

11-2017

Socio-political contradictions in Brown's American Gothic: an important historical precursor to the conceptualization of ideology in modernity

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Recommended Citation

Schassler, Robert T., "Socio-political contradictions in Brown's American Gothic: an important historical precursor to the conceptualization of ideology in modernity" (2017). *College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences Theses and Dissertations*. 239. <http://via.library.depaul.edu/etd/239>

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Socio-Political Contradictions in Brown's American Gothic: an Important
Historical Precursor to the Conceptualization of Ideology in Modernity

A Thesis

Presented in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

November, 2017

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Introduction

Charles Brockden Brown's *American Gothic* is distinctly American in its dealings with Revolutionary-era culture and distinctly Gothic in its critique of the nascent cultural identity and political environment that would emerge. The way in which he gothicizes elements of the American socio-political identity through identifying cultural (during the revolution) and partisan (in post-revolution early America) contradictions is indicative of Brown's vast breadth of historical perspective and self-consciousness, which makes his works of gothic fiction anticipatory to many subsequent philosophies of the modern age. What facilitates Brown's work is the converging of present, "real" society—as he saw it—against the prevalent idealisms of his time, and when viewing American history "self-consciously," or objectively, he finds the present is ignorant of the past, and therefore contradictory to these idealisms in the underlying presence of repeated transgressions. Mark L. Kamrath paraphrases Brown's own historical notions,

"If the historian, writes Brown, is one who will write of 'the noises, the sights, and the smells that attend the eruption of Vesuvius, what is known by the testimony of our senses'—he or she depends on linking facts or events together by circumstance and the 'evidence of others,' evidence that can never be linked to certainty...the writer of history is a 'dealer. Not in certainties, but probabilities, and is therefore a romancer...In this respect, suggests Brown, the barrier between 'history' and the 'novel' as narrative forms evaporates and is permeable" (Kamrath 85).

Brown's gothic fiction makes use of history, specifically forgotten or ignored lineages of ideas and philosophies, in its ultimate critique of political ideology and the effect on the American individual. He achieves this most completely and directly in his final gothic work *Edgar Huntly*, but all of his works of gothic fiction leading up to the publication of *Edgar Huntly* play a distinct part in decoding Brown's enigmatic and ambiguous socio-political commentary.

He draws upon his own revolutionary experience, which is extremely unique—yet again, distinctly American considering historical context—first in the novel *Wieland* to connect, and then criticize, two main tenets of the transatlantic migration of seemingly opposite ideologies to America. These are radical German-Protestant theology and rationalistic political and socio-economic philosophies associated with the Enlightenment.¹ Brown creates an obvious duality between the two opposing spheres through the common thread of “seeking illumination,” or in other words, making assertions about ultimate truths—truths about man and society. He will include other cultural and ideological contradictions under this theme of contradictory dualism, such as the two respective spheres’ New-World optimism.² The Quakers and other radical Protestant “seeking” sects sought in America a haven, a place to start a fresh from corrupt European society.³ The Enlightened revolutionaries, people like Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine, expressed in their revolutionary politics the main points of liberty and freedom through republican rhetoric, all connoting traces of utopian sentiment—derived from the classical republican principle of civic virtue—regarding the society of the new America.⁴ Furthermore, he alludes to the fact that while both express these classical principles they nonetheless share an

¹ Charles Brockden Brown was born a Quaker in a prominent Philadelphia Quaker family. His lineage consisted of many Quaker “visionaries,” those religiously motivated towards seeking illumination through visions and divine intuition. However, his father, Elijah Brown, was motivated by mercantile capitalism and was renounced by the Philadelphia Quaker council. Peter Kafer successfully describes the dichotomy of these spheres of influence on Brown’s perspective of the Revolution in Chapter 4, *Sins of Fathers*, of his book, *Charles Brockden Brown’s Revolution and the Birth of the American Gothic*.

² Mark L. Kamrath writes about various revolutionary historical misconceptions about American identity. On one hand revolutionaries and patriots believed in the exceptionalism of American Republicanism and on the other the religiously motivated populations believed American to be a moral utopia, a divine providence.

³ Peter Kafer, Chapter 1, *Children of the Light*

⁴ Peter Kafer, Chapter 3, *Revolutionary Reverberations*, in reference to John Locke’s political philosophy and the idea of a realistic and feasible “fresh start.”

undercurrent of economic individualism. His perception of these contradictions—specific to America in the 1790s—drive Brown’s gothic fiction, which exposes the self-blindness of both Federalist and Jeffersonian Republicans, in whose apparently opposite visions of an American future he detects a common disabling force.

Scholarship on Charles Brockden Brown and the American Gothic seems to, indeed, be interested in his personal experiences portrayed throughout his novels and what insights he may have for us on pre- and post-revolution America, but it also seems to be missing a larger picture. This larger picture is that an unlikely kinship can be traced