," Stevens tells us, "by the figure

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<sup>46</sup> Cynthia Jordan, "On Rereading Wieland: 'The Folly of Precipitate Conclusions'" Early American Literature 16, 1981 (154-174) makes an argument for Wieland very similar to what I attempt for Arthur Mervyn.

<sup>47</sup> Charles Brockden Brown, Wieland (New York: Penguin, 1991) 35.

of a man, reclining against the wall a few paces distant. My sight was imperfectly assisted by a far-off lamp; but the posture in which he sat, the hour, and the place immediately suggested the idea of one disabled by sickness" (5). The narrative frame provides a visual frame, complete with perspective and lighting cues. From this "picture," Stevens finds it "obvious to conclude that [the figure's] disease was pestilential" (5). Stevens offers shelter to the anonymous figure, and the tale begins. Arthur performs an influencing act before he even speaks a word, for Stevens says, "I scarcely ever beheld an object which laid so powerful and sudden a claim to my affection and succour" (6). The scene is at once a clear restatement of the Preface's "moral sense" note, since knowledge of suffering is axiomatically sufficient to prompt action, and the first demonstration of how powerful (and possibly dangerous) instinctive, unmediated action can be.

The almost simultaneous actions of perceiving, interpreting, and acting that Stevens presents in the first pages of Arthur Mervyn quickly appear in the title character as well. Arthur draws inference from "tokens," "looks," and appearances without pausing to consider possible alternatives before he acts. A few examples from the very beginning of his story will illustrate: Arthur misinterprets the appearances of his father and the slattern Betty Lawrence (20); he is moved to jealousy by the rich

appearance of Welbeck's home (47); when he meets the mysterious Clemenza for the first time, his adolescent imagination leaps over itself into fantasies of marriage, even though they have not spoken a word to each other (58). Such a rush to erroneous conclusion is not Arthur's fault alone; it is important to remember that the principle of immediate bond through visual or aural impression is reciprocal. What Arthur perceives of others' presentations initiates connections with them, and no one ever tells him a complete story, either. Neither his father nor Betty actually tells him that they are going to be married, Welbeck does not willingly reveal the trickery that produces the appearance of such wealth, and Welbeck's subtly ambiguous directive to Arthur regarding Clemenza--"you are to treat [her] with the respect due to my daughter" (52)--leaves sufficient room for Arthur to conclude (wrongly, it turns out) that she is his daughter. She is in fact the victim of Welbeck's fickle sexual economy, another credulous, unfortunate audience for Welbeck's deliberately theatrical misrepresentations. The inadequacies and ambiguities of spoken language and visual appearance are strongly evident in the scene where Arthur first meets Clemenza. She does not speak English, and as she and Welbeck converse in Italian, Arthur is left with no other information with which to interpret the scene except appearances and tones.

In addition to faulty reliance on his senses for information for himself, Arthur's delivery of information to others is an attempt at conscious performance, complete with visual clues and physical gestures. I say "an attempt" quite deliberately, because Arthur's development of a reliable interior self is an ongoing kinesic project; until he learns to locate his "self" in written text, the only Arthur available is the acting, performing, displayed presentation. There is no prior interior self crafting or directing it. Arthur here offers a variation on the dilemma Benjamin Franklin addressed in the Autobiography. Franklin provides a paradigmatic example of the deliberately created public self. His "bold and arduous Project of arriving at moral Perfection"<sup>48</sup> as he sets it down in the Autobiography hints at the existence of a governing, immanent self that identifies desirable traits in the first place and a governed, malleable self that then strives to acquire them. The printer trundling his own stock of paper or making certain that his neighbors see him at work early and late (441) is a deliberate visual and public presentation of an image chosen by a private and rational self. The public self who so appears in turn becomes private self by means of "[h]abitude" (455), and success is counted according to a

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<sup>48</sup> Benjamin Franklin, The Autobiography, The Norton Anthology of Literature, ed. Baym, et al, 2nd ed. Vol 1 (New York: Norton, 1979) 454.

public standard. "I cannot boast of much Success in acquiring the Reality of [Humility]," Franklin confesses, "but I had a good deal with regard to the Appearance of it" (Autobiography 462).<sup>49</sup> Arthur Mervyn's career in Philadelphia may be superficially similar to Franklin's, but Brown's character crucially lacks an internality that can provide for the self what Franklin's does. The lack of an immanent self and Arthur's conscious or unconscious efforts to construct one are what fuel the novel's narrative progress.

Fliegelman's Declaring Independence draws on elocutionary manuals and acting handbooks to explore the problematic interpenetration of performance and performing self. He quotes Rousseau's observation that an individual lives within so many disguises that "if at any time he is obliged for a moment to assume his natural character his uneasiness and constraint are palpably obvious"<sup>50</sup> Fliegelman reasons that "[i]f the self was no more than an endless sequence of self-presentations structured for different audiences without an overarching and definable core self . . . theatricality was the essence of natural behavior" (81-

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<sup>49</sup> See Alan Axelrod, Charles Brockden Brown: An American Tale (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983) 147-156 for a further discussion of Franklin in the context of Arthur Mervyn.

<sup>50</sup> Rousseau, Emilius and Sophia, or a New System of Education, 2:183, qtd. in Fliegelman, 81.

82). Arthur's "natural theatricality" (Fliegelman, 82) is what creates the initial bond between him and the people around him.

In the oratorical gesture, Fliegelman explains, a speaker must invisibly resolve the paradox between modesty and pride (Franklin again!); "[o]ne must not only be composed, but one must compose oneself in public" (105). Arthur does precisely that the first time he speaks. Chapter 1 introduces the major thematic complication of the novel when Stevens' friend Wortley accuses Arthur of being in league with the duplicitous villain Welbeck, who has cheated Wortley in a business deal. Wortley claims that Arthur is not what he appears. Wortley is Stevens' "dearest friend," a man "venerable for his discernment and integrity" (12). Whom is Stevens to believe, friend Wortley or stranger Mervyn? Arthur's "uniform complacency and rectitude of . . . deportment" (14) dispose Stevens to listen to Arthur's response to the accusation, and he asks Mervyn for an explanation. Arthur asks in return "an opportunity for deliberation" (13) before he tells his story. The next morning, after an opportunity to rehearse, and in what modern ears can easily imagine as the insincerely self-deprecating tone of one unaccustomed to public speaking, Arthur agrees to "render a tale worthy of attention which will not be recommended by a variety of facts or skill in the display of them" (16). It is important to remember



Arthur's selection of audience here. For almost all of the First Part, Stevens' wife Eliza is present and listening. She is energetically favorable toward Arthur, and claims that "she would vouch . . . before any tribunal, for [Arthur's] innocence" (14). Arthur refuses to allow Wortley, presumably an openly hostile auditor, to be present. Having carefully screened his listeners, and "after a pause of recollection" (16), he begins his first story, the tale of Welbeck.<sup>51</sup>

Just as Arthur offers a plausibly constructed image as his contribution to a bond between himself and the listening Stevens, Welbeck's ability to present a deliberately created public persona had earlier initiated Arthur's bond with him. That association is characterized by visual, verbal, and written deception. Shortly after his arrival in Welbeck's household, Welbeck takes Arthur to a social gathering, where Arthur watches his new friend closely. Welbeck's "entrance into . . . company appeared to operate like magic. His eye sparkled; his features expanded into a benign serenity; and his wonted reserve gave place to a torrent-like and overflowing elocution" (73). Yet Arthur discovers that this "vivacity [is] mere dissimulation" (73), a show designed purposely to further Welbeck's money schemes with Wortley.

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<sup>51</sup> Arthur's hesitation here is a demonstration of aporia, a public rhetorician's deliberate hesitation, "a passage in speech or writing incorporating a difficulty or doubt" (Webster's Third International Dictionary).

Arthur is intrigued. Welbeck has crafted his public success through the forgery of written documents, as well; he hires Arthur as an amanuensis to assist his present scheme--the plagiarism of Vincentio Lodi's manuscript--and Welbeck's most recent difficulty with Wortley devolves from a forged banknote.

Visual deception, corruption of written documents, silence and lies: these emphatic markers of Welbeck's character come together most forcibly in Chapter 23 of the First Part, when a desperate Welbeck attempts to regain possession of Watson's banknotes from Arthur. Even though Arthur has first-hand experience of Welbeck's skill as a dissimulator, the youth falls for this ludicrously overacted performance of insuring secrecy:

[Welbeck] cast fearful glances at the windows and door. He examined every avenue and listened. Thrice he repeated this scrutiny . . . he approached the bed. He put his mouth close to my face. He attempted to speak, but once more examined the apartment with suspicious glances (207).

Welbeck tells Arthur that the notes are forged. Instantly, Arthur burns the notes in a convenient candle flame and so doing precipitates a dangerous rage in Welbeck. "Maniac! Miscreant!," Welbeck bellows, "[T]o be fooled by so gross an artifice! The notes were genuine. The tale of their forgery

was false" (210). Arthur is not a "maniac" or a "miscreant"; he is simply inept at critically interpreting what he sees or hears, however earnestly he may concentrate his thinking. The secrecy of tales is the force that maintains Welbeck's bond with Arthur. Welbeck reinforces the bond by enjoining a promise of secrecy from him regarding Arthur's pre-Philadelphia life, and he makes other definite if unspoken demands for Arthur's silence: during Watson's ghastly burial, for example, or concerning Clemenza's true identity. Arthur's acquiescence to these demands is passive. It requires no effort not to speak, he reasons, and his experiences so far have not revealed to him the civic and moral necessity of "telling." He takes his promises to Welbeck, explicit or implied, seriously. Later in the novel, the imprisoned and dying Welbeck says to him, "[T]hou hast done me harm enough, but canst do, if thou wilt, still more. Thou canst betray the secrets that are lodged in thy bosom, and rob me of the comfort of reflecting that my guilt is known but to one among the living" (338). When Arthur invalidates that injunction to secrecy by telling all to Stevens, the bond is dissolved.

## II

Welbeck tells stories to bind Arthur to him; Arthur tells stories to Stevens in an effort to secure the physician's good will and illustrate the "benevolence" of the novel's Preface. Storytelling as event establishes, if only for the duration of its own telling, an identity. "Telling their own story or acting as subjects of a narrator's story," Patricia Spacks asserts in Imagining a Self, "[characters] declare the overwhelming fact of their own existence: existence in and through story" (10). Echoing Spacks, Larzer Ziff, in Writing in the New Nation, claims that Arthur tells his stories because "in the telling he establishes for himself who he is" (78). In other words, the process is the product. Ziff goes beyond Spacks to assert that an individual character cannot be fixed with any certainty, for the ongoing welter of personal experience in this new post-Revolutionary America demands a constant re-evaluation and reformulation of the self that inhabits it. Arthur can own an identity only when he is telling his story, when he "[adjusts] . . . the data of personal experience so as both to conform them to what he is and to adapt himself to what they have made him become" (76). In this way he differs from the more self-assured Benjamin Franklin, for Franklin assumed that the appearance of virtue, which would engender a positive reputation in the

community, could only confirm what was already present in the immanent self. Arthur begins to build a self in the act of telling stories; that act of self-creation is again a dynamic, ever-active, ongoing event. Ziff locates Arthur Mervyn among other late eighteenth-century novels that concern themselves with the reliability of self-representation within a community and the possible influence on the community such representations might have. Deception is dangerous, of course, but, as Ziff puts it, appearance also has the capacity "to convert itself into the truth of social reality" (58-59). The stories we tell can become the reality we know. The stories characters tell can have the power to create both the immanent, internal self and the represented, socially circulating self. Exactly how does Arthur Mervyn handle the question of identity through communal report? The new republican universe, shedding traditional clues to character such as family, occupation, or hometown, makes it possible for what is circulated about an individual to define him. Arthur discovers a way to creating a self as he responds to the stories told about him. Along with self-represented and publicly perceived selves, Brown's novel calls attention to a third element of identity: the reported self.

Several characters in Arthur Mervyn appear only as actors in other people's stories: Betty Lawrence, Colville, Clavering. In Chapter 2 of the Second Part, Dr. Stevens

hears Mrs. Althorpe, a resident of Arthur's home county, tell the story of how the young man seduced Betty Lawrence, a servant girl on his father's farm. Stevens brings the accusation before Arthur, and Arthur explains that while Betty's attempts at a "criminal intimacy" (230) with him failed, "they produced another [consequence] which was by no means displeasing to her" (346). Because someone saw an "incident one night," the rumor of an "intrigue" (346) begins, and Betty is pleased because though she may have failed in fact, the circulating fiction of Arthur's seduction is as good as fact in the neighborhood. Arthur sees no point in actively trying to erase the effects of the town rumor, since he believes the witness (yet another storyteller) was acting on an understandable, if erroneous, commutative principle of morality. "[T]he standard of possibilities, especially in vice and virtue, is fashioned by most men after their own character," Arthur tells Stevens, "A temptation which [the witness] knew that he was unable to resist, he sagely concluded to be irresistible by any other man . . . I believe [the accusation] useless to deny, because no one would credit my denial, and because I had no power to disprove it" (346-347).

If Welbeck's bond with Arthur depended on secrecy, Stevens demands openness. By asking the questions and providing an audience, Stevens has made the "power to disprove" available to Arthur. The bond between Arthur and

Stevens commences in the exchange of Stevens' kindness for Arthur's story; Arthur must tell as part of the negotiation. As he performs his tale, Arthur's disclosures to the Stevens are an earnest offered in an attempt to ratify his social character and legitimate his membership in the society of the virtuous. Telling the whole story to an audience that will consider it and reflect upon it independently transforms the dangerous secret into manageable information. This information becomes subordinate to what Michael Warner, in The Letters of the Republic, terms the normalizing "supervision" (41), the approval or censure, of the community that receives it. The auditors of such presentations are empowered to accept or condemn what is disclosed. In the public/political sphere, the "standard of publicity defines the legitimate" (Warner 167). As a silent portrait or as a figure telling his tales before a limited audience of physically present perceivers, Arthur has certainly begun the public process of disclosure through appearance and verbal report. Disclosure made in this way may provide legitimacy for the information, but it complicates the character of its deliverer. Arthur cannot control or alter his story once it has reached the ears and understanding of his hearers, since in the telling he creates another Arthur Mervyn separate from the self who is doing the telling, and, as his hometown witnesses demonstrate, subject to the communal supervision of

reputation. The "self" created in the storytelling becomes once again problematic. In two other instances, Arthur is first the victim of a fictionalized, reported individual and second, himself the creator. In Chapter 20, First Part, he believes that Colville, another villain from his village past, is present in Welbeck's house when Welbeck has only mimicked Colville's voice. When he meets Welbeck in prison in Chapter 13 of the Second Part, Arthur has seen Clemenza weeping over her dead child, and gone to Welbeck with the news. In Welbeck's prison chamber, Arthur apostrophizes Clemenza and Welbeck mistakenly believes that she is actually there. "What . . . Is she here?...The moment she appears I will pluck out these eyes and dash them at her feet" (336) cries Welbeck, in an example of the text's pervasive language of vision and supervision. Shortly afterward, Welbeck makes his final plea for secrecy to Arthur; Arthur responds by performing his first verifiable act of writing in the novel. He "[procures] pen and paper" (338) and writes to Stevens.



## III

Setting the self down in writing offers a new option. According to what Warner calls the "negativity of person" principle at work in the print discourse of the period's tracts and pamphlets, the presenter of material, the writer, disappears as a singular individual susceptible to private interest and ambition and becomes a voice that speaks through the "universalizing mediation of publicity" (Warner 40-41). Instead of an orator with a carefully identified and anticipated goal, performing before a limited audience, the phenomenon of print makes the performer invisible, the perceivers universal, and the outcome impartially derived. As Warner reads Arthur Mervyn, Arthur's dynamic and narratively rhythmic progress from ignorance to knowledge is a "drive to acquire knowledge . . . a principle of dynamism" that expresses itself as "a fantasy of publication" (160, 169). In the novel, Arthur's "fantasies of publication" are his stories, and since in the telling he is creating yet another "Arthur Mervyn," distinct from the physically present, performing individual, the negativity of his person equals the imagined Arthur of the visually represented or communally reported tales. In his oral performances, Arthur is a fiction. How does Arthur Mervyn (and Arthur Mervyn) handle printed or written information? An instance of Arthur actually writing anything is hard to find. After his initial "audition" before Welbeck, in which Arthur writes a

line from Shakespeare,<sup>52</sup> Arthur carries messages--to Mrs. Wentworth and to Thetford's office. Arthur's intention to write contrasts sharply against his actually writing. Over and over again, Arthur's search for writing materials leads him to unlocked rooms and complicating discoveries--Welbeck standing over the body of the freshly murdered Watson, for example.<sup>53</sup> Stevens' failure to recognize Arthur's handwriting in the note the youth writes to him concerning the imprisoned Carlton (Second Part Ch. 4), and Stevens' not receiving letters which Arthur claims to have written, demonstrate that at that point in the narrative, Arthur has probably never written anything for Stevens, either. But Arthur has encountered the authority implicit in texts written by others, as his experiences in connection with Eliza Hadwin prove.

When Arthur flees to the countryside after Welbeck's supposed suicide in Chapter 12 of the First Part and arrives at Hadwin's farm, he has in his possession the Lodi manuscript which Welbeck had intended to plagiarize and parley into an increase in his own public reputation. Arthur's uses of that text illustrate the novel's emphasis on the value of written or printed document. After farmer

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<sup>52</sup> "My poverty, but not my will consents" (Romeo and Juliet, V, 1, 75).

<sup>53</sup> See Christophersen 95-96 for a discussion of an "iconography of the hand" that reflects a "deformed moral sense."

Hadwin's death from the fever, Arthur vows to provide a safe home for his daughter, Eliza. Arthur's interview with Eliza Hadwin's uncle, the innkeeper Philip Hadwin, in Chapter 10 of the Second Part illustrates three points: the complexity and unreliability of verbal report, the elusiveness of character thus established, and the assertive power of written text.

Welbeck had received the Lodi manuscript from the dying Vincentio, who had requested that Welbeck give the manuscript to his sister, Clemenza. In a manner anticipatory of the way Arthur infers information from Welbeck, Lodi had communicated his wishes to Welbeck more through gesture and his audience's conjecture than through direct verbal command (94). On the Hadwin farm, Arthur's "romantic and untutored disposition" (124), which has already made itself known in his reaction to Clemenza, (52), leads him to develop an attraction for Eliza. He hesitates to pursue her, first because she is poor, and whatever inheritance is hers is to be gained only through Hadwin's death; and second, because she is a Quaker, a member of a faith that forbids its members marriage to anyone outside its ranks. Arthur believes he could circumvent this second obstacle through "hypocrisy" by either "[feigning] conversion or [rooting] out [Eliza's] opinions" (125). Here is a revealing choice, for Arthur has the perfect opportunity to perform for Eliza the same variety of show that Welbeck performed for Clemenza

in order to gain an immediate selfish end. Arthur is pinned between the choices of duplicity and honor. He decides against deception, since, he claims, "the consciousness of rectitude was mine, and in competition with this...the gratifications of boundless ambition and inexhaustible wealth were contemptible and frivolous" (125). As a way to "discover some means of controlling and beguiling my thoughts" (125), and as an effort against turning into another Welbeck, Arthur translates Lodi's manuscript from Italian into English, relying only on his knowledge of Latin. The translation, a deliberate manipulation of written word, is the first instance of Arthur attempting a greater portion of mastery over thought and self. Eliza is the catalyst.

Arthur's description of the translation process is also an announcement, similar to that of the Preface, of the novel's intent:

What impediments, in the attainment of a darling purpose, human ingenuity and patience are able to surmount; how much may be done by solitary and strenuous efforts; how the mind, unassisted, may draw forth the principles of inflection and arrangement; may profit by remote, analogous and latent similitudes, would be forcefully illustrated by my example; but the theme, however attractive, must, for the present, be omitted.

(126)  
Arthur says this about his translation, but his words describe the experience of reading the novel as well; Arthur, his stories, and the book that at that moment rests in its reader's hand are the example. The point is stressed further a paragraph later when Arthur pries apart a few manuscript pages "glewed together at the edges" (126) to discover banknotes, the rest of Lodi's fortune. As a heavy-handed example of Arthur Mervyn's emphasis on the value of text, a work of fiction about money becomes money. The manuscript is a story about an outlaw in hiding who discovers a treasure just in time to secure the loyalty of his followers and escape his persecutors. The outlaw's experience directly parallels that of Arthur, who has also taken refuge and discovered a treasure, and that of the novel reader, who in reading Arthur Mervyn takes "refuge" in the imagined universe of the book and ought to be aware of the treasures available therein. The lesson operates on three distinct levels: the outlaw of the manuscript narrative can buy the "family" of his gang; by returning the manuscript and the money to Clemenza, Arthur of the novel can re-establish her family; the reader of Arthur Mervyn can become a member of a supervising (and virtuous!) family of individuals bound in republican virtues of reflection and deliberation. The passage is also a warning. Text carries literal rewards, and rejecting text can mean danger. Arthur

thinks of how Welbeck would have benefited from the money had he only read the manuscript, "but deterred by anxieties, which the perusal would have dissipated, [Welbeck] rushed...to suicide, from which some evanescent contingency, by unfolding this treasure to his view, would have effectually rescued him" (127). Reading the physical document of disclosure, which "unfolds" that which is secret into the safety of its reader's supervising "view," can save your life.

Arthur's meeting with Philip Hadwin, to whom Arthur appeals on Eliza's behalf, continues to emphasize the association of Eliza with written document. Local rumor characterizes Philip Hadwin as an ignorant bully. Believing the community report, and, as a visual performer, Arthur shapes his demeanor for the interview accordingly; he says,

I kept my seat, and carefully excluded from my countenance every indication of timidity and panic on the one hand, and of scorn and defiance on the other...My demeanor was calculated to damp the flame, not only by its direct influence, but by diverting [Hadwin's] attention from the wrongs which he had received, to the novelty of my behavior." (304-305)

Arthur goes so far as to pretend a casual disregard for imminent danger as he teases the irate Hadwin and cavalierly

calls for more wine. There is a surprise, however, awaiting Arthur's calculated performance. The interview reveals that Eliza's inheritance, the farm, has been mortgaged to Hadwin in a transaction published and recorded in the public office of the prothonotary (an early form of notary public).<sup>34</sup> Hearing this, Arthur is dismayed yet cautious in his reaction. He reports, "I meant not to rely on [Hadwin's] own assertions, and would not acknowledge the validity of his claim, till I had inspected the deed" (307). What Arthur wishes of others--that they believe his story solely on his visual performance and report of it--he now rejects as Hadwin's story touches on him. After leaving behind him in the tavern "the character of a queer sort of chap" (309, Brown's emphasis), Arthur rushes to the public office, where the existence of the mortgage is confirmed.

Father Hadwin's will had identified Philip as Eliza's guardian, and Arthur goes to Hadwin's tavern to tell him that, learning of this provision, Eliza has burned the will and is residing for the moment with another farming family, the Curlings. Arthur's purpose is to insure Eliza a place in Hadwin's care, presumably until she can qualify for marriage. The complicated mise-en-scene of Chapter 10 effectively erases Arthur as an autonomous, distinct

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<sup>34</sup> The power of a present-day notary public derives from the actual physical appearance of an individual before a certifying authority.

individual and reinscribes him as a character in Philip Hadwin's own imagined story of the event. Arthur's report to Stevens about the incident repeats Hadwin's words indirectly, and a reader untangling the verbal strands of this chapter is more often than not left confused as to who says what about whom. The description of Arthur as "damnably tough and devilishly pliant" (308) in his handling of Hadwin's anger in this scene has previously been read as Arthur's statement about himself, but it is in fact Hadwin's.<sup>55</sup> It is also a fair description of the rhetorical gymnastics taking place here. Two long paragraphs (308 and 309) are Arthur's indirect quotation of Hadwin's speech, a complicated narrative move that makes the Arthur of this chapter at once participant and reporter in an actual event and an actor in Philip Hadwin's imagined one.<sup>56</sup> In fact, one sentence manages to contain four simultaneous voices: Stevens reporting Arthur reporting Hadwin reporting the voice of an imagined Arthur. As Arthur reports Hadwin's words, he becomes a character in an imagined drama, a figure in the gossiped tale that Philip Hadwin tells himself and

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<sup>55</sup> Emory Elliott, in Revolutionary Writers, gives the voice of this description to Arthur (241), as does Watts (106).

<sup>56</sup> See Harald Kittel, "Free Indirect Discourse and the Experiencing Self in Eighteenth Century American Autobiographical Fiction: The Narration of Consciousness in Charles Brockden Brown's Wieland" New Comparison: A Journal of Comparative and General Literary Study 9: Spring 1990; 73-89 for a discussion of the particular "narrative devices" in that novel.



might plausibly tell others about the visit:

I had come to him, whom I never saw before,  
on whom I had no claim, and who, as I well  
knew, had reason to think me a sharper, and  
modestly said -- "Here's a girl who has no  
fortune. I am greatly in want of one. Pray,  
give her such an estate that you have in your  
possession. If you do, I'll marry  
her and take it into my own hands" (309).

That Arthur is Hadwin's construct. The written passage's  
incredibly complicated chain of report displaces oral and  
visual directness with a challenge to read, and read  
carefully; the careful reader of Chapter 10 is forced into a  
strenuous, minute explication of superimposed voices before  
anything makes sense. That Arthur's encounter with the  
authority of published document, occurs in a chapter of such  
complex, not to say confusing, verbal report only stresses  
the importance of written word in fixing character (who is  
Arthur here?), ascertaining the truth of verbal utterance,  
and, in general, keeping things straight.

## IV

It is a truism among stage actors that a performance before an empty house is just a rehearsal; performance and print both require a visually participating audience. The participating eye is everywhere in Arthur Mervyn. For example, early in the novel, Arthur on one of his frequent quests for writing materials discovers Welbeck moments after the latter has killed Watson. Arthur "gazed without power of speech...at Welbeck; Then [he] fixed terrified eyes on the distorted features of the dead" (84). "Mervyn," says Welbeck, "you comprehend not this scene" (85). Welbeck then proceeds to tell a fairly complete history of his duplicity and manipulation. As Welbeck and he silently bury the body in Welbeck's cellar, Arthur's "eye roved fearfully from one object to another" (109), trying indeed to comprehend. When the covering falls from Watson's face, Arthur's "attention [is] arrested by a convulsive motion of [Watson's] eyelids. This motion increase[s], till at length the eyes opened, and a glance, languid but wild, [is] thrown around" (110). Much later, "something" in Ascha Fielding's eyes reveals the fact that she is Jewish, and Louis Harap, in The Image of the Jew in American Literature, describes as "unfortunate" Brown's "acceptance of popular beliefs [in] his use of the surviving medieval notion of the special quality of 'Jewish eyes'" (43). Ascha's eyes are not merely an embarrassing instance of Brown's cultural backwardness; in addition to the

witnessing neighbors, Watson's synoptic corpse, and the repeated instances of objects folded and unfolded to reveal their content, Ascha's eyes contribute to the novel's emphatic tropes of vision, supervision, and disclosure.

Consider how Arthur meets Stevens' question of how to explain the opinion his former neighbors hold of him:

It was not me whom they hated and despised.  
It was the phantom that passed under my name,  
which existed only in their imagination...They  
examined what was exposed to their view:  
they grasped at what was within their reach.

(340-341)

Imagery of sight, vision, or eyes occurs frequently in Arthur Mervyn, and the passage above presents a combination of visual information and reputation that results in an exercise of public, communal censure; reputation has offered a way for his neighbors to "see" Arthur. Arthur goes on to offer convoluted praise for his detractors, claiming that their revulsion at the spectacle of vice they thought he presented only confirms them in their "virtue." What was "exposed to their view" was the material of erroneous conclusions, and, as Arthur declares, "[m]en must judge from what they see; they must build their conclusions on their knowledge" (340). Warner explains the trope of vision thus: "[T]he sense of sight is not necessarily more appropriate to the public world than any other sense is; yet the optic and

spatializing metaphor of supervision became...the dominant way of conceptualizing the public" (52). The public is made aware of information through acts of disclosure. Disclosure gives information a temporary fixity that allows for public evaluation, or supervision.

Arthur is a fictional ground mapped from at least three angles. We meet him first as a figure in Dr. Stevens' eyes, as a portrait, then through the communal report of his neighbors, as a character in a story, and finally through his own record of his experiences, when he writes them down. Since so many examples from the novel illustrate the point that Arthur sees, concludes, and acts precipitately solely on visual information, one way to amplify a discussion of visual information's power to direct and influence its reception is to examine another representational art, the wholly visual gesture, of the period: portraiture and genre painting.

In contrast to portraiture of the Colonial period, which relied on a collection of images surrounding the sitter to communicate information about the subject's character, social standing, or wealth, Federalist period portraits strove to be both likenesses of the paying client and the embodiment of abstract cultural values. America's anxious struggle to establish an identity distinct from Britain in the post-Revolutionary years meant a slow organic change from identification through individual material

wealth to communally achieved and protected civic virtue, "a dedication to certain ideas, a holy conformity to virtuous goals and behavior, a collective will," as Neil Harris has described it.<sup>57</sup> Paintings became no longer private singular possessions intended to announce information about their subjects, but public statements of the culture, as well. Dorinda Evans, in her essay "Survival and Transformation: The Colonial Portrait in the Federal Era," identifies several ways in which Federal portraiture differed from the Colonial, of which the most pertinent to this discussion is "idealization of the sitter's character" (124). With this "idealization," as Fliegelman might agree, "[m]imetic pictorialism gives way to psychological representation" (76), for the sitter becomes not only a physiognomy to be copied, but an idealized representation, a ground upon which to illustrate culturally universal "truth." Federalist portraiture thus performs its own version of Warner's negativity principle by dissolving the unique individual into a larger thematic object. Such a proposition makes the portrait innovatively political: which "truths" are to be represented? And how should the perceiver interpret them? These are precisely Arthur Mervyn's questions. In the oratorical gesture, Fliegelman explains, "[at the moment the

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<sup>57</sup> Neil Harris, "The Making of an American Culture: 1750-1800," American Art: 1750-1800 Towards Independence (Yale University Art Gallery: Little, Brown, 1976) 29.

speaker wishes to project a particular emotion, he must not paint it but become a portrait of it" (31). If the visual portrait--living orator or painted likeness--makes the individual the embodiment of the universal, with its concomitant gesture toward influencing behavior, then, as Arthur Mervyn's Preface argues, the printed "portrait" may do the same.

The canonical painter of this period whose work best expresses the development from strictly pictorial reproduction to interpreted representation in portraiture is Gilbert Stuart. Evans compares Stuart's "Lansdowne" portrait of George Washington (1796) and Charles Willson Peale's William Pitt (1768). She notes that both portraits employ classical iconology in the setting and the subject's pose, but that the difference between the two is the "personification of abstract ideas" (130) offered by Stuart's George Washington. What are those abstract ideas? And, more specifically, how does each portrait communicate those ideas through the authoritative gesture of leading the viewer's eye? The Peale portrait uses classical images; standing next to a pedestal holding a wreath, a flame, and the images of revered predecessors, Pitt wears the toga of a Roman orator. He motions commandingly toward a figure of Liberty in the left background, and the combination of these images evokes the ideals of tradition, loyalty, and virtue. The portrait leads the eye through an upward and back

ziggurat, from the pedestal in the foreground, through Pitt's direct gaze, and up into the background toward a singular figure. The lighting in William Pitt emphasizes the head and the areas around Liberty's face. Stuart's George Washington energetically lights the head also, and the table leg and column at the left are classical motifs, but Washington is wearing contemporary dress. His gaze is focussed in the distance, not toward the viewer, an effect that connects him to the world outside the frame of the portrait. His orator's hand, also strongly lit and white, gestures not toward a single symbolic object in the painting, but, hovering over quill, inkstand, and book, toward us. With a finger pointing toward the figure of Liberty, Pitt gestures back and seems to be saying, "Look at this"; with an open hand toward us, Washington gesture out and seems to be saying, "Look at you."

The deliberate, active inclusion of the viewer in the interpretation of a painted scene was certainly not a startling American innovation. Indeed, as Neil Harris points out, not much in American arts was truly innovative until early in the nineteenth century.<sup>58</sup> Two examples of how an American painting can attempt to affect its viewer, however, are the trompe l'oeil "deceptions" by Charles Willson Peale

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<sup>58</sup> Harris 31. See also James Thomas Flexner, History of American Painting: The Light of Distant Skies 1760-1835 3 vols. (1954; New York: Dover, 1969) 2: 32-48.

and his son Rembrandt. Charles Peale's Staircase Group (1795) depicts his sons Raphaele and Titian (yes, Peale named his sons after artists), ascending a shadowy stair and looking curiously toward an audience at the foot. Two bits of information deserve inclusion in any discussion of this painting. First, when it was exhibited in America's first art academy, the Columbianum of 1795, Peale displayed it with a real wooden stair at the base of the painting, enhancing and emphasizing the intended deception. Second, when President Washington visited Peale's Philadelphia museum, he "greeted Peale's sons when he caught sight of the picture." " There is a bit of "urban legend" about this Washington anecdote, for it seems to demonstrate that not even the revered, visionary "father of the country" is immune to the influence of the visual. Rembrandt Peale's A Deception (1802) is a meticulous representation of printed and written matter--bills, invitations, tickets, all tucked helter-skelter beneath restraining bands--whose self-revealing title creates a logical circularity. The title denies what the object seeks to affirm, yet the drawing is no less effective or affective for having announced itself a fraud.

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Hughes, American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America (New York: Knopf, 1997) 103.



The most dramatic example of visual art demanding the imaginative participation of its beholder is Peale's famous "moving pictures," which first appeared in his Philadelphia museum in 1785. In this exhibit, a transparent painted screen was illuminated from behind and other screens sequentially lowered behind or in front of the first to create the illusion of motion in scenes of city streets, or landscapes, or even naval battles. Peale included music and sound effects. He called the display "Perspective Views with Changeable Effects; or, Nature Delineated and in Motion," another title that reveals its object's affective purpose. A perspective or view is arrived at, or defined, from a singular point which can be differentiated from all other points; for example, the view from the top of a hill is not the view from or the bottom or from halfway. A view is limited and subjective, and identifying a point of view of necessity identifies and locates the viewer. Just as the skilled orator's performance of emotion was intended to create the corresponding emotion in his hearers, so with the illusion of "you are here," did Peale's "deceptions" and "moving pictures" intentionally manipulate their viewers' physical sense of presence.

"Genre" painting, as Hermann Warner Williams, Jr. defines it in Mirror to the American Past, is an artist's depiction of ordinary people doing ordinary things, the theme of which is "not the incident, but the human

condition."<sup>60</sup> "Genre" defined in this way peremptorily sets aside historical narrative, marine, landscape, and portrait painting to isolate a separate category of visual art in which everyday scenes could be employed to state cultural ideas. Peale's Staircase Group, for example, would qualify as genre painting. Both Fliegelman (Declaring Independence, (143-137) and Cathy Davidson, writing in Revolution and the Word (90), offer exegeses of what might be considered a subgroup of genre, the novel frontispiece, when they interpret the frontispiece to William Hill Brown's 1789 The Power of Sympathy. Fliegelman discusses the phenomenon of "absorption," an "artful theatricality in which acts of attention within the paintings...destroy the viewer's self-conscious distance and [bring] the viewer into the painting itself" (84). Like Peale's "moving pictures," genre painting asks its viewer to take a role by directing attention, leading the eye, and creating curiosity: what are you looking at and why? One example of genre painting, again from Charles Willson Peale, will illustrate.

Peale's The Artist in His Museum (1822), is both a self portrait and an example of genre<sup>61</sup>. The artist in his role of curator is drawn full-length, standing slightly to the

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<sup>60</sup> Hermann Warner Williams, Jr., Mirror to the American Past: A Survey of American Genre Painting 1750-1900. (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1973) 75.

<sup>61</sup> For a discussion of Peale and Brown as Philadelphia contemporaries, see Silverman 445-469.

right of the center of the frame. His pose is classically oratorical, but the upraised right hand is not pointing to some static iconic or allegorical figure, as in the artist's earlier William Pitt. This arm is in motion, lifting an ornate curtain to reveal a long corridor lined with display cases and framed pictures. His left hand is opened toward us, his gaze direct and genially commanding as he invites, almost challenges, us deeper into the museum, deeper into the picture. In place of other portraits' classical busts or pedestals, the foreground holds a turkey, and, marvellously, a mastodon bone. There are mysteries here that immediately engage the viewer's attention: what is in those cases? what would be revealed if we could push past the figure and see what his figure and the curtain obscure? The sight would be rewarding, as the figures deep in the background promise. A man looks attentively at one of the display cases, another talks with a young boy. A woman in Quaker dress exclaims over the sight of the "something" we cannot see. And there is plenty to see; each of the display cases offers another scene to be witnessed, each of the portraits within this portrait another likeness to be read. We have been "absorbed," to use Fleigleman's term, into relationship with the picture, for the figures behind Peale--generic and inclusive man, woman, child--commutatively inscribe the viewer into the vertical plane immediately in front of

him.<sup>62</sup> They are looking, we are looking; the light that falls on them further back in the hall also falls just on the tip of Peale's shoe and, continuing outward, on us. We are located and identified, assigned a perspective, by our exclusion from the visual experience and knowledge that those figures possess, but Peale the preceptor is lifting the curtain that separates us.

The Artist in His Museum appeared twelve years after Charles Brockden Brown's death, yet the analogy exists between the figure of the artist in the painting and the voice of Arthur Mervyn's Preface. Arthur Mervyn offers a "museum" of visual scenes, and the bond between readers and novel is to some extent reinforced by a deliberately created curiosity quite similar to that created by viewing the painting. Far beyond the tantalizing thematic mystery of Arthur's "true" character, many individual passages in the novel hint at plot threads that could lead to sequels. Brown may have seeded the published novel with unanswered questions with the express intent of taking up the narrative again at some future time. For example, the most intriguing visual scene in Arthur Mervyn contains nothing visual at all. Arthur tells Stevens about how he escaped from

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<sup>62</sup> Laura Rigal, "Peale's Mammoth," American Iconology: New Approaches to Nineteenth Century Art and Literature, ed. David C. Miller (Yale UP, 1993) offers an interpretation of the perceiving viewer of The Artist in His Museum as "simultaneously a male and female reader of Nature's Book" (37).

Welbeck's house at the height of the plague by hiding in the attic, and he pauses dramatically just before he reveals what he saw there:

I might deceive you by asserting that nothing remarkable occurred, but this would be false, and every sacrifice is trivial which is made upon the altar of sincerity. Besides, the time may come when no inconvenience will arise from minute descriptions of the objects which I now saw and of the reasonings and inferences which they suggested to my understanding. At present, it appears to be my duty to pass over them in silence, but... the interval, though short, and the scrutiny, though hasty, furnished matter which my curiosity devoured with unspeakable eagerness, and from which consequences may hereafter flow, deciding on my peace and my life. (213)

There is nothing in the text that explains what Arthur sees, and that gap provides an enticing mystery. Brown has "enchain[ed our] attention" (Rhapsodist 136) with a portrait he does not describe.

An appropriately striking instance of Brown incorporating a visual "genre" scene in his work is the story of Baxter the night watchman. Brown first created the story in "The Man At Home," a series published in The Weekly

Magazine between February 3 and April 28, 1798.<sup>63</sup> In Numbers IV and V of "The Man At Home," a reclusive, unnamed narrator tells the story of a local porter, Baxter, who witnesses a gruesome midnight burial in the garden of a house next door. Brown copied the story, with only very minor changes, into Chapter VII of Ormond, or The Secret Witness (1799). In this discussion, I will refer to the relevant passages as they appear in Ormond.

Like Arthur Mervyn, Ormond takes place during the yellow fever plague in Philadelphia of 1793. Baxter's story begins with an announcement and a visual image:

Human life abounds with mysterious appearances. A man, perched on a fence, at midnight, mute and motionless, and gazing at a dark and dreary dwelling, was an object calculated to arouse curiosity. When the muscular form, and rugged visage, scarred and furrowed into something like ferocity, were added; when the nature of the calamity, by which the city was dispeopled, was considered, the motives to plunder, and the insecurity of property, arising from new wants on the poor, and the flight or disease of the rich, were attended to, an observer would be apt to admit fearful conjectures (67).

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<sup>63</sup> Reprinted in The Rhapsodist 27-98.

What "fearful conjectures" is that man making, and what are we to "conjecture" about him? The image offers a rich conjunction between the idea of the "individual" and of the larger communal body to which he belongs.

Because of city-wide panic at the height of the epidemic, "[t]he solicitude of the guardians of the city was exerted . . . not only in opposing the progress of the disease, and furnishing provisions to the destitute, but in the preservation of property" (64-65). Baxter, a porter by trade before the emergency, has been enlisted in civic service as a night watchman. His wife remarks that their neighbors, a French man named Monroe and his daughter, have not been seen in recent days. As a private porter, Baxter had "a notion that Frenchmen were exempt from this disease" and "too much regard for his own safety, and too little for that of a frog-eating Frenchman" (64) to entertain any real concern for their well-being.<sup>64</sup> Coming home at midnight from his watch one night, however, he passes his neighbor's home and "put his eye to the key-hole . . . listened and imagined that he heard the aspirations of grief, . . . [a sound which] had an electrical effect upon his feelings" (65). Baxter is moved to compassion by this event, but he

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<sup>64</sup> Belief in a French person's immunity to yellow fever was commonplace in Philadelphia at the time. See Sydney J. Krause, "Historical Notes" to Ormond 399-405; Shirley Samuels, "Plague and Politics in 1793--Arthur Mervyn," Criticism 1985 Summer 27:3, 225-246.

decides to tell his superiors, the "set of men, self-appointed to the generous office" (65) before he acts. Later that night, he sees a flickering light coming from the house next door. Baxter is still uncertain about what he should do--he does not want to be mistaken for an intruder himself--but he posts himself at the rear of Monroe's house, "raising his head above the fence, at a point directly opposite the door, [and waiting] with considerable impatience for some token or signal, by which he might be directed in his choice of measures" (67).

The flickering light is Miss Monroe's candle, and the girl is engaged in burying the body of her father. Brown gives the scene every possible drop of conventional Gothic horror--the sheet-draped corpse, the guttering candlelight that falls on a shallow-dug hole in the ground, Baxter's blood that "ran cold at this spectacle" (69). There is just a bit of macabre humor here, too. Just as Miss Monroe, "her eyes scarcely open and every feature set to the genuine expression of sorrow" (69) is about to inter her father, the sheet covering his face falls away, and Baxter (his station at the fence precarious to begin with) jumps in fright. The noise draws Miss Monroe's attention, she screams, and Baxter runs away.

The most significant part of this vignette is Baxter's later reaction. He had erroneously believed the idea that "Frenchmen were not susceptible of this contagion, . . .but



now [he] regarded it as having been fully confuted" (70). Convinced that "through his own inadvertency, he had rushed . . . into the jaws of the pest" (70), Baxter sickens and dies. "His senses [that night] had not been assailed by any noisome effluvia," the story's narrator reassures us, but that is what Baxter believes. The story he tells himself and, more importantly, the change in what he believes, are sufficient to precipitate his own death. "His case," we are told succinctly at the close of the chapter,

may be quoted as an example of the force of imagination. He had probably already received, through the medium of the air, or by contact of which he was not conscious, the seeds of this disease. They might perhaps have lain dormant, had not this panic occurred to endow them with activity (71).

The image of the unfortunate Baxter, gaping over a fence at a scene that generates his own disaster, is, like the scene of Dr. Stevens at the beginning of Arthur Mervyn, a clear instance of Brown employing the force of the visual to explore a social and political point. Baxter's familiar world has been gravely disordered on several levels by the epidemic. He had been a soldier, accustomed to scenes of death only when they were accompanied "in the ancient manner, with halberts and tents" (68). He has left his private employment to become a public servant, subordinate

to "guardians of the public welfare, . . . [a group] distributed into those who counselled and those who executed" (65). He hesitates over what to do for the Monroes and even whether he should do anything. This new setting and Baxter's new role as public caretaker demonstrate what Elizabeth Johns in her American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life calls post-Revolutionary society's anxiety over "the rise to power of a heterogeneous and politically empowered citizenry" (8), a body politic that included new and unfamiliar social groups. Genre painting, Johns explains, "drew on generalizations about social groups that developed during periods of intense change" (7) and reflected the common citizen's anxiety over the disarray of traditional hierarchical structures of authority. As Johns puts it, after the Revolution the citizen discovered that

the social, moral, and religious practices that had unified their leadership in prerevolutionary society, and that they had assumed would sustain them in the new nation, would not prevail. Moreover, . . . the process of republican decision-making that depended on shared assumptions and deference to the wise was severely compromised. The alarm of these citizens was exacerbated by the increasing visibility of European visitors (8).

Baxter's story incorporates all these discoveries, including an economic dimension of protecting private property. Genre painting "constructed aspects of the scene at hand and offered newly arrived patrons--not quite elite but not lower class either--the possibility of sorting out their place in it" (Johns 3). Baxter's experience in the back yard is a visual set piece, a genre painting in prose; the significance of his story springs from the intersection of private concerns and perceived civic demands. One of those in-between citizens (and one of Ormond' multiple "secret witnesses" as well), Baxter peeking over the fence is also an apt metaphor for Brown's reader. The act of reading and interpreting visual information is an exercise, just as Brown the "Rhapsodist" would hope, in the "force of the imagination" (71). Readers must beware what seeds may lie dormant.

Seeing an event (actual or painted) and reading an account of it are two different visual operations. Yet since the seen and the read both require a perceiving eye in order to exist, a consensual transaction takes place. Both experiences can assert authority over their perceivers and inscribe authority in their perceivers. Before wandering off and becoming invisible in that forest of the falling trees, however, it is helpful to consider three particularly visual "portraits" Brown does provide in Arthur Mervyn. These visual portraits, paradoxically, establish Arthur's

ultimate self-confirmation through writing. There are at least three significantly visual scenes that Arthur witnesses in the Second Part that demonstrate his acquisition of empowering rational reflection: meeting Ascha (Ch. 11 and 12), discovering Clemenza (Ch. 12), and approaching the household of Watson's widow (Ch. 17). The first two illustrate the immediacy of visual information and Arthur's immediate reactions to it. The third, which appears after Arthur has taken over the writing of his own story, demonstrates how he has gained authority over his imagining self as a result of his experiences with the writing women.

In Chapter 11, Second Part, Arthur's search for Clemenza brings him to Mrs. Villars' brothel, where in characteristic fashion he walks right into the parlor and examines the surroundings while waiting to meet the proprietor. Brown gives a detailed description of the room, a messy place which contains, among other carefully described objects, "novels and plays, some on their edges, some on their backs, gaping open by the scorching of their covers; rent; blurred; stained; blotted; dog-eared" (315). If, according to a metaphor Arthur himself draws between women and books--"There is no book in which I read with more pleasure, than the face of woman" (403)--women are synonymous with text, then Mrs. Villars' library is a fit representation of her morally corrupt household. Arthur goes upstairs, without permission, and opens a door to see "[t]wo

females, arrayed with voluptuous negligence, in a manner adapted to the utmost seclusion, and seated in a careless attitude, on a sofa" (318). One is Mrs. Villars, the other unidentified beyond Arthur's characteristically spontaneous conclusion that "in [her] countenance and carriage there are tokens of virtue" (320).

In Chapter 12, Arthur continues his unauthorized search of the Villars establishment, and he finds Clemenza at last, weeping over her dying child:

The door was ajar...Sitting on a low chair by the fire, I beheld a female figure, dressed in a negligent, but not indecent manner. Her face in the posture in which she sat was only half seen. Its hues were sickly and pale, and in mournful unison with a feeble and emaciated form. Her eyes were fixed upon a babe, that lay stretched upon a pillow at her feet... The features of Clemenza were easily recognized, though no contrast could be greater, in habit and shape, than that which her present bore to her former appearance...Still, however, there was somewhat fitted to awaken the tenderest emotions. There were tokens of inconsolable distress. (324)

This Pieta in a whorehouse is an affecting portrait of virtue, just as the Preface promised. The younger woman from Chapter 12, Ascha Fielding, arrives, "her looks

[betraying] the deepest consternation and anxiety, . . . She shuddered at this spectacle but was silent" (327). Arthur pleads for assistance on Clemenza's behalf, and the restraint this woman shows in response to his request is the first baffle he encounters in his scattershot, if energetic, career we have witnessed so far. "I chuse the obvious path, and pursue it with headlong expedition" (323), Arthur has said immediately before this scene; Ascha begins at once to moderate that "headlong expedition" when she refuses even to speak to Arthur as they stand together in Clemenza's room. Instead, she gives him "a card...[bearing her] name and place of abode" (328), symbolic and textual confirmation of her identity and "perspective." For the first time, Arthur has been unable to create a visual/aural impression that affects his viewer. In the following chapters, Arthur will witness Welbeck's death, refute his neighbors' calumny, and devise a plan, through complete disclosure, to repair whatever damage he may have inflicted on others as a result of his earlier secrecy.

## V

Michael Warner sees Arthur as "[invoking] an ideal of untrammelled knowledge exemplified in scenes of writing...And if the oral conditions of his narrative suggest the frustration of his desire for ...expansive and atemporal knowledge, he will find what he seeks in the fixed publicity of writing" (165). The key word in that sentence is "fixed." In Chapter 16 of the Second Part, Arthur assumes direct narration of the novel, and one level of reportage disappears as Arthur moves from being a reported being in Stevens' story to assuming the direct self-presentation of writing his own. When, in the first paragraph of Chapter 16 Arthur can write, "What remains of my story can be dispatched in a trice. I have just now some vacant hours, which might possibly be more usefully employed, but not in an easier manner or more pleasant" (354), his tone of casual assurance indicates at last a fixed point of self-reference, a perspective. Occupying those "vacant hours" with the authorship of his own text, Arthur reveals a measure of control over the telling of his story and the circulation of his "self." He has translated himself from immediate visual performance through the negativity of fictionalizing--creating a writing "voice"--to proclaim an authority of self through the objective confirmation of text. Warner is correct in pegging this transformation to Welbeck's death and the resultant freedom from the old man's compulsion to

secrecy, but the point needs to be made that women, most notably Ascha, are responsible for this significant change in Arthur after Welbeck dies.<sup>65</sup> The benefits of full disclosure, and the further confirmation of virtue through written disclosure, are the result of Arthur's encounters with women.

Chapter 16, in which Arthur takes over his own narration, also includes a gathering of all the "writing women" in the novel. Warner has identified interruptions in the chronological line of the story, both for Arthur and for the novel's readers, as representing the authority of tempered, literate knowledge over impulsive, unlettered ignorance.<sup>66</sup> The women of Chapter 16 offer emphatic reminders of the necessity for calm reflection, and each woman bears some token that self-management is best acquired through written text.

Arthur's newfound resolution to offer only "an honest front and a straight story" (349) takes him to Mrs. Wentworth, the woman whom his earlier reticence (at Welbeck's command) had deceived. Arthur's strategy of full

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<sup>65</sup> Grabo reads Arthur Mervyn Second Part as a "subtle feminization and simultaneous liberation from his own past, . . . [turning] on his relationships with women" (116-117).

<sup>66</sup> Michael Warner has made these observations in Chapter 5 of The Letters of the Republic, but his remarks concentrate on the quality of suspension according to the novel's narrative structure, not the relationships between characters as I do here.



disclosure is successful at least as a visual performance for "the effects were visible in her demeanor which [he] expected from it...Her suspicions and angry watchfulness was quickly exchanged for downcast looks" (356-357). She is not fully convinced, however, and after Arthur makes the request that Mrs. Wentworth provide Clemenza asylum, she demands "other proofs beside an innocent brow and a voluble tongue" (363). The "other proof" is Arthur's written narration, as we later discover when Arthur tells an inquiring Eliza, "[Mrs. Wentworth] has put me upon a strange task...she wants a written narrative...not as if it were designed for her perusal, but for those who have no previous knowledge of her or of me" (412). Clearly, this is the knowledge through "fixed publicity" Warner claims for Arthur. While Arthur is with Mrs. Wentworth, Ascha arrives, and feeling "[c]ertain tremors...which seemed to possess a mystical relation" (363) to her, Arthur shyly hands Ascha the card she had given him earlier. She agrees to meet him later that evening. In deferring their meeting, Ascha once again baffles Arthur's impetuosity, virtuous though he may protest it to be. She continues to teach him to wait. Arthur finds "[t]he interval...tedious" (364), and he goes with Mrs. Stevens to visit Miss Carlton. Mrs. Stevens has been the silent auditor of Arthur's verbal defense of his character, remember, and Dr. Stevens has consistently relied on her to help him interpret what he has heard and seen (251). Miss

Carlton is the sister of another Stevens friend, Francis Carlton, imprisoned for debt (conveniently, in the cell next to Welbeck). Miss Carlton has assisted her brother and is now working toward his release by working as a scribe, writing documents that "[bind] fast the bargains which others made" (261), and she likes it. "The pen was irksome and toilsome at first, but use has made it easy, and fat more eligible than the needle, which was formerly my only tool," she has told Stevens. When, during the visit, Arthur looks for a speedy way to talk Francis Carlton's creditor into releasing him, Miss Carlton checks him by answering that the creditor is motivated by vengeance, not humility or logic. She believes this will to "inflict misery" is "the likeness of almost every second man we meet," and Arthur calls her view an "odious portrait" (366). But it is a portrait drawn from "looking further than the surface of things," as she tells Arthur, and one "not lightly taken up" (366). Again, a woman with text literally in hand is teaching Arthur the importance of thinking things through. Finally, Arthur meets Ascha in her house, where she has been talking on "political topics" (366) with several friends. With only "newspaper knowledge" (366) of such things, Arthur is embarrassed and off balance. He makes his plea for Clemenza to her, and Ascha meets his request with an argument for prudence that repeats the lesson of virtue assured only through disclosure: "Is it worthwhile to be a

dissembler and impostor? And will not such conduct [taking Clemenza into her household] incur more dangerous surmises and suspicions, than from acting openly and directly?" (368). Rebuffed, the Arthur who only a few days ago had asserted, "Our good purposes must hurry to performance, whether our knowledge be greater or less" (323) now shows the beginnings of a new ability to reflect as he grudgingly agrees to wait because "the determination to be wise should not be hasty" (369).

Arthur goes to Baltimore to return Watson's money to his family, and two events there provide examples of Arthur's growing ability to think before he acts. Arthur Mervyn is not without its attempts at humor, and the raucous coach ride Arthur endures on his way to Baltimore is clearly funny. His companions in the coach are a Frenchman, an ape, and two black women. The monkey chatters, the Frenchman shouts at the ape, and the women babble about it all. Arthur reports that he gazed

at the faces of my four (Brown's emphasis) companions, and endeavored to discern the differences and samenesses between them... I compared them together, and examined them apart. I looked at them in a thousand different points of view, and pursued, untired and unsatiated, those trains of reflection which began at each change of tone, feature, and attitude.

(307)

This reflecting marks the development for Arthur of the ability to imagine in comprehensive yet interior and controlled way. In place of acting precipitately on visual information, Arthur now finds "an uncommon gratification in comparing realities...with the picture which [his] wayward fancy had depicted" (371).

As Arthur plans his visit with Mrs. Watson, he tells himself that he must consider all the possible ramifications of his simply appearing, unexpected, bearing news of Watson's death and the dead man's money. With Arthur's arrival in Baltimore, Brown provides another strongly visual scene that confirms Arthur's developing powers of circumspection. Here is the Watson kitchen as Arthur sees it through a window:

I approached it, and, looking through, beheld a plain but neat apartment, in which parlour, kitchen and nursery seemed to be united. A fire burnt cheerfully in the chimney, over which was a teakettle. On the hearth sat a smiling and cheerful cherub of a boy, tossing something to a black girl who sat opposite... Near, in a rocking chair, with a sleeping babe in her lap, sat a female figure in plain but neat and becoming attire. Her posture permitted half her face to be seen, and saved

me from any danger of being observed...

This spectacle exercised a strange power over my feelings. (372)

This description closely resembles Arthur's discovery of Clemenza. In tone, detail, and reaction, it could also be the voice of Dr. Stevens as we heard it in the beginning of the novel. When Arthur does enter the room, he thinks briefly about simply leaving the banknotes and departing without giving any more information; that is, continuing his old habit of secrecy. But his new thoughtfulness prompts him to consider all the possible consequences of such an act, and for the first time he stops to ask himself, "Was it right to act in this clandestine and mysterious manner?" (373). The answer, as he is at last able to discover for himself, is "No."

In Chapter 22, Arthur reveals that the document he is writing is a combination of Stevens' composition and his own, begun at Mrs. Wentworth's request. The novel's plot complications seem resolved: Arthur is studying medicine with Dr. Stevens, Wortley's antagonism has been neutralized, Clemenza is at last safe with Mrs. Wentworth. Eliza Hadwin, still residing with the Curlings, waits for Arthur to retrieve her from those rural scenes and marry her. Arthur does not marry her, however, and early critics of the novel, including Percy Shelley, condemned it for failing to provide

such a conventional happy ending. <sup>67</sup> Eliza fails as a marriage candidate for Arthur because she is not able to enter the imaginative realm of writing and text that Ascha offers. "Your pen cannot teach me like your tongue," Eliza complains to him in an awkward letter; "I have no spirit to think upon the words and paper before me" (400). There is irony here in Brown's making her written letter the vehicle of this non-lettered girl's self-revelation. Eliza does show some signs of developing further after Ascha takes the farm girl into her home and polite urban circle, but the development does not go far enough. Eliza does not have the imagination for the literate, urban life Arthur has chosen. Since, according to Warner, the most successful and useful citizens are those who can perform the depersonalized and therefore universalizing acts of writing, reading, and reflection, the ability to imagine is essential for healthy civic participation. Eliza cannot imagine. Eliza cannot erase the "self" through the personally negating phenomenon of print, and so the farm girl must be left behind in Arthur's evolution toward lettered virtue.

Arthur has made a measured progression from unlettered ignorance to literate knowledge. When Arthur left his father's farm, he had "gotten the whole of [his books] by

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<sup>67</sup> Paul Witherington, "Charles Brockden Brown: A Bibliographic Essay" Early American Literature 9 (1974): 172-173.

rote" (25) and considered the physical objects themselves to be therefore useless. The boy who carried others' books around in his head develops into the man who writes his own. A third advance in Arthur's evolution--from memorized books through visual performance to written self-authorization--is the discovery of the ability to imagine. From writing down his history Arthur must learn to imagine his future, and Ascha Fielding is the figure who stimulates that advance in him. It is the imagination, or, to put it more precisely, the ability to create the imaginary, that makes a reliable interior self, and, by extension, virtuous republican identity in the public sphere possible. Ascha possesses the power of creating the imaginary, while Eliza does not. If we recognize the thematic ideas of visual/aural versus written/textual representation that Arthur Mervyn proposes to discuss, then the most beneficial "portrait," the one most effective in generating, replicating, and amplifying virtue, is the imagined one. Arthur may have learned to moderate his behavior through text, but his revolutions in search of confirmation of self are translated one layer further when he is able to "write" himself into imagined roles. Just as he has eclipsed the visually performing or reported self through discovering a written self, so that written self is eclipsed, slipped out of the apparent and into the represented, when Arthur learns to imagine.

When, mulling over marriage to the newly-orphaned Eliza, Arthur describes the wife he wants (292), he is actually describing Ascha. This is an early instance of his ability to imagine. Much later, as events unfold and Arthur begins his association with the actual embodiment of his ideal, all his thinking and hard-learned skill at careful contemplation do not help him to see that his imagined does in fact exist. He tells Ascha, "The very counterpart of you (Brown's emphasis) I want...that rare and precious creature whom I shall love must be your resemblance" (408). Recognizing Ascha for exactly what she is is the last exercise in Arthur's "reading" lessons; the ability to cast himself into an imaginary role that ultimately becomes reality is essential to completing Arthur's epistemological adolescence and establishing a more complete selfhood. Dr. Stevens provides that opportunity.

Arthur cannot think of the actual Ascha as his wife until Dr. Stevens leads him into an imagined narrative that paradoxically confirms reality. In Chapter 24, Stevens and Arthur discuss Ascha. Stevens' language here is a clue to understanding the fictive, imaginative dimension of the exchange, for the physician who has been cautious, even dry, in his descriptions suddenly becomes practically rhapsodic in his ironic denigration of the lady. The physician is teasing an Arthur who still thinks too literally to get the joke. If "the ability to recognize irony is one of the



surest tests of intelligence and sophistication,"<sup>68</sup> then Stevens's ironic tone is here prodding Arthur's imagination as a final test of his development. Stevens calls Ascha "unsightly as a night-hag (Brown's emphasis), tawney as a moor, the eye of a gypsey [sic],...contemptibly diminutive...less luxuriance than a charred log" (432). Arthur answers each sally with clear arguments in favor of the conclusion he is as yet unable to reach. He still does not understand Stevens' intent. Stevens pushes his sarcasm even further when he taunts his protege as "loathsome is your person, an idiot [sic] in your understanding, a villain in your morals..." (433). When Arthur continues obtuse ("What mean you by an hint of this kind?" (433) he asks), Stevens abandons the jest and takes the more challenging tack of suggesting a story to Arthur. From verbal irony, Stevens shifts to forcing Arthur's imagination directly:

You have imaged no delight beyond that of enjoying her society as you now do...How quickly would this tranquility vanish... if a rival should enter the scene and be entertained with preference; then would the seal be removed, the spell be broken, and you would awaken to terror and to anguish. (434)

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<sup>68</sup> C. Hugh Holman, "Irony," A Handbook to Literature, 4th ed. 1980.

That is precisely what happens. To balance off his conscious imaginings, Arthur must undergo a harrowing nightmare experience, in which he encounters the one door in the novel he cannot open and the threatening figure of Ascha's first husband, who strikes the dream Arthur a fatal blow.<sup>69</sup> The crisis of a fully formed identity works itself out in Arthur's dream, and Arthur awakens, "perfect and entire. Some miracle had made me whole" (438). Shirley Samuels' remarks on the dream, although the focus of her discussion of Arthur Mervyn is primarily on the plague and (re)construction of the family, parallel my own reading; Arthur "counter[s] that dream-knife [and] wields his pen . . . Arthur is at last speaking in his 'own' voice, which may be taken as a sign that he has at last achieved control over his destiny as he enters the institutions of marriage and family" (42). The whole Arthur is now able to act according to a whole will. Consciously imagining, Arthur tells himself a fantastic story of Ascha and another male acquaintance, rushes to where they are, declares his love, and the compact between Arthur and Ascha is set. Through mastery of his imagination, Arthur makes his imagined goal a reality.

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<sup>69</sup> Emory Elliott, Revolutionary Writers: Literature and Authority in the New Republic 1725-1810 (New York: Oxford UP, 1986) reads Arthur's dream as "a kind of spiritual crisis, . . . his Oedipal dream" (263); Christophersen also sees it as "oedipal vengeance," (102); Grabo sees "a sense of infamy and guilt" (121). Elliott also remarks the Freudian suggestiveness of that locked door (263).

Anticipating his marriage, Arthur establishes an even stronger bond with Ascha by rolling over her doubts with his storytelling skills. She expresses fears about marrying him because of past disappointments and Arthur's report of his dream. "I, at last, succeeded...in restoring her serenity and beguiling her fears by dwelling on our future happiness" (445), he declares, composing "the humble outline of a scene" (446) complete with servants and the strong hint of the creation of a family. Creating an imaginary of the future in this way undercuts the sincerity of Arthur's final, curious apostrophe to his pen--"Lie there, snug in thy leathern case...till Mervyn has been made the happiest of men" (446). That pen, like so many other objects in this novel, is wrapped up, and we are left with a strong suspicion that its owner will sometime soon be unwrapping it to write again, for Arthur's self is inextricably wrapped up in the confirmation that only disclosure--unfolded--made through the mediation of writing can provide.

Reading Arthur Mervyn as a series of adventures leading to the attainment and circulation of civic virtue, as the Preface wills we should, those adventures culminate in Arthur's espousal of the principles of disclosure, and, most emphatically, disclosure through the medium of text. With the simultaneous development of a republican political system and a print culture in the late eighteenth century, conclusions drawn in the immediacy of the seen event are

moderated by the dompting experience of reading. Reading establishes a mediating, negotiating space and transforms the visual from immediate and possibly dangerous to reflective and possibly beneficial. What Michael Warner calls Arthur's "dynamism" is disclosure in the form of storytelling, and the organizing principle for that dynamism is the act of writing. Writing may be organizing, but it is not static; what is written is read, and new dynamic events become possible, new opportunities for choice and action appear. When Arthur left his family's Chester County farm for the big city, he carried the conventional waif's bundle of clothes tied to a stick. But there was something more in that bundle: a "portrait of a young man...drawn by his own hand...wrapt in paper [on] which a few ... stanzas were inscribed in [his] own hand and with [his] utmost elegance of penmanship" (29-30). Arthur's unusual baggage--painted image wrapped in written text--is an appropriate image for the novel. We unwrap the portrait of Arthur Mervyn, Brown's "example[s] of disinterestedness and intrepidity," and such a figure, as the Preface has predicted, becomes an effective and influential "portrait" of virtue in action.

### CHAPTER III

#### "A most precious relique": Mothers and Ormond

##### I

Charles Brockden Brown completed four novels in which the main character, or one of the main characters, is female: Wieland (1798), Ormond, or, the Secret Witness (1799), Clara Howard (1801), and Jane Talbot (1801). These women--Clara Wieland, Constantia Dudley, Clara Howard, and Jane Talbot, respectively--are elements in female-female bonds that incorporate various images of representation. By "representation" I mean instances of re-expressed experience, including written or verbal story and painted image. Where young men must work toward self-hood through mentor relationships and the acquisition and use of literacy, women already have a network of association that fosters self-definition within established roles. Brown's women are sisters, wives, or widows even before their stories begin. In relationships with family, friends, or even suitors, the act of reading or producing representations is already a way to make sense of and control their imagining, circulating selves as they move through their plots. When narrator Clara Wieland uses her diary or paints Carwin's picture as self-therapy through the horrors of her brother's madness, she attempts to bond with and re-discover a reliable self but fails. In Ormond, Constantia Dudley is not so much a writer as a written woman, since the entire body of the novel is her friend

Sophia Courtland's report of Constantia's life. With Clara Howard and Jane Talbot, Brown shifts in genre from Gothic to sentimental and in structure from extended narrative (ostensibly framed as letter) to the straightforward epistolary novel. Common to all four novels in one dimension or another is a close and dynamic association of "woman" with representation and the act of representing. Brown's women may write themselves or write letters or be written about, but such acts of independent literacy paradoxically erase the individual because they exist only in terms of such literary conventions. They mark the dissolve of the singular, confirmed woman who is into a generalized palimpsest or template of woman who should be.

Presenting women in this way, Brown joins his contemporaries in the discussion of marriage, education, and identity. By the 1790's, with the immediate and material upheaval of the Revolution behind and the great uncertainty of defining a new culture ahead, Americans found themselves with the necessity and the space to work through new approaches to such social issues. As Jay Fliegelman has shown in Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority 1750 -- 1800, one social result of America's political rebellion against vertically established authority was a gradual disestablishment of the traditional hierarchy of the family, a reorganization of the "little commonwealth" in which the father stood as absolute

authority over all in his household. In the wake of new theories of childrearing and education, the family became a less rigid, more affectional unit. Wives gained a more independent identity, and parents advised instead of dictated to their children. In this period, the clear distinction between public and private, commercial and domestic, male and female "spheres" that segregated women out of the civic arena is present but not yet codified as the nineteenth century's "cult of true womanhood." With the patriarchal family loosened, a wider role for women in the new society remains problematic, and a space opens up for the redefinition of relationships between women. One gesture toward constructing a societal norm for women came from women themselves; as Nancy Cott has suggested, profound cultural changes led women to "[invent] a newly self-conscious and idealized concept of female friendship . . . [an] ideal [that] became a subject of their conversation, reading, reflection, and writing."<sup>70</sup> From a variety of perspectives historians like Nancy Cott, Linda Kerber, Mary Beth Norton, Marylynn Salmon, and others have explored specifically the history of women of the early Republic.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Nancy Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1977) 160.

<sup>71</sup> Linda Kerber, Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America (1980; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Mary Beth Norton, Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women (Harper Collins, 1980). Also, Karen A. Weyler

However the various analyses may define it--whether the challenges women faced at the end of the eighteenth century were opportunities or oppressions--the necessity of securing some kind of reliable social order focused close attention on women, marriage, and the family.

When Brown identified property and sex as the areas most productive for "moral painters" ("Walstein's History" 152), he was announcing their most logical intersection--the family--as his instructive ground. Many of Brown's characters are orphans in one way or another, and a damaged family structure (especially one in which the mother figure is ineffectual or missing altogether, as in Rowson's Charlotte Temple or Foster's The Coquette) creates space to tackle questions of generative authority in the production of successful citizens. One desire all Brown's orphans share is the wish to establish a family, a socially confirmed grid against which to define the self. What we worry about we write about, and, as Cathy Davidson's Revolution and the Word has shown, the fiction Americans read articulated an anxiety about how best to choose a mate and establish a family that could contribute to the progress of a new nation. In at least one of his novels, Brown tackled the same question. In Wieland, Pleyel jokes that "to

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has reviewed the just-published Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds, Private Property: Charles Brockden Brown's Gendered Economics of Virtue (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997) in Early American Literature 32:3 (1997) 272-274.



make the picture of a single family a model from which to sketch the condition of a nation [is] absurd" (30), but that is just what Brown does. He puts the responsibility for that "sketch" into the writing (and sketching) hands of Clara Wieland.

In Wieland, when Clara Wieland confronts Pleyel's incorrect assumptions about her virtue, she must respond not only to his announced condemnations ("Is not thy effrontery impenetrable, and thy heart thoroughly cankered? O most specious, and most profligate of women" (119)) but also to his written idealizations of her. Pleyel has literally written Clara as a pattern:

I was desirous that others should profit by an example so rare. I therefore noted down, in writing, every particular of your conduct. . . . I laboured not to omit the slightest shade, or the most petty line in your portrait. Here there was no other talk [sic] incumbent on me but to copy; there was no need to exaggerate or overlook, in order to produce a more unexceptionable pattern . . . the picture I drew was not a phantom; as a model, it was devoid of imperfection; . . . Here, in all its parts, was a model worthy of assiduous study, and indefagitable imitation (139-140).

Clara's act of writing her self through her narrative is, in

a sense, her erasure of Pleyel's version of her."<sup>72</sup>

Republican ideology viewed the family as the nation in miniature, and a reconfigured family added attention to women as participants in directing the progress of that nation. According to Linda Kerber's idea of the "Republican mother," conservative republican thinking assigns the educated wife/mother the role of teacher and trainer of virtuous citizens, but only from the site of the home. Such assignment does grant women a kind of political power, but only subjunctively--as influence, not actors. "The Republican Mother was to encourage in her sons civic interest and participation," Kerber explains; ". . . women could--and should--play a political role through the raising of a patriotic child" (283). Beyond granting and valuing women the job of educating the future, the new republicanism shifted focus from the family unit as the fundamental social organization on which the culture was to stand and grow to the antecedent act that establishes the family--the marriage choice. As historian Jan Lewis explains it, when "[t]he affectionate union between a man and his wife . . . is the model for all the relationships in the society and the

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<sup>72</sup> Kenneth Dauber says of Clara: "[She]normalizes her experience. But her experience is, therefore, not hers, for the only 'her' that remains is not one which in writing she makes but one which, assimilated to the experience of everyone else, 'she' has power passively but to describe" (67).

polity,"<sup>73</sup> then women become politicized and the marriage choices they make become much more significant as cultural acts. Women then are simultaneously an arbitrating force (as the "Republican mother" whose maternal attentions would direct the progress of a nation) and a submissive object of that force (as the single young woman who, trained by that mother and empowered to make her own marriage choice, must still choose wisely). The point must be made that both expressions are deferred, indirect; influence is not action. Brown's female characters offer both paradigms of female behavior.

Brown created intelligent, writing, authoritative women, but was he a feminist? His biographers and critics agree that his interest in "women's rights" was early, consistent, and strong throughout his career.<sup>74</sup> In his chapter on Brown in American Novelists Revisited, Fritz Fleischmann comments on the range of feminist approaches to Brown's works and concludes that Brown the artist "was . . . the first major writer of the Republic to examine women's rights and roles systematically and sympathetically" (7). Cathy Davidson credits Brown with "[identifying] the contradictions in the contemporary ideology of women, the

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<sup>73</sup> Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the New Republic" William and Mary Quarterly 44 (October 1987) 699.

<sup>74</sup> Clark, 110-112; Watts, 58-60.

presumed opposition between female intellect and domesticity" (135). Brown does do exactly that, but for a writer who was bold enough to raise disturbing questions about male selfhood, or to question the stability of America's new political and cultural identity as a nation in his other novels, he fumbles the ball when it comes to such boldness concerning women. Brown's major female characters are remarkable for their intellect and energy, and they are deeper and more personally autonomous than Richardson's Clarissa or Rowson's Charlotte Temple. But any true potential they might show for autonomy or independence akin to that of their male counterparts in Brown's work is still circumscribed by the ideology of the good Republican mother. As Steven Watts has put it, "Brown struggled to shape a civic role for women without removing them from their 'natural' domestic setting. This often resulted in a redefinition of republican 'virtue' as the particular product of female moral efforts in the household" (60). One way to lay this out more clearly is to look backward from works that came after Brown, to see the cause more accurately by considering the effects.

David S. Reynolds' Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville obviously focuses on a period much later than Brown's, but Reynolds' interpretations can be useful in illuminating how Brown built his female characters. In Chapter 12, Reynolds

analyzes two broad types of female character found in nineteenth-century American fiction: the "moral exemplar" and the "adventure feminist" (339). According to Reynolds, the moral exemplar woman offers either religious or philosophical influence in a "world of devalued, immoral males" (342); Beth in Little Women and Little Eva in Uncle Tom's Cabin are two examples. An "adventure feminist" is "an especially tough, active version" of her sister (345). These types are "alternative women characters representing a variety of protofeminist or feminist views" (339) who offer positive "affirmations of women's power" (340), centered mainly in the domestic sphere. Before the emergence of a recognizable "cult of true womanhood" that could be exemplified and reinforced by fictional characters such as Beth March or Little Eva, however, women's access to social power and how that power should be expressed were still important questions. As Marybeth Norton explains in Liberty's Daughters, the ideology of the Republican mother was one answer to those questions; "women's public role . . . [was located] in her domestic responsibilities, her obligation to create a supportive home life for her husband, and . . . her duty to raise republican sons" (298). Reynolds does mark Ormond's Martinette de Beauvais as the first adventure feminist in American letters, but he misses adumbrations of other moral exemplar women operating in Brown's work as well. Female characters like Mrs. Carter in

Alcuin, Sophia Courtland in Ormond, and Mrs. Fielder in Jane Talbot are the beginning of the moral exemplar ethos that informs later females; they are the successful mothers of the nineteenth century's domestic/sentimental heroines. Reynolds may see both the moral exemplar and adventure feminist as positive and affirming, but those figures exist only over erasures of other, earlier possibilities for female selfhood. As mother figures who exert life-shaping influence, Brown's moral exemplar women seek to dissolve the other women with whom they establish relationships into an abstracted bondage of confirmation in a strict and restricting moral and social code. Brown's "adventure feminists," of whom Ormond's Martinette de Beauvais is the signal example, are rejected outright and disappear. The female bonds in Brown's fictions--friendships or some version of mother/daughter relationships--work in only one direction. Was Brown a feminist? Brown should not be called so merely because he creates strong women. His novels may raise within themselves the debate regarding the nature and appropriate social role of women, but nothing in Brown's handling of female characters gives any hint that a female self outside the all-absorbing ideology of marriage and motherhood is at all viable.

As a young intellectual radical in the 1790's, Brown was certainly interested in questions of gender role. In 1792, the same year Mary Wollstonecraft published A

Vindication of the Rights of Women, he recorded in his journal a series of letters, set as a correspondence between "C.B.B." and one "Henrietta."<sup>75</sup> It is on Steven Watts' idea that the letters were Brown's experiment in "[postulating] gender definitions of human impulse" and "[identifying] 'culture' as the domain of women" (43) that I base my discussion. The letters are a florid exchange between suitor and beloved in which the lovers tease and flirt with each other through a rambling discussion of various topics, including education, marriage, nature, and music. The Henrietta letters are significant to this discussion for two reasons: they present one indication of Brown's earliest opinions regarding women, and they give us the first instance of a writing woman in his work. "I must indeed confess that before I knew you I deemed too contemptuously of the greater part of your sex," C.B.B. writes to Henrietta, ". . . but I never conceived that the minds of women were naturally inferior to men" (Clark 93). "I am, at least in my own opinion, a woman of vast learning," Henrietta has remarked; "I care not who knows." (66). The conceit of exchanging language lessons is the vehicle for amorous jousting between the two. Within that context, one of Henrietta's letters offers Brown's definition of the scope or nature of female influence:

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<sup>75</sup> Clark transcribes the series in Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America 55-107.

[W]hy should you not be my preceptor? It will furnish you with a pretense to be more frequently my visitant. Let us be mutually communicative of our literary stores. If you will teach me the Greek and Latin I will initiate you into the French and Italian . . . [A]m I not qualified to be . . . the mistress of your taste and understanding as well as of your heart? If you have no dictionary, I will stand in the place of one. (65, 67)

Brown's "new woman" of the Republic is to become "mistress of . . . taste and understanding," influencing her mate intellectually and, here and in later works, by controlling language and the written word. Henrietta fends off her suitor's effusions of physical passion ("C.B.B." seems unable to take his mind off Henrietta's "fluttering lawn, whose whiteness dazzles the beholder, and through which the whiter bosom which it covers is discernible" [72]) by deflecting it into a demand for "a literary correspondence . . ." (65). She asks him to "be more cool, collected, and dispassionate, and let [her] be gratified with the sight of one letter written in the capacity rather of a tutor than a lover" (65). Granting the ornate language and extravagant sentimental conceit, Henrietta is the prefigure of the important female characters who will appear in later novels; she is literate, acute, in control of herself and her text,



and able to use that mastery in some measure to influence the behavior of another.

Henrietta, who had wished "to be placed by the side of Mrs. Carter . . . a linguist and philologist, the deepest of female scholars" (64) and complained "Why should women be outstripped in literary pursuits?" (65) appears again as "Mrs. Carter" in Brown's first published work, Alcuin, a Dialogue (1798)<sup>76</sup>. Alcuin is an inconclusive debate in three Parts on women's education, marriage, and gender roles in which each voice in the exchange presents first a Godwinian argument for female autonomy in marriage choice and education, and then reverses tack. Robert D. Arner's "Historical Notes" to Alcuin, Cathy Davidson's "The Matter and Manner of Charles Brockden Brown's Alcuin,"<sup>77</sup> and especially Fritz Flieschmann's chapter on Brown in his American Novelists Revisited have all meticulously laid out the intricacies of Brown's handling of Godwin's philosophies in the structure and logic of this work. Brown's first published work of fiction established at least one characteristic that his novels would follow, for in Alcuin's

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<sup>76</sup>Charles Brockden Brown, The Novels and Related Works of Charles Brockden Brown, Bicentennial Edition, 6 vols., gen. ed. Sydney J. Krause (Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 1977-1987), vol. 6: Alcuin; A Dialogue and Memoirs of Stephen Calvert (1987), ed. with Historical Essay by Robert D. Arner.

<sup>77</sup> Cathy N. Davidson, "The Matter and Manner of Charles Brockden Brown's Alcuin," Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown ed. Bernard Rosenthal (Boston, 1981) 71-86.

debate Brown plays one side and then the other and never reliably resolves anything. It is the character of Mrs. Carter in Alcuin that interests us here.

In Alcuin's Mrs. Carter Brown realizes Henrietta's promise as an authoritative female figure. Alcuin, a poor schoolteacher with higher class aspirations, visits Mrs. Carter, who is "always at home" (3) in her capacity as housekeeper to her brother. She hosts an evening "lyceum . . . [for] particular persons . . . who enjoyed, gratis, the benefits of rational discourse" (4). Before his first visit Alcuin polishes his shoes, brushes his coat, and expresses considerable anxiety over the "awfulness of flowing muslin" (5). Since through the dialogue, carried on over several visits and three published Parts, she and Alcuin spar energetically over almost every point of both Godwin's and Wollstonecraft's ideas, Mrs. Carter is indeed a formidable figure in muslin, and Brown gives her final authority over the subject and manner of the discussion.<sup>78</sup> In Part III, Alcuin takes the imaginative approach of telling her a story, recounting a conversation he has held with a citizen

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<sup>78</sup> Alcuin agonizes over meeting Mrs. Carter, pondering "the awfulness of flowing muslin" (5). These words recall "C.B.B.'s fascination with Henrietta's "fluttering lawn" (Clark 72). These descriptions hint at the visual representations--painted portrait miniatures--I discuss in a subsequent section of this chapter. For a brief discussion of the Romantic attitudes of Brown and John Singleton Copley, see Amy Tucker, "John Singleton Copley and Charles Brockden Brown: Forerunners of American Artistic Tradition" Mid-Hudson Language Studies 5 (1982) 63-70.

of the "paradise of women" (34), where "a diversity of sex cannot possibly make any essential difference in the claims and duties of rational beings" (42). He offers his fiction as a way of cementing a tenuous bond by keeping the conversation going. Mrs. Carter listens to his utopian fantasy until, approaching the subject of sexuality, Alcuin stops. "The remainder of [the] conversation," he apologizes to Mrs. Carter, "decorum would not perhaps forbid you to read, but it prohibits you from hearing. If you wish it, I will give you the substance of the information I collected on this topic in writing" (50). Mrs. Carter retorts, "What is improper to be said in my hearing . . . it should seem was no less improper to be knowingly addressed to me by the pen . . . write what you please . . . though I may not approve of what you write, your silence I shall approve still less" (50-51). She takes it to herself to be the director and judge of what Alcuin presents her, and timorous Alcuin has just had his delicacy rebuked. This well-read, self-assured woman is clearly in control of her world and welcomes the opportunity for rational exercise Alcuin offers. She encourages him to continue his performance, oral or written, explaining, "Give me leave to take so much interest in your welfare, as to desire to see your errors corrected, and to contribute what is in my power to that end" (52). She dismisses Alcuin's fiction as another version of Godwinian heresy, a "visionary world" concocted

"by engrossing the fancy and charming the affections," and she already knows how Alcuin's story will end. Mrs. Carter "can pretty well conjecture of what hues, and lines, and figures, the remainder of the picture is intended to consist" (52). Sitting in her parlor, serving tea and lemonade to eager conversational idealists, Mrs. Carter is the first clearly developed instance of the controlling, static mother who listens, reads, sees, and judges.

Controlling the presentation and circulation of narrative, fiction, or story is the function of several other sited matrons in Brown's novels. The almost invisible Mrs. Baynton in Wieland is apparently a friend of the Wieland family who keeps a house in Mettingen; it is at her home that Pleyel reads the newspaper notice that reveals Carwin's criminal history. In Chapter 15, it is from Mrs. Baynton's hand that Clara receives Carwin's note requesting a meeting. Mrs. Stevens, in Arthur Mervyn, is audience along with her husband's side at the family hearth to listen to Arthur's tales, and Stevens turns to her to have his own impressions of young Arthur confirmed or challenged. In the unfinished Memoirs of Stephen Calvert<sup>79</sup> Mrs. Wallace holds a packet of letters that she gives to Stephen at just the right moment in the plot, and in the same novel Louisa

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<sup>79</sup> Memoirs of Stephen Calvert was serialized in Brown's Monthly Magazine (June 1799-June 1800). Robert Arner details its publishing history in "Historical Essay" 301.

Calvert, a cousin, hands him a letter tucked inside a book. Ascha Fielding and Mrs. Wentworth in Arthur Mervyn and Clelia Neville in Stephen Calvert reside in secluded homes to which their young men are drawn for visits, conversation, and the gift of literacy in the form of letters or books. In every instance, these women exert an influence, direct or indirect, on their partners in the exchange.

## II

Brown's second novel, Ormond; Or the Secret Witness (1799) offers a fully developed text-controlling female figure in Sophia Westwyn Courtland, the narrator. There are three main characters in Ormond: Constantia Dudley, Ormond himself, and Sophia, Constantia's childhood friend. As with almost all Brown's novels, the plot is not easily summarized. Constantia Dudley's father had been a leisured painter until his own father's failure in business forced him to enter commerce as pharmacist in Philadelphia. Through a swindle executed by Dudley's trusted apprentice Thomas Craig, an avatar of the far more deceitful Ormond, Dudley loses his business and livelihood. Mrs. Dudley dies (of embarrassment, one infers, at sudden penury) and the simultaneous advent of the yellow fever sends widower Dudley and his only daughter Constantia into poverty. Dudley goes blind and sinks into alcoholism; Constantia supports the small family by working as a seamstress. Coincidence leads Constantia to Ormond, a French gentleman with ties to the radical, utopian cult of the Illuminati. Constantia involves herself with Ormond's lover, the soft, beautiful, and empty Helena Cleves. Rejected by Ormond in favor of Constantia, Helena commits suicide and leaves her estate to the girl, an estate that happens to include a former possession of the Dudley's, a sumptuous house in New Jersey. Restored to wealth, her father able to see again thanks to

the benevolent offices of Ormond, Constantia turns her efforts to recovering a miniature portrait of her childhood friend Sophia. This portrait is a "relique" she had had to sell in earlier, tougher times and for which she holds a passion akin to religious fever. Sophia had earlier left Philadelphia, severing her ties to the Dudleys in order to accompany her mother to Europe. Constantia's search leads her to Martinette de Beaveais, another, different model of female identity who is eventually revealed to be Ormond's sister. Mr. Dudley is murdered, and later we learn that Craig, at the instruction of Ormond, is responsible. Constantia's search for the miniature finally leads to a reunion with Sophia; through some earlier relationship that is never satisfactorily explained, Sophia knows Ormond and fears for her friend's safety should the connection between Constantia and Ormond continue. Ormond, meanwhile, counters Sophia's warnings with an enigmatic and terrifying threat of his own to Constantia of "the danger that awaits thee. . . . An inexorable and immutable decree enjoins. . . . [o]ne more disaster. . . . [that] will exterminate hope" (258-259). In the climactic encounter between Constantia and Ormond, a scene ripe with Gothic atmosphere, Ormond menaces Constantia in the remote New Jersey house and reveals his plan to rape her, "[l]iving or dead" (285). Before disaster can be effected, however, Constantia kills him, Sophia rushes in (literally and narratively), and, after a brief legal

inquiry, Constantia and Sophia depart for Germany.

Strung between the two forces of Sophia and Ormond, Constantia is a site for the contest between Sophia's bourgeois, class-bound safety of convention and Ormond's radical, impetuous danger of the continually re-invented, fluid self. Young, impressively resourceful, and smart, Constantia navigates among both the physical dangers of infection as she moves about in a plagued Philadelphia and the metaphysical dangers of competing epistemologies that seek to control her. She catches yellow fever (and recovers), but neither of those other two forces manages to catch her. Ormond, as his final threat to Constantia so vividly suggests, represents the high entropy of lawlessness, an energy capable of transgressing any boundary. An actor, he "blended in his own person the functions of poet and actor, and his dramas were not fictitious but real" (116). Sophia Courtland, Constantia's friend and the narrator of the novel, is the representative of low entropy, committed to rescuing Constantia from the dangers of a life unsecured by convention. Sophia is strictly and morally sentimental; her goal is nothing less than "[i]n proportion to the rectitude of [her] perceptions and the ardour of [her] piety, [to] clearly discern and fervently love, the excellence discovered in [her] fellow beings, and industriously promote their improvement and felicity" (224). Sophia as the narrator/creator of



Constantia and her story is an example of the literate female who controls the disposition of text. She is also an adumbration of the strong, manipulative mother-mentor who appears in Brown's last two novels.

Between *Sophia and Ormond*, then, Constantia is a prize to be won. But who wins what? By rhetoric, by pity, by financial exigency, by force, even by accident, Constantia cannot be seduced. By "seduced" I intend both the conventional, sentimental application of that term and a larger construction that implies conviction, persuasion, assignment to one mode of conduct or philosophy, however complex, over another. Despite the acuity, rationality, and courage she displays and has been praised for by readers of Brown, I argue that Constantia is the first of Brown's palimpsest women, a blank figure that exists only as a field to be inscribed and reinscribed. In a novel full of reference to light and vision, Constantia is an optical illusion whose attributes change according to light and perspective. More precisely, as the elements of *Ormond's* text demonstrate, Constantia is an ivory oval waiting for the portraitist's brush. The Constantia of *Ormond* is a miniature portrait, "painted" by the more interesting character in the novel, the narrator Sophia Westwyn Courtland.

Brown's habit of setting contrasting ideas in direct opposition to each other manifests itself in the transactional bonds between Constantia and the women around her, supervised by Sophia. Leslie Fiedler approaches the idea of characters in opposition when he discusses Ormond as the equal of Constantia (Love and Death, 101), but he ignores an even stronger element: Sophia. Carl Nelson, in "A Just Reading of Charles Brockden Brown's Ormond" (EAL 8, 1973), takes a directly opposite tack and focuses solely on the character of Sophia as "an experiment in excessive and hyperbolic sentimentality" (165). For Nelson, Sophia is a demonstration of Brown's condemnation of the sentimental plot and the untenable conditions of a life ordered accordingly. In my view, Sophia is neither as absent as she is in Fiedler's reading, nor as sappily malevolent as she seems to be in Nelson's. Sophia is a figure of moral sentimentality, a strong Republican mother, whose goal is to certify her protege, Constantia, within the ranks of conventional virtue. The framing of Constantia's story as a letter to someone named "I.E. Rosenberg" indicates that the Constantia the reader meets is really only a woman-as-text, a portrait/story to be circulated extra-textually as a token in another woman's different, still on-going transaction.

In his discussion of Arthur Mervyn, Emory Elliot warns that "the difference between the surface meanings of the narrator's tale and the deeper meaning of the novel hinges

upon the reader's perception of how the speaker may be slanting his life story" (235). True enough for Arthur Mervyn, especially true of Ormond. Our critical noses should be lifting into the wind from the very beginning of Brown's second novel, for Ormond is a fiction framed within another fiction. A "frame" is not unusual in Brown's novels, not unusual in any novels of the period. Wieland begins with an "Advertisement" signed "C.B.B.," Edgar Huntly with a note signed the same way and addressed "To The Public." However we interpret such extra-textual entities--at face value, as the artist's conventional apology to a reading audience, or as integral parts of the novels themselves, ante-matter that should also be considered in a critical reading--these introductions offer at least the illusion of a transition from "real" to "fictional." The beginning of Ormond, on the other hand, offers a note "To I.E.Rosenberg," signed "S.C." (Brown used the same fictional introduction device with Clara Howard two years later.) Ormond begins with a framing fiction that calls attention to itself with the question it provokes: who are "I.E. Rosenberg" and "S.C."? Behind Ormond's Gothic plot runs Sophia's sentimental one. Sophia's plot places Constantia in the role of endangered heroine, Ormond as deceitful and dangerous suitor, herself and the ideology she occupies as the only possible happy ending. The strategy of creating Sophia the narrator offers another novel whose ending, beyond the enigma of

"I.E.Rosenberg," we cannot know.

I see a resonance between my reading of Sophia in Ormond and Michael Warner's theory of personal negativity through the medium of written text, an idea I applied earlier (in Chapter 2) to the visual elements in Brown's Arthur Mervyn. In Chapter 3 of Letters of the Republic, Warner discusses Benjamin Franklin's career in print as an "illustrative case" of the "paradoxical embodiment of print ideology in the personal" (77). As Warner reads him, Franklin accomplished the Republican ideal of successfully balancing personal interest against civic virtue, a goal possible only with the dissolve of the singular individual into a general polity through the phenomenon of print. Part of Warner's discussion is a brief comment on Joseph-Siffred Duplessis's 1778 portrait of Benjamin Franklin, a painting commonly referred to as the "fur collar" portrait. In New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, the painting hangs in its original frame with the legend "VIR"--the Latin generic noun for "man." Warner remarks of the painting: "In Franklin's career the virtuous citizen of the republic (vir) attests to his virtue by constituting himself in the generality of letters" (96). It is the painting's frame that makes that statement valid. In Ormond, Sophia frames Constantia with the intent of constituting her in the generality of assignment to "I.E.Rosenberg" and thus confirming her virtue. Sophia's "Preface" also sets up an analogy between

the text of Ormond as Sophia writes it and the portrait miniature that Constantia reveres so intensely in the story. Sophia's narrative, which she apologetically calls "little more than a biographical sketch, in which the facts are distributed and amplified, not as a poetical taste would prescribe, but as the materials afforded me" (3) is a stand-in for the real thing, the actual Constantia, in Sophia's gesture toward Rosenberg. The connection between Sophia's written "sketch" and painted representation appears early in the novel when a friend of the Dudleys, Mr. Melbourne, remarks to Ormond (of Constantia),

What pity . . . you did not come a little sooner. . . I should like to hear your opinion of a face that has just left us . . . Complexion, and hair, and eyebrows may be painted, but these are of no great value in the present case. It is in the putting them together, that nature has shewn her skill, and not in the structure of each of the parts, individually considered. (110)

A painting, a narrative, a novel--Constantia exists only as others' representations of her, and those representations vary according to who is doing "the putting them together." As the acquisition of literacy produces successful individual male identity, committal to text produces successful erasure of the individual female. A writing man identifies himself and moves as a distinct individual; a

written woman disappears into convention. In the tropes of disclosure, text, and painted portrait miniatures that cluster around the female characters in Ormond, the novel's alchemy offers only two products of transactional bond between females: total erasure or evanescence into the anonymous construct of "wife."

Two secondary female characters, Helena Cleves and Martinette de Beauvais, begin to build a triangular picture of female roles with Constantia as one variable corner. Encountering Helena's and Martinette's two extreme versions of femaleness provides Constantia a test of her principles and a revelation of her character. In Sophia's narrative, these two women are also failed experiments in female bond that direct Constantia to what her narrator sees as the one, true, best bond: with Sophia herself.

Helena Cleves, Ormond's mistress, lives secluded in a Philadelphia mansion as probably one of the first "kept women" in American letters. She is a beautiful, unfortunate cipher who is accomplished in her education according to fashionable standards; she plays piano, sings, and paints. But this woman, who "was calculated to excite emotions more voluptuous than dignified. . . [whose] presence produced a trance of the senses rather than an illumination of the soul" (120) is incapable of original action, of owning or conducting an independent life of any kind. She replicates without feeling the arts of poetry, drama, or painting; when

she does speak her own ideas, her "sentiments [are] trite and undigested, but. . . decorated with all the fluences and melodies of execution" (130). Most unfortunate of all, from Ormond's perspective, is that Helena has no intellectual ability; Sophia cattily observes, "[t]he doctrine of lines and surfaces was as disproportionate with her intellects as with those of the mock-bird" (128). A "mock-bird" is just what Helena is, and Ormond's attempts to teach her anything more abstract than chess leave "impressions. . . as fleeting as if they had been made on water" (129). Helena's only strength is a remarkable skill on harp and clavichord, where she "had long since relinquished the drudgery of imitation" in favor of emotionally charged improvisation, "not inferior to the happiest exertions of Handel" (131). Krause notes that stringed instruments such as the lute (which, interestingly, both Constantia and her father play, and functions in the plot as the device that brings Martinette and Constantia together) and clavichord in Handel's baroque music were "used to accompany voices -- providing the basso continuo -- in . . . compositions" (429). Even Helena's one skill is subordinated as accompaniment to the ventriloquist/actor who can feign anything, Ormond.

When Helena and Constantia first meet, they recognize each other as vague acquaintances from the past, and each is carrying a false name. Helena goes by the Biblically ironic "Mrs. Eden," and Constantia is "Miss Acworth," a name she

and her father assumed on their descent into poverty. An unnamed "officious person" (138) has told Constantia the true situation of her newly rediscovered friend, and explaining her own change of name gives Constantia an opportunity to tell Helena her story of difficult circumstances and honest endeavor. Peeling away the names designed to protect them from public censure is a mutual act of intimacy between the two that allows further confidences. Once the secrets are out, Constantia approaches Helena "to solicit a compleat [sic] and satisfactory disclosure. . . [and] to offer her disinterested advice" (139). The knowledge that Constantia does not condemn her but in fact offers the "sympathy and intercourse of her own sex. . . [a] good, in its most precious form" (139) is the cue for Helena to unburden herself to Miss Dudley. The exchange of stories between these two women places Constantia in the role of forgiving mother who listens and repairs, and we can almost imagine Constantia wiping away the poor girl's tears. As Constantia listens to Helena, we see her also as the wise mentor, able quite rationally and dispassionately to evaluate the details of Helena and Ormond's dilemma (140-143). Yet the exchange also disturbs whatever self-confidence Constantia has managed to develop to this point, since when Helena suggests that Constantia approach Ormond as her advocate, Constantia's self-understanding, her sense of role, is thrown into confusion.



Reflecting on how she might approach Ormond and persuade him to marry Helena, Constantia ticks off the roles--father, brother, mother, sister--who might "assume the office without indecorum" (145) instead of herself, "a girl and a stranger" (146). Constantia does eventually resolve to face Ormond, as a "vindicator of the injured, before any tribunal, however tremendous or unjust" (145), and in diction that echoes Sophia's version of benevolence, "point out to him the road of duty and happiness" (146). Helpless victim as she is, Helena has managed to exert an influence over Constantia; Helena's situation has stirred up Constantia's "maleness," a recognition of an ability to transgress conventional female behavior. Constantia's concern for Helena is not, however, wholly disinterested, for even as she trembles at the thought of facing the "boisterous and manlike spirit" of Ormond, Constantia is not unaware of her own attraction to him. Of herself and him she thinks "their elements were more congenial, and the points of contact. . . more numerous than between her and Helena, whose voluptuous sweetness of temper and mediocrity of understanding excited in her bosom no genuine sympathy" (146). Helena's exaggeratedly weak femininity generates an independent agency in Constantia and at the same time affirms her sexuality.

Ormond's increasing obsession with Constantia leads him to reject Helena cruelly; in his final conversation with

her, he literally wishes her to die. "Thy woes are but beginning," he tells her; "I fear they will terminate fatally; if so, the catastrophe cannot come too quickly" (162). Ever pliant, Helena obliges. But it may be too simple to conclude that Helena is nothing more than an empty pattern to be filled in by whatever comes along. Even though her intellectual weakness leads to Ormond's rejection and that rejection to her suicide, Helena commits one act that fixes her as a recognizable, integrated self. Before she drinks that laudanum, she writes a note, a note that, as Sophia reports, was "calculated to make a deeper impression on Ormond, than even the sight of Hellen's [sic] corpse" (172). Ormond's reaction to Helena's note admits her an ironic kind of self-agency at last.

While she may read poetry, act, paint, or sing as a mere replicator of another's art, Helena's one act of writing is all hers; it is her. Maundering, obsequious, her note still has a strong effect on its reader:

I am sorry, indeed I am, that I ever offended you. . . I am very unhappy, for I have lost you, my friend. You will never see me more, you say. That is very hard. I have deserved it to be sure, but I do not know how it has happened. No body[sic] desired more to please than I. . .[y]our love was a reward and cure for every thing. I desired nothing better in this world. . .My lot

was happy, infinitely beyond my deserving. I  
 merited not to be loved by you. O that I had  
 suitable words to express my gratitude, for your  
 kindness. . .I am a poor silly girl, but Constance  
 is a noble and accomplished one. Most  
 joyfully do I resign you to her, my friend.

(171-172)

Ormond incompletely perceives Helena's suicide as her one  
 decisive act: "Endless have been the proofs of thy frailty.  
 In favor of this last act, something may be said: It is the  
 last thou wilt ever commit. Others only will experience its  
 effects: Thou hast, at least, provided for thy own safety"  
 (171). Ormond is the one who "experience[s] its effects"  
 most severely, and he misses one of the causes. Helena has  
 indeed had "suitable words," for it is not only the act but  
 the note that affects him. After discovering her body and  
 reading the note, Ormond is unmanned. He must ask an "old  
 lady" who lives nearby to "take charge of affairs, until  
 another should assume it" (172). That other is Constantia,  
 whom Ormond summons in a note of his own.

Fritz Fleischmann may be overstating the case when he  
 calls Helena's note "a model of dignity and logic" (25), yet  
 her one act of writing is Helena's one independent, self-  
 defining act that has direct consequences. It is,  
 unfortunately, not enough; as an image of the idealized,  
 helpless, dependent female, Helena is defined by what she is

not. Her education as a singing, painting, empty-headed doll has made her an object only, never a true agent. Ormond and Helena are balanced extremes: he of seductive sophistry and intellectual misogyny, she of female helplessness and vacuity. Once that relationship fails, the absence of individuality or self-sufficiency that the feminine ideal enforces leaves Helena literally nothing. She disappears.

Just as her perfect adherence to the ideals of feminine accomplishment replicated Helena right out of any self-authority, Martinette de Beauvais' complete transgression of those same ideals erases her. Helena's replication of the feminine ideal led her outside the boundaries of acceptable female behavior into the criminal relationship with Ormond, complete with change of location, false name, and sequestration as Ormond's private toy/experiment. Martinette has had the same experiences in reverse. She recounts her history to an amazed Constantia and reveals a peripatetic life in which she has crossed the boundaries of geography, custom, even gender. Orphaned along with her brother by a Slavic father and Greek mother, Martinette was reared in childhood by a kindly Italian merchant and later by an English woman, Lady D'Arcy. She married an Englishman and traveled with him to America, where, disguised as a man, she fought beside him on the side of the Revolutionaries. After her husband's death, she traveled to France and became embroiled in the plots and battles of the French Revolution.

While Constantia and Sophia share reverence for a miniature portrait, Martinette's most prized possession is the gun she used to "kill thirteen officers at Jemappe"(206). Exotic, cosmopolitan, daring--far from being subordinated or controlled by conventional standards of female behavior, Martinette transgresses every assigned role she encounters.

Where Constantia's relationship with Helena began with a commonality, since in earlier, happier times they had moved in the same Philadelphia circles, her relationship with Martinette begins with difference. Before they actually meet, Constantia sees her in Roseveldt's music shop and is struck by the Frenchwoman's unusual appearance. Sophia's description of Martinette at this moment is the inverse of her description of Helena: "It was not the chief tendency of [Martinette's] appearance to seduce or to melt. . . the emotions most apt to be excited in the gazer took less of love than of reverence" (77-78). There is an opposition between Helena and Martinette, too, in the area of names; while revealing their true names was the initiation of intimacy for Constantia and Helena, Constantia and Martinette know each other's names from the beginning. The gesture of exchanging the lute brings Constantia and Martinette together, and thereafter Martinette seems free to burst in on Constantia at any moment without ceremony.

Martinette's stories of war, intrigue, and assassination fascinate and shock Constantia, but, although she listens eagerly, the stories of women who "fought in the ranks" (206) as active partisans, even disguised as men, repel her. Consider her language as she responds to Martinette's tales: "[S]o much bloodshed and injustice! Does not your heart shrink from the view of a scene of massacre and tumult. . . how can the heart of women be innured to the shedding of blood?" (206). Nancy Cott discusses the significance of "heart" in the letters of and other documents addressed to women of the early Republic and concludes, "[t]o identify women with the heart was to imply that they conducted themselves through life by engaging the affections of others. The cultural metonymy by which the nurturant maternal role stood for the whole of woman's experience further confirmed that 'heartfelt' caring was woman's characteristic virtue" (168). Constantia's heart is shrinking, vicarious thrill or no. Hearing Martinette's story of a thwarted suicide (Martinette was to infiltrate an enemy camp, assassinate a general, then "attest her magnanimity by slaughtering herself" (207)), Constantia's opinion of her mysterious new friend changes: "[Constantia] felt that antipathy was preparing to displace love" (207). Here is a direct reversal of the script for Constantia and Helena's relationship. When Helena committed suicide, Constantia handled the disaster calmly and efficiently;

Martinette's mere story of a suicide that obviously did not take place sends her into the vapors. Martinette's arrogation of male roles, her disdain for Constantia's timidity, her phallic "fusil": all mark Martinette as beyond the boundaries of Constantia's sense of femaleness and set the limit to Constantia's accepting or understanding of transgressive female behavior.

Helena's weaknesses provoked Constantia's autonomy; Martinette and her stories do the opposite. Immediately after hearing Martinette's suicide story, which produces "many reflections. . . on the deceitfulness of appearances, and on the variety of maxims by which the conduct of human beings is regulated" (210), Constantia runs to her father, the one source of her own "maxims." The drama of Martinette's stories has stimulated Constantia's imagination, and her unpleasant reaction to their teller has reminded Constantia of the friend she has lost, Sophia. When her father proposes that they return to Europe, a plan that both feeds her wish for adventure and holds out the possibility of reunion with Sophia, Constantia's "imagination anticipated her entrance on that mighty scene with emotions little less than rapturous" (212).

"Rapturous" is a fitting word to describe the relationship between Sophia and Constantia. While Ormond is a passionate figure, the emotional energy of the attachment between the two women is the most intense of any bond in the

novel. Just as it is possible to read the bonds between master and apprentice in Edgar Huntly, Arthur Mervyn, or Carwin as covertly homosexual, numerous Brown critics have approached the question of homoeroticism in the relationship between Sophia and Constantia. The passion that exists between the two may certainly be read as sexual,<sup>80</sup> and Brown even presented blatant homosexuality in his work.<sup>81</sup> But the question of male or female sexuality is always subsumed in Brown's larger theme of the individual/the community's quest for reliable, confirmed self- and nationhood. Male bonds, sexually expressed or not, develop outwardly as public acts of disclosure that lead to a publicly acting individual male self. Female bonds, sexually expressed or not, develop in intimacy, grow out of private disclosures, and work toward impressing a female self into the useful mold of the good Republican wife/mother. Beyond sexuality, male/male or female/female bonds in Brown's novels are explorations of gender, authority, and autonomy. Male bonds individualize; female bonds homogenize.

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<sup>80</sup> Grabo 59; Fieldler 103; Christophersen 81. Christophersen also reads the relationship between Constantia and her father as "a fable of incest," with political connotations (57-61).

<sup>81</sup> In Memoirs of Stephen Calvert, Clelia Neville flees her husband because, as she says, "[u]nder a veil of darkness, propensities were indulged by [him] that have not a name which I can utter. . . I could not readily believe what yet appeared to be true, that his associates were wholly of his own sex . . . so open, so shameless was his conduct, that, at length, my own eyes were allowed to witness--" (204-205).



Her relationships with Helena and Martinette have been the partially successful first trials of Constantia's "homogenization." Norman Grabo reads Constantia's experiences in Ormond as "a series of tests or temptations, all in terms of [her] sexual identity," (51) leading up to a "just compact of generative energy with chaste restraint . . . joining Sophia's existence to her own" (54). To push Grabo's line of analysis further, I want to argue that the "just compact" established by Sophia's and Constantia's reunion is not a combination of still-distinct entities, like a chemical compound from which elements may be separated out again, but the dissolve of Constantia's individuality into the ideology Sophia represents--an indissoluble bond. Having survived the vagaries of life with her own mother, a woman who "delighted to assume all parts, and personate the most opposite characters. . . .to carry . . . the mask of virtue" (226), Sophia is committed to saving Constantia from the same trials as represented by the facile Ormond. Through "conformity of sentiments and impressions of maternal tenderness," (220) Sophia as mother is driven to confirm the girl in the same set of bourgeois beliefs she occupies. Her strongest effort in attaining that goal is the writing of Constantia's life story. The composition of another's experiences into a work of one's own necessarily demands the deliberate erasure of some elements, the emphasizing of others. By writing her story, Sophia re-

composes Constantia into the pattern which Sophia has chosen for her.

## III

I have said that the bonds between women in Brown's work all point to the erasure of an individual female self. In Ormond, that "erasure" is metaphorically expressed in the element of the portrait miniature. Shirley Samuels, in Romances of the Republic, explains that "a continual interconnection of political, cultural, and social systems produces significant narratives about families . . . such systems become visible to us now in the traces of their interactions, traces most readily available as texts" (140n51). Ormond is such a "trace." The trace of the painted miniature as symbol in the novel had particular resonance for Brown's readers, and it is worthwhile to attempt a recovery of that resonance here. Inside Brown's narrative the miniature encodes a tension, for women, between the risks of public individuality and private disappearance into a secure, generalized identity of good Republican wife.

Rising out of the intaglio of ancient Greek and Roman coins and rings, painted miniature portraits of individuals first appeared as illuminations in medieval manuscripts. Later, artists of the Renaissance produced small portrait medals in which the subject was drawn in profile.<sup>82</sup> What we

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<sup>82</sup> Dale T. Johnson, "An Introduction to the History of American Portrait Miniatures" American Portrait Miniatures in the Manney Collection (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1990) 13-26; Harry B. Wehle, American Miniatures 1730-

think of as a "miniature" today--a small oval painting on cardboard, vellum, or ivory that depicts a head-and-shoulder view of one individual against a colored background--began in the sixteenth century in the court of Henry VIII.<sup>83</sup> From England the miniature came to America as English-painted transplants. As American painters grew in confidence and an increasingly commercial, even affluent new Republic created demand, Americans produced their own. Portraiture in general was the financial mainstay of almost all the artists of the early national period, and painters like John Singleton Copley, Charles Willson Peale, and Edward Malbone all painted miniatures as part of their business. Brown's close friend and biographer, William Dunlap, painted a miniature of the author in 1806.<sup>84</sup> As I demonstrated in Chapter II of this dissertation, an American artist's painted portrait of an individual could carry deliberately public meanings for its perceivers. The signal quality of a miniature portrait, however, is just the opposite; its power lies in its cache of intimacy. A painted miniature, in direct contrast to the larger public portrait, is

a memento, . . . an intimate personal

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1850 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970).

<sup>83</sup> Christopher Lloyd and Vanessa Remington, Masterpieces in Little: Portrait Miniatures from the Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II (London: Balding and Mansell, 1996).

<sup>84</sup> Watts, frontispiece.

document, not to be kept by the subject of the likeness, but intended to serve the owner as an aid in visualizing the admired or beloved person portrayed.

In its emotional appeal to the original owner it partakes thus a little both of the companion and the talisman. (Wehle 5)

The full portrait which hangs static on a wall is public; it is simultaneously subject and communicative to the gaze of any who view it. It can negativize or dissolve its subject in service to a communal, public, even political purpose. In contrast, the small and portable miniature is intensely subjective and private, precise and specific in both message and audience. The original owner was usually the only viewer who could derive from the picture its intended emotional message.

The natural synthesis of these two opposite incarnations of the portrait occurs in the convention of hanging the chatelaine's portrait in the entryway or over the hearth of her home. The likeness of a home's mistress in such a spot semiotically smooths the transition from public to domestic space and translates the public visitor into private guest.

The possessor of the miniature also controlled the circumstances of its physical display, its "publication." By regulating access to a picture small enough to be secreted in box or drawer, or by wearing it as ornament, the owner of the picture takes control over the revelation of self that the emotional content of a miniature provokes. The picture worn as brooch or pendant, as part of its wearer's costume, becomes metaphorically part of the self, thus making "public" an image with strong private associations and creating a sometimes unsettling intersection of public and private worlds. The significance of this object/self can vary along a seamless, circular continuum that runs from one point--intensely private and emotionally priceless---to an opposite--universally common and commercially worthless.

There are three important foci along this continuum, and the miniature's progress through Ormond illustrates each. First, if the miniature continues in the possession of its original owner and the image continues to function as a uniquely tagged spur to emotional recollection or reminder, all is well. To the original owner who still possesses the object, the emotions connected with the person portrayed by the image and not the setting or the image itself are of primary value. Constantia reveres her miniature of Sophia beyond all else. Second, when the miniature is separated from its owner, the person portrayed

becomes less important and the miniature gains value not for what it represents, but for having been owned. Sophia recognizes Martynne's miniature as having been the unique possession of her Constantia, and Sophia's hope is renewed. Finally, when the object circulates publicly as an item of economic exchange, it has meaning only for its setting or the aesthetics of its painting. The specific individual whose image is contained in the oval disappears, and its original owner becomes irrelevant. Constantia's sacrifice of the miniature to a demanding landlord, and the miniature's subsequent reappearance in a goldsmith's shop window both mark the picture's move on the continuum from precious relic to price-tagged commodity. Detaching the object from its private and personal context, making it public, opens up all kinds of dangerous possibilities. When individual identity is erased, all identities become possible. The image becomes a site for anything, from imaginative storytelling to outright fraud. For Sophia, this multiplicity of possible identities is the greatest threat to Constantia. The miniature portrait that circulates from personal treasure to anonymous article of traffic and back again in the novel is echoed by the miniature "portrait" of Constantia that is the novel. Both are "a precious though imperfect substitute for sympathy and intercourse with the original" (75). As the good Republican mother, committed to replicating her own role in her daughter surrogate, Sophia

must secure Constantia somewhere between the disastrous isolation of Helena and the wide-open universality of Martinette. Sophia's narrative is her attempt to fix Constantia within the frame of safe conventionality by vetting the girl's provenance to Rosenberg, and Ormond is a cultural "trace" that describes the role of literacy and writing in women's lives as the safest way to accomplish that goal.

Elements of Brown's novels are often repetitive or cyclic: characters resemble each other, the same plot sequence repeats with (or without) variation several times in one work, a complicated narrative frame obscures a reliable point of view.<sup>55</sup> One instance of this nonlinear, spiralling effect in Ormond's structure occurs in Chapters 22 through 25, in which Sophia our narrator recounts first Constantia's search for the lost miniature, then her own. The story of the women's reunion is told from two directions, with a reciprocal balancing of character and event centering inward on the moment at which the friends are reunited. The engine of that narrative is the miniature itself.

Representations of Sophia are an emotional anchor for Constantia, even if her attachment to that anchor is disproportionately exaggerated. Like Clara Wieland's

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<sup>55</sup> Berthoff, "'A Lesson in Concealment'" 47; Tompkins 67.



pleasurable self-torment over her painting of Carwin (she draws his picture, then spends half the night and the ensuing day with her "eyes rivetted [sic] upon it" (Wieland 62)), Constantia has the habit of tormenting herself with onanistic emotionalism. She occasionally shuts herself away and enjoys a recital of the song she and Sophia had sung together, a recital accompanied by "a flow of such bitter yet delicious tears that it were not easily decided whether the pleasure or the pain surmounted" (187). Constantia also harbors a stronger, more vivid obsession with Sophia's painted miniature. It has "power over her sensations . . . similar to that possessed by a beautiful Madonna over the heart of a juvenile enthusiast. . . .[i]t was the mother of the only devotion which her education had taught her to consider as beneficial or true" (75). When she is forced to surrender the trinket to landlord M'Crea in lieu of rent, "[b]itter were the tears which she shed over it as she took it from her bosom, and consigned it to those rapacious hands, that were stretched out to receive it" (75). The portrait as "mother" and "Madonna," the melodramatic weeping more suited to a mother's relinquishing of a baby than of a pawn transaction: the language and tone of these passages point to the miniature's emotional significance for Constantia. It is an expression of Sophia as a maternal, supervising, beloved influence over her daughter surrogate.

When Helena's will returns the Dudleys to solvency, Constantia's first goal is the recovery of the picture. She discovers that M'Crea had sold it "for as much as the gold about it was worth" (219) to a goldsmith, who found the painting too pretty to melt down for its frame. He hung it in his window, hoping "a purchaser would . . . be attracted by the mere beauty of the toy" (219). A purchaser was attracted to it, but according to the report of the goldsmith, not solely for its monetary value. The purchaser, later introduced as the deceitful sharper "Martynne," seemed to be "acquainted with the original," (220) i.e., Sophia. The goldsmith "cannot conceive how the picture could otherwise have gained any value in [Martynne's] eyes" (220). From the goldsmith Constantia hurries to Martynne's boarding house, where a nameless woman admits her to a sitting room and tells her that Martynne, "a man of specious manners and loud pretensions" (221) has disappeared. Constantia is preparing to leave when she hears a harpsichord and Sophia's voice singing "their" song right next door. She faints, and as Chapter 23 opens, the reader too at last hears Sophia's (narrative) voice.

"I must be forgiven if I now introduce myself on the stage," Sophia announces primly; "So far as my fate is connected with that of my friend, it is worthy to be known" (224). Chapter 23 contains Sophia's personal history, a narrative backstitch that interrupts the hunt for the

miniature but does provide information that reveals the source of her obsession with Constantia. Sophia is possibly Constantia's half-sister; "[l]ife itself was the gift of [Constantia's] father," (224) she tells us, and mentions no other possible father figure (note Watts). Sophia's mother had abandoned her at birth to the Dudleys, yet her mother had "asserted the privilege of that relation: . . . laboured [sic] for years to obtain the control of [Sophia's] person and actions [and]. . . to snatch [her] from a peaceful and chaste assylum [sic]" (225). Sophia is ashamed of her mother; we can almost see Sophia's grimace as she spits out a description of her mother's "freaks of intoxication, . . . defiance of public shame, the enormity of . . . pollutions, . . . the infatuation that made [her mother] glory in the pursuit of a loathsome and detestable trade" (225). Profligate to begin with, Sophia's mother changes affiliations--husbands, religious faiths, names--so fluidly and so often, she has no solid or reliably constituted self at all. In short, Sophia's mother was a prostitute (we infer) who gets religion in a big way, wallows in guilt and eventually succumbs to insanity, but not before dragging her daughter away from the Dudleys and off to Europe in search of a cure. Sophia makes the choice to care for her mother during this time even though Mother's "aversions and attachments, habits and views were dissonant with [her] own[,] . . . [and c]onformity of sentiments and impressions

of maternal tenderness, did not exist to bind [them] to each other" (229). Freed by her mother's death to return to the Dudleys, Sophia seeks to "assert the privilege" of the maternal role over Constantia in order to rescue her from Ormond, another impersonator, and the dangers he represents. Conquering a confusion of masks and false or confused identities, Sophia as mother is driven to "rescue" Constantia.

To this point, the progress of Ormond's narrative has been moving in one direction: from Constantia and her father, through Constantia and the secondary females, with Constantia and Ormond, leading to Sophia. Sophia's backward history of how she discovers the miniature and finally Constantia herself begins from an opposite direction and arrives at the same point--Sophia. Mother deceased, new husband left behind in London, Sophia follows story after erroneous story from New York to Philadelphia to Baltimore to Philadelphia again. Sophia has wandered into deserted apartments, visited the site of plague victims' mass graves, and had contact with people she might otherwise never have deigned to recognize, all in service of her "inflexible purpose to live and to die" (232) with Constantia. She has joined temporary families, like that of Constantia's cousin, Mary Ridgely. As the last link in a chain of acquaintances in Sophia's search, Mary is an ersatz Constantia, a pale version of the imminent genuine article. Mary, "artless and

affectionate," but whose "chief recommendation" to Sophia is her "personal resemblance and her affinity by birth" (239) to Constantia, makes recovery of the miniature (and the much-desired reunion) possible. Like Constantia's relationships with Helena and Martinette, the climax of the association between Mary Ridgely and Sophia hinges on the women's understanding of names. Mary is acquainted with (surprise!) one Martynne, the purchaser of the miniature from the goldsmith, and Mary has seen the picture. Making up her own story about what she has seen, Mary assumes that "Sophia Courtland" is a widow, and wrongly infers that, since Martynne wears Sophia's miniature "at his breast," a romance exists between the two. She teases Sophia about it ("We are not bound to love our husbands longer than their lives" [240]) and as a surprise brings Martynne into the room. The miniature set loose from its rightful place is again in danger of being used criminally; Martynne is an ersatz Ormond who plans to use it in his own shady plans for Mary.

Of the miniature, Sophia tells us that for Constantia "[h]abit had made this picture a source of a species of idolatry" (75), and Sophia's diction here reveals more than what first appears. She calls it a "species of idolatry" (italics mine), indicating that Constantia is enacting only one of a variety of possible "idolatries." The miniature--so personal, private, intimate--is in fact

also only one of a variety, since Sophia has been the model for several. Because her

thoughts had modified [her] features into an expression [that is] a model for those who desired to personify the genius of suffering and resignation, . . . among those whose religion permitted their devotion to a picture of a female, the symbols of their chosen deity, were added to features and shape that resembled mine. My own caprice, as well as that of others, always dictated a symbolical, and in every new instance, a different accompaniment of this kind. (242)

In other words, there are many Sophias out there in circulation, but each has a unique "symbolical" marker incorporated within it. The miniature that had belonged to Constantia is one of a pair the two women had had painted earlier by a German "Eckstein" (Krauss, "Historical Notes" 471). Sophia was portrayed with "the crescent of Dian" (243), and Constantia with "the cincture of Venus" (243).

Sophia is careful to include these details. Why? The two specific portraits are only two of what Sophia admits are many possible representations, both of goddesses and of their models. It is the possibility of those "species" that frightens Sophia, the multiplicity of meanings and identities to which an unsecured identity is vulnerable.

The object that Martynne purchased is twice a representation--not only of Sophia, but of Sophia as the Greek goddess Artemis. Sophia/Artemis's "crescent" was the goddess's bow, symbolic of her supervision of the hunt in Greek myth. Artemis was also a goddess protective of virgins and chastity, and so the miniature's representation of Sophia in this guise is further significant. Sophia has been all along hunting and seeking to protect "her" virgin, Constantia. The other painted miniature, of Constantia, displays Constantia's likeness as Venus wearing the Cestus, the magic girdle given to her by Vulcan. Venus' girdle made its wearer attractive to anyone she chose. Casting Constantia this way, as the goddess paradoxically cinched in yet infinitely available, underlines Constantia's mutability as an independent, secured identity. The miniature of Constantia, while Sophia describes it and tells her story about it, never actually appears in the narrative because the narrative is the portrait. A miniature portrait framed in gold of a female subject encircled by a magic belt lies at the center of Sophia's sentimental tale, a narrative "framed" by Sophia's act of writing.

Can we trust the Sophia who writes for us? Written forgery as threat to identity is obvious throughout Ormond Craig's forged letters and notes and the disasters that flow from them are the prime example. But the imposture of erroneous story that comes about through misconstrued image

is equally dangerous. To nullify that danger, Sophia writes. For example, she redeems the miniature in an exchange of correspondence with Martynne. To her reader she explains that the painting is valuable "because it had been the property of one whom I loved, and it might prove highly injurious to my fame and my happiness, as the tool of this man's vanity and the attester of his falsehood" (243). To Martynne, however, she simply offers "a price for it, at least double its value, as a mere article of traffic" (243). Sophia here demonstrates an ability to negotiate between her own emotional attachment to the image, the dangers she can foresee in its misuse, and the pragmatic demands of the marketplace.

My reading of Sophia suggests that there are two narratives operating in Ormond. The first is the conventionally read Gothic romance of Ormond's amoral self-interest menacing Constantia, a tale which ends with his murder. The second narrative, operating behind and concurrent with the first, is a sentimental tale of Sophia pursuing, capturing, and finally fixing Constantia's female identity within the normative bounds of the good Republican wife. The climax of Brown's Gothic novel occurs when Constantia confronts Ormond inside her father's deserted New Jersey house and kills him with her pen-knife. The climax of Sophia's sentimental narrative occurs when her pen fails her and she must rescue Constantia using other means.



Constantia's person and self have been tested and contested for the run of both narratives, and as the final events of Ormond unfold at the New Jersey mansion, the "prize . . . in view" (285) is finally won. Sophia's final gesture toward securing Constantia takes place in the intersection of visual image and written word.

One way to read the crisis in Sophia's novel-long quest is to examine another form of self-representation beyond the painted portrait--the letter. The line of their relationship, from their initial separation, through the final moments of the plot, extending even outside the narrative proper to include Sophia's "frame" of the letter to Rosenberg, has been conducted through the representation of letters. When they were first separated, the women agreed to a "mutual engagement . . . to record every sentiment and relate every event that happened, in the life of either, and no opportunity of communicating information, was to be omitted" (228). No letters from Constantia find Sophia as she travels in Europe with her mother, and that silence is Sophia's first spur to return to America. Immediately after she has redeemed the miniature from Martynne by writing her letter offering twice the price he had paid, but before the joyful reunion, "a new reflection" (243) occurs to Sophia. If she cannot find Constantia herself, at least she may recover the "copious and accurate memorials of her life" (243) which Constantia had promised. Letters again are a

prompt to action; they are also a sign of the power relationship that operates between the two women. Letters, as Mary Beth Norton has discussed in Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women 1750-1800, were a significant tool in developing and strengthening a mother/daughter bond. Norton offers examples of women's "journal-letters," extended diaristic narratives "written daily and dispatched . . . at irregular intervals" (108). "A woman's relationship with men changed as she grew older and married," Norton writes, "but she often retained throughout her life her attachments to the same female friends-- attachments her relationship with her mother had taught her to cultivate and cherish" (106).

In an essay titled "Wise and Foolish Virgins: 'Usable Fiction' and the Early American Conduct Tradition," Sarah Emily Newton explores the similarities of purpose and effect between didactic "conduct" or "courtesy" advice texts and the developing genre of "usable fiction" "A genre she calls a "literary hybrid which cast acceptable conduct precepts in the form of an admittedly appealing narrative" (146). In her readings of Susanna Rowson's Mentoria, or the Young Lady's Friend (1791) and Hannah Foster's The Boarding School; or, Lessons of a Preceptress to her Pupils (1798),

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<sup>66</sup> Newton takes the term from Henri Petter, The Early American Novel, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971) 63.

Newton sees in the figure of a mother-mentor (in Mentoria, the title character; in The Boarding School, Mrs. Williams) a fictional, feminized authoritative voice providing in anecdote and story the same prescriptive advice offered by didactic literature like Dr. John Gregory's A Father's Legacy to His Daughters. The power of "usable fiction" lies in its ability to construct "a version of reality which dramatized the possibilities, limits, and consequences of female behavior" (146). As Newton finds it in her readings of the two novels, the central authoritative force in "usable fiction" is the sited matron. The mother-mentor is established, settled, fixed in a household and in an epistemology that good citizenship demands she perpetuate in the next generation. Her authority to act thus is created by her own success in the marriage market and her presumed intimacy with the girl she seeks to direct, and, in at least Newton's two specific instances, that authority is communicated through written text. As I have read Sophia's writing of Constantia's story, Ormond fits the pattern of "usable fiction" with a few significant differences. Sophia is not quite the settled, sited matron my reading wants her to be; her quest for Constantia has led her, albeit willingly, to move out of her established role as wife to Courtland and travel about, encountering people and experiences she would rather not. For example, she, like Arthur Mervyn before her, is fascinated by the stories of

the plague in Philadelphia. Hearing tales of "the endless forms which sickness and poverty assume in the recesses of a commercial and populous city" (245) she admits, "The powerful considerations that governed me, made me slight those punctilious impediments, which, in other circumstances, would have debarred me from intercourse with the immediate actors and observers" (244). In other words, her hunt for Constantia has challenged the boundaries of her settled social code. Does Sophia change as a result of her experiences? No. Just before she finally finds Constantia, Sophia occupies her time

[studying] the effects which a political and religious system, so opposite to that with which I had conversed, in Italy and Switzerland, had produced. I found that the difference between Europe and America, lay chiefly in this; that, in the former, all things tended to extremes, whereas, in the latter, all things tended to the same level. Genius and virtue, and happiness, on these shores, were distinguished by a sort of mediocrity. Conditions were less unequal, and men were strangers to the heights of enjoyment and the depths of misery, to which the inhabitants of Europe are accustomed (236).

Without the structure of a reliable class and social system, Sophia is lost. She is incapable of understanding the borderless peripeteia of a woman like Martinette, and Constantia's own wanderings through the streets and alleyways of Philadelphia (where she democratically does errands for the washerwoman and sews for the physician's wife alike) confuse and frighten her.

One remedy to this fear, Sophia Courtland seems to suggest, is the fixing of experience through the act of writing. Writing Constantia's story as she does in Ormond is a gesture toward both confirming Constantia in a particular role and reconfirming Sophia's own dislocated system of belief. Rescuing Constantia would seem to reassure Sophia that her epistemology is indeed the "correct" one. The act of writing and the power it conveys fails Sophia in only one instance.

After Sophia and Constantia are reunited, they decide to leave America for England. Constantia, against all Sophia's advice, wishes to return once more to the New Jersey mansion and revisit the surroundings and spirit of her departed father. She spends her time alone in the deserted mansion, "traversing spaces, in which every object prompted an endless train of recollections," (266), mooning over "[t]hose images which bind us to our natal soil" (267). The mansion itself, as Sophia too late acknowledges, is a second competitor for Constantia's allegiance. The novel's

description of the house is evocative of a tomb, Constantia's desertion of which would "[seem] a kind of sacrilege, for which she almost feared that the dead would rise to upbraid her" (266):

The massive parts were of stone; the outer surfaces were smooth, snow-white, and diversified by apertures and cornices, in which a cement uncommonly tenacious was wrought into proportions the most correct and forms the most graceful. The floors, walls, and ceilings [sic], consisted of a still more exquisitely tempered substance, and were painted by Mr. Dudley's own hand. (266)

Constantia, as her attachment to Sophia's miniature demonstrates, is already predisposed to exaggerated, intense concentration on objects that carry emotional meanings. Sophia recognizes that remaining at that mansion means death for Constantia, for Constantia is in danger not only of Ormond's physical threat, but also a spiritual death threatened by isolated worship within the walls of a "kind of fane, sanctified by [Mr. Dudley's] imaginary presence" (266). The only other "fane" in this novel has been the "pre-eminent love" of Sophia for her sister/daughter, a love that "layest all [its] homage at the feet at one, who most visibly resembles the perfections of our Maker" (250). Sophia the living model will not allow Constantia to worship the shrine of a dead artist, even if he is

Constantia's father.

Constantia's continued residence in New Jersey is a last gesture of autonomy before being absorbed wholly into the life Sophia has planned for her, and Sophia resents what she sees as willfulness. Her descriptions of Constantia's obstinacy in remaining at a distance, where Sophia cannot control her, indicate a level of pique. Sophia was "by no means, reconciled to this proceeding" (267); she writes "an urgent admonition to return . . . couched in such terms, as, . . . laid [Constantia] under the immediate necessity of compliance" (286); she fears Constantia's "defiance of [her] rhetorick [sic]" (286-287). Not trusting her letters to convince Constantia of the danger she faces, Sophia again takes horse (and boat and carriage and foot) to track down her wayward friend. She arrives just after Constantia has killed Ormond. In another version of their first reunion, Constantia is scrabbling at a locked door, and Sophia hears her cries. As Sophia tells it:

I once more darted a glance through the crevice. A figure, with difficulty recognized to be that of my friend, now appeared in sight. Her hands were clasped on her breast, her eyes wildly fixed upon the ceiling and streaming with tears, and her hair unbound and falling confusedly over her bosom and neck (289).

Constantia, framed within the keyhole of the door, becomes another miniature portrait. Shortly after the dramatic rescue, Sophia shepherds Constantia through "a tribunal hastily formed, and exercising its functions on the spot" (292) and, just as she had done for her mother so long ago, takes Constantia with her to Europe. Once there, Constantia is settled; her life "has experienced little variation" (293). Larzer Ziff, in discussing Wieland, has said that Brown's novels are American failures because their protagonists always return to the known safety of Europe.<sup>87</sup> Wandering, with or without a purpose, can get a girl into trouble.

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<sup>87</sup> Larzer Ziff, "A Reading of Wieland" PMLA 77 (1962) 51-57.



## IV

The miniature portrait as symbol of the bond between women appears in one other place in Brown's novels, and it emphasizes again the fixed stability of the writing woman. Brown's last two novels, Clara Howard and Jane Talbot, make explicit the power and authority of the sited, established woman and rehearse new paradigms of gendered social behavior. In these last two novels, men may travel the world, but the writing woman/mother/matron's power concentrates itself and emanates from within the clearly defined boundaries of her own domestic circle.

With Clara Howard (1801) and Jane Talbot (1801)<sup>88</sup>, Brown made a deliberate shift in form and subject. From the "gloominess and out-of nature incidents" of his earlier works, Brown consciously moved to "[substitute] moral causes and daily incidences in place of the prodigious or the singular" (qtd. in Clark, 181). Critics have accounted for this shift in several ways: as a working writer's gesture to a literary marketplace which was beginning to demand more and more sentimental fiction; as a reflection of the man's changed sensibilities as he draws nearer to establishing

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<sup>88</sup>Charles Brockden Brown, The Novels and Related Works of Charles Brockden Brown, Bicentennial Edition, 6 vols., gen. ed. Sydney J. Krause (Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 1977-1987), vol. 5: Clara Howard and Jane Talbot (1986) ed. with Historical Essay by Donald A. Ringe.

his own domestic life; even as a played-out artist's last reworking of a productive imaginative vein"<sup>9</sup> These domestic fictions are, as Sidney Krause has said, "the consensus losers" (Critical Essays 184) in the Brown canon. The most interesting things about Clara Howard and Jane Talbot in the context of this project are the way they present the image of the mother-matron who transmits wisdom and guidance, and their emphasis on representation as the medium of that transmission.

Clara Howard is a complicated exercise of conflicting theories of benevolence, working Godwinian philosophy inside a sentimental frame until the novel collapses on its own happy ending. The plot is a crazy-quilt of other Brown plots, including elements lifted apparently wholesale from Edgar Huntly (characters in both novels must deal with sums of money left them under ambiguous circumstances, for instance, and Edward Hartley in Clara Howard and Clithero in Edgar Huntly are both invited to marry their daughter of their benefactors). The novel is a collection of letters that detail the emotional and intellectual development of a

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<sup>9</sup> Steven Watts sees the last two novels as Brown's exploring "the cultural and ideological dimensions of Brown's early nineteenth-century adjustment" (133); Ringe sees them as "rather weak books that do not add much to Brown's reputation as a literary artist" (128); Norman Grabo reads them as further exercise in "[viewing] the complexities and ambiguities playing beneath obvious surfaces and conventions" (129); for a survey of other twentieth-century reaction to Clara Howard and Jane Talbot, see Donald A. Ringe, "Historical Essay," 459-474.

generative triangle built among Edward Hartley, his beloved Clara Howard, and one Mary Wilmot. Edward, a poor watchmaker's apprentice, had promised to marry Mary, even though he did not love her. With the reappearance of the benefactor of his childhood, Mr. Howard, our Edward becomes an "inseparable member of [Howard's] family, . . . in every respect . . . on the footing of [a] son" (51), a shelter which includes the suggestion of marriage to Howard's daughter, Clara. Edward falls in love with Clara, a girl who "[i]n her marriage choice . . . will . . . think only of the morals and understanding of the object" (51). Meanwhile, Mary mysteriously disappears, and, having learned of Edward's promise to Mary, Clara refuses to marry Edward because, thoroughgoing benevolist that she is, it is "her duty . . . to contend with selfish regards, and to judge of the feelings of others by her own" (71). Clara demands that Edward find and marry Mary, even though such an outcome would destroy her own chance at happiness (she loves Hartley, too) and there is no guarantee that, once found, Mary will be either available or willing to marry at all. When Edward does at last discover Mary and make his awkward proposal ("I came to offer you the vows of an [sic] husband. They are now offered, and received. You have no power to decline them. Let me then salute you as . . . my wife" (133)), Mary refuses him because she would defer to Clara's superior benevolence and besides, she is in love with

someone else. As at the end of any Shakespeare comedy, all the lovers finally pair up correctly.

The action, if there may be said to be any, of Clara Howard is framed by winter storms. The first casts Edward out of the Howard household orbit and into the search for Mary; the last, which Mary takes pains to describe, brings him back. Disruption of the natural world iterates disruption of the intellectual; with the image of the storm the novel announces a conflict of physical motion. Characters in motion (Mary, Edward) must be led by characters at rest (Clara, all the women Edward meets in his travels) to find a permanent site of their own. That permanent site is built around the domestic mother/mentor who sets the adventure in motion, directs its progress, and waits.

That female figure's power is signaled by its representations. Early in the novel, Edward Hartley lies recovering from a fever he incurred by rescuing a young girl from a coach overturned in the storm-stirred Schuylkill River (note de St. Mery). "I write to you by the hand of another," Edward tells Clara in Letter 8; "my good friend and nurse, Mrs. Aston, insists upon guiding the pen for me" (28). Later, Clara's father, who has been sent to check on poor Edward, reports further on Mrs. Aston as "a young lady, newly married, who resides in this neighborhood, . . . [who] has paid him the kindest and most anxious attention" (33).

In the most significant mention of this kindly nurse, in Letter 12 Edward directs Clara to "place the inclosed [sic] portrait in your bosom. It is that of my nurse (*italics* Brown), Mrs. Aston. She sends it to you, and desires me to tell you that she has received your letter and will answer it very shortly" (36). As I have argued earlier in this chapter, miniature portraits are significant in Brown's development of female characters, and the appearance of this miniature at the beginning of Edward's trial is no exception. First, giving over the physical performance of his letters to a settled matron and sending her likeness to his beloved Clara is a symbolic capitulation of Edward's autonomy and an indication that he is to be the object of transaction between the female forces at work in the narrative. Second, this mention of Mrs. Aston announces that a correspondence between Clara and her already exists, a correspondence occluded in the novel but nonetheless influential. Edward's experience is thus almost wholly dependent on women and their representations/stories to and about him. We never learn anything more about Mrs. Aston, but Edward's search for Mary leads him to several other women who hold (or withhold) information about her. Mrs. Valentine and Mrs. Bordley sheltered Mary for a time; Miss Hickman (an elderly servant) gives him the packet of letters Mary had written for him; his old master's widow, Mrs. Watkins, spreads a rumor about Mary she heard from Mrs.

Kalm; that same Mrs. Kalm dismisses the rumor. Clara's mother provides a history for Mary when she recounts, through her daughter's letters, the interrelationship of her family with the Wilmots. The development of Edward's character, or at least the success or failure of his mission to recover Mary, is a sequence of lessons from women.

Clara herself directs Edward's behavior through her letters, exhorting, praising, teasing, condemning him as he searches for Mary. While she may not exactly be "Brown's ideal woman" (182) as Clark would have it, she is articulate, strong-willed, and fervent in her attachment to benevolent ideals. We have seen her before, as Henrietta in Brown's Letters (above), for example, or in the more independent facets of Ormond's Constantia. Brown is still up to his old tricks of playing theories of behavior against one another, and in Clara he draws near absurdity. In her insistence that fulfillment of a no-longer-viable promise must supersede actuality, she is Brown's demonstration of the futility of action directed solely by abstract principle without the leavening of actual experience. As in the relationship between Ascha Fielding and Arthur Mervyn in Arthur Mervyn, by the end of the novel Clara can make clear her precise intentions of influencing her beloved's life. As she tells Edward in her last letter,

My maturer age and more cautious judgment shall be  
counsellors and guides to thy inexperienced youth.

While I love thee and cherish thee as a wife, I shall assume some of the prerogatives of an elder sister, and put my circumspection and forethought in the balance against they [sic] headlong confidence (147).

Clara never leaves her parents' home, yet she exerts a directive power over Edward, a power established and approved, in Stephen Watts' phrase, by "a sisterhood of moral teachers" (137).

The figures of Brown's writing women--members of the "sisterhood" whose written productions have discernible influence on their objects---dominate his last novel, Jane Talbot (1801). Jane Talbot is also an epistolary novel, and the triangle operating here is built among the young widow Jane, her suitor Henry Colden, and Jane's foster mother, Mrs. Fielder. The plot, for once, is easy to summarize. Like Sophia Courtland in Ormond, Jane and Mrs. Fielder in Jane Talbot stress conventional religious belief as a necessary prerequisite to happiness. Jane had married a man whose religious faith was "steadfast and rational, . . . produc[ing] honest, regular, sober, and consistent conduct" (224). Her foster mother, Mrs. Fielder, recommended and approved the match, but unfortunately, Talbot (whom we never meet) dies. Jane meets and falls in love with Colden. Through an act of written forgery, Jane is wrongly accused of an earlier adulterous relationship with him, and the

action centers on the characters' struggles to escape the condemnation of Mrs. Fielder and the terrifying, unwarranted loss of Jane's "reputation." After many letters back and forth among the three, Colden's discovery and confrontation of the forger, a long sea voyage,<sup>90</sup> and Mrs. Fielder's deathbed exoneration of him, Jane and Henry marry.

Harry Warfel found in Jane Talbot that the story of Jane and Henry "make[s] clear the necessity for a harmony of intellectually achieved religious beliefs to make a socially accepted, and, possibly, a happy marriage" (199). Donald Ringe sees Brown raising questions about "the strengths and limitations of reason and emotion as guides to life . . . [and] the value of religious faith as the foundation for proper behavior" (122). David Lee Clark marks the novel for "the philosophy of social emancipation working itself out in the lives" of the two lovers, and in a rare word of praise admits, "If inability to lay the novel aside before the last page is reached is a test of its power, then Jane Talbot will rank with novels otherwise admittedly superior" (183). Stephen Watts has discussed the novel's exploration of "the solidification of a bourgeois sensibility with its [the novel's] moral code based on restraint, gentility, and self-control" (217n). What is most pertinent about Jane Talbot in

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<sup>90</sup> Clark notes that in Jane Talbot "for the first time in American fiction . . . we find emphasis on the significance of the sea in shaping man's life and character" (185).



the context of my discussion is not its exercise of social philosophies, but the ways in which the acts of writing that occur in the narrative again demonstrate Brown's concentration on text and report as powerful controllers in the development of a self. It is a demonstration, furthermore, with a difference.

Jane Talbot is different from Brown's other novels in at least two ways. First, it sounds a note of moderation and balance for its main characters, offering a clear answer to the intellectual puzzles it builds. By novel's end, Jane is able to expand her strict religious principles to recognize, if not approve, the reformed rebel Colden's radical ideas; Colden, as he announces at the end of the novel, has "awakened from [his] dreams of doubt and misery, not to the cold and vague belief, but to the living and delightful consciousness of every tie that can bind man to his divine parent and judge" (427).<sup>91</sup> Second, the association for women between writing and self as it has operated in Brown's earlier novels changes significantly with Jane Talbot. The novel uses the element of written text to dramatize explicitly a division between genders, confirming in another, subtle way Jane Talbot's traditional label as "sentimental." For male characters written text presents challenges to their intellectual and public identities; for

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<sup>91</sup> see Ringe, 127.

females, what they write is a challenge to their sexual and domestic identities. The center of either conflict is the figure of Mrs. Fielder.

Mrs. Fielder's view of Colden is derived from letters he had written in his youth; like Edgar Huntly's Waldegrave, Colden is vulnerable to calumny springing from those letters. Mrs. Fielder judges Colden on "letters which had passed between [Colden and his friend Thomson], . . . in which every horrid and immoral tenet was defended by one and denied by the other" (227). She has mistakenly assumed his past history as the adherent of a "most fascinating book [Godwin's Political Justice] . . . which changed [him], in a moment," (228) from "a youth whose notions, on moral and religious topics, were, in some degree, unsettled" to "an adept in this accursed sophistry!" (227, 229). Before he can win Jane, Colden must refute his youthful letters and redeem his intellectual self before Mrs. Fielder's moral judgement. Jane sums up her own conflict when she writes to Colden of her mother's enmity toward him:

How does it fall out that the same object [Colden] is viewed by two observers with such opposite sensations. That what one hates the other should doat upon? two of the same sex: one cherished from infancy; reared; modelled; taught to think; feel, and even to speak, by the other: acting till now, and even now, acting in all respects, but one, in

inviolable harmony; that two such should jar and thwart each other, in a point, too, in respect to which, the whole tendency and scope of the daughter's education was to produce a fellow feeling with the mother. (301-302)

Jane, already a widow and therefore removed from the sentimental virgin's dilemma over proper marriage choice, still struggles here not with Mrs. Fielder, but with the self Jane has structured and internalized under Mrs. Fielder's maternal guidance. Colden's letters are the source of this division. In Ormond, Sophia Courtland resorted to the act of writing as prophylaxis for Constantia against the perceived threat of Ormond, while in Jane Talbot writing itself is threat.

Jane Talbot dramatizes the dangers of erroneous representation by making the main events of the plot dependent on a woman's physical act of setting hand to paper; her signature becomes synonymous with her self. That signature is furthermore associated with legitimate or illegitimate sexual economies. Jane must redeem her sexual identity in a battle against "false" writing, text either forged or obtained through deceit. This association appears in two instances. First, Jane is suborned by her profligate brother Frank to draw and sign checks on an aunt's legacy in order to resolve his debts. She at first refuses, but Frank bullies and cajoles her into the act, most successfully by

"appealing to [her] sisterly affection" (193). Jane agonizes over acting thus without discussing the matter with Mrs. Fielder, to whom she had always turned as "the arbiter and judge of [her] whole conduct" (190). She discovers her brother's treachery when she overhears loiterers in a watch shop discussing his successful exploitation of her. In one of the few passages of direct dialogue we can find in Brown's novels, the men comment on the check one of them holds:

Seeing is believing, I hope---producing a piece of paper. Why so it is. A check---but---what's that name?---let's see, stooping to examine the signature---`Jane Talbot' who the Devil is she? (194)

The men's comments further reveal that the money Jane gave her brother went not for an honest debt, but "all for trinkets and furniture bought by that prodigious jade, Mademoiselle Couteau" (194). Her signature has reappeared, let loose in the world to make its owner vulnerable to damaging rumor from any quarter. What is worse, Jane's money has gone to support her brother's illicit dalliances. With the knowledge that her signature and, by extension, her self have become the currency of gossip, Jane is concerned not about the "censure of the undistinguishing and undistinguished multitude," but what may occur "when the censure reaches those who love us. The charge engrosses

their attention, influences their happiness, and regulates their deportment towards us" (199). "Those who love us," of course, refers to Mrs. Fielder; the misuse of Jane's signature, like Colden's letters, threatens to disrupt the "inviolable harmony" (302) of mother and daughter. What Ormond's Sophia Courtland only imagined as a danger to her portrait has, as a signature, become a real injury for Jane. Furthermore, in Jane's reaction we see that the frightening, dangerous world Sophia inhabited has shrunk, for the injury is entirely domestic. Jane's emphasis on how her mother will respond to the rumor narrows the sphere of its consequence to the privacy of the mother/daughter bond and reinforces that bond's preeminence.

In a second instance of text endangering the female self, Jane's virtue is libelled and she is alienated from her mother as a result of sexually-motivated forgery. A Miss Jessup, obsessed with Jane's husband, had contrived to destroy that marriage by forging a letter from Jane to Henry and then sending it to Mrs. Fielder, in the hopes that "maternal authority [would] declare itself against" the relationship and "vex and distress" Jane (370). Shortly before Talbot's death, Miss Jessup, "much addicted to the pen. . . [and] always scribbling" (336), finds a letter lying unfinished on Jane's table; imitating Jane's handwriting, she completes it. Her additions indicate that Colden has spent the night with an unchaperoned Jane, and

Mrs. Fielder's belief in this libel fuels her animosity toward Colden. When Colden confronts Miss Jessup with his knowledge of her act (in a scene that reads today like well-written courtroom drama, complete with Ciceronian rhetoric and a brandished envelope), he demands that she confess her forgery to Mrs. Fielder immediately, by letter. Miss Jessup refuses, even as Colden offers to write the confession himself:

I will hold; I will guide your hand; I will write what you dictate. Will you put your hand to something which I will write this moment in your presence, and subject to your revision  
(352)

There is power in the act of the writing woman's hand, even if roles are reversed and Colden, in his desperation for written absolution by any means, becomes the amanuensis. Miss Jessup again refuses, but eventually does write a moving confession to Mrs. Fielder (Letter 48), which then, capriciously, she later repudiates. It is not until just before her own death that Miss Jessup at last admits the truth of her actions to Mrs. Fielder; with that, and Mrs. Fielder's examination of the letters that have passed between Jane and Henry, all is forgiven.

I have argued that bonds among Brown's male characters were an exploration of how the newly independent male self can develop an internal and conduct an external identity in

a fluid political, social, and economic world. Brown's women bring an already-developed individual self to the bonds they create, and their relationships are thematically different. The triangular relationship that I have described in the contest for self-authority and identity for Brown's male characters--mentors and proteges--is, among women, inverted. For a manipulative or a generative male mentor, I find an authoritative mother or mother figure. For a confused, unstable young man working to craft a personal identity, I find an already self-possessed young woman. That young woman exerts her own influence on her chosen object (male or female) from under the aegis of either a mother or an ideology. The difference between the product of male bonds and the product of female bonds is that through the acquisition of literacy, the former produces (or hints at producing) a unique, autonomous self ready to act, and the latter reduces an autonomous self to mere representation, a page or canvas always already inscribed. Men write themselves into individual identity; writing or represented, individual women disappear.

With his treatment of young men, their mentors, and the women who surround and direct those relationships, Brown implicates literary and artistic representation in order to raise questions and offer alternative views in the ongoing national discussion regarding self, citizenship, and the family. If we disengage Brown and his works from the genre

he transplanted or the successors he influenced and attempt to read his fiction as simply the productions of an imaginative, intelligent writer in and of his time and place, the concerns Brown articulated at the end of the eighteenth century show themselves ahistorically harmonious with the concerns existing at the end of the twentieth. Brown critic Paul Witherington, in a 1974 article, summarized those concerns thus: "What standards can we reasonably adopt to meet the challenges of a world with shifting forms and faithless humanity?"<sup>92</sup> Just as we face the Internet and an entropic society, so Brown's culture faced the advance of mechanized print and the task of codifying a new nation's general social and particularly family structure. The intent here is not to draw exact analogies between the printing press and the computer keyboard, or precise contrasts between the early Republic's valorized Republican mother and the deadbeat dads of the present; each age claims its own "shifting forms." We can try, though, to read Brown where he is: on the cusp of transition in intellectual thought between the established neo-classical and the incipient Romantic. In historicist terms, his fictions employ the structural vocabulary of his culture's dominant ideology to cast questions forward toward

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<sup>92</sup> Paul Witherington. "Charles Brockden Brown: A Bibliographic Essay." Early American Literature 9 1974, 164.



the emergent. Positing an analogy between the cultural concerns of early Republican America and those of the present makes a space for productive questioning toward our own emergent ideologies.

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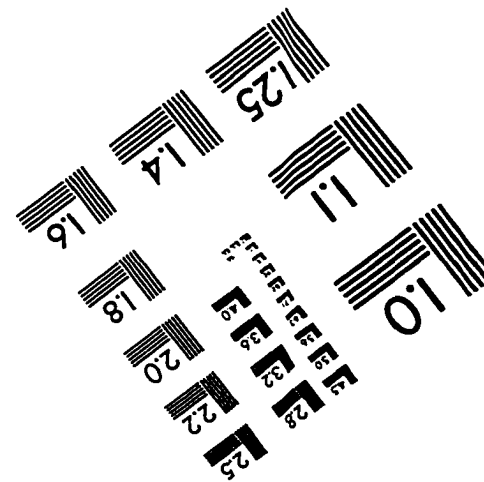
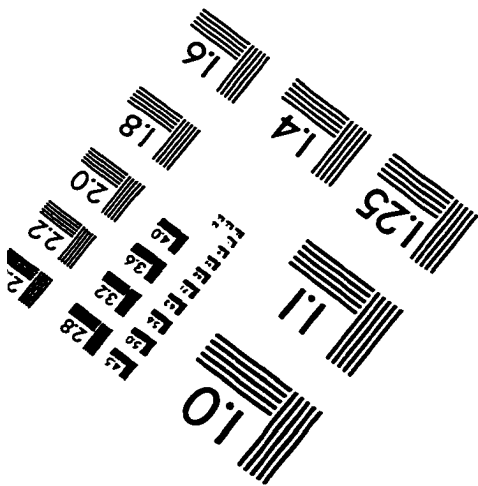
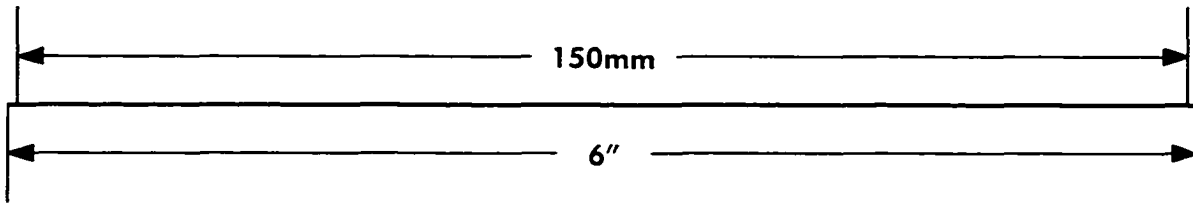
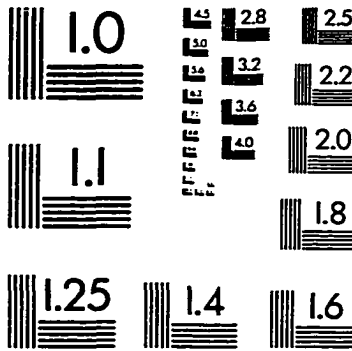
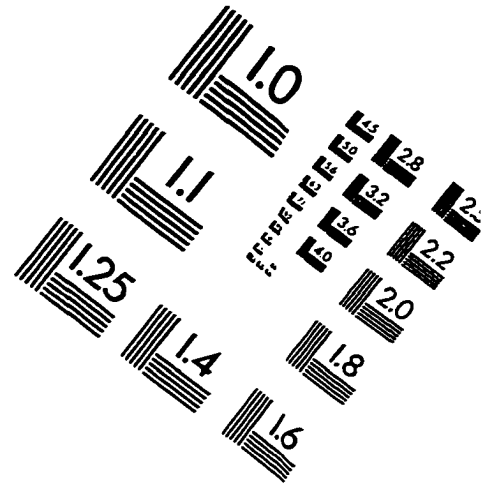
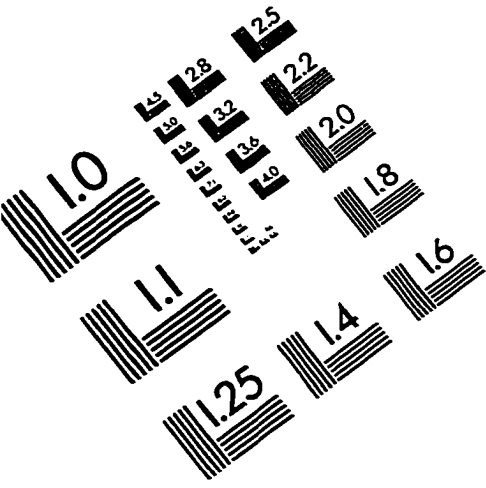


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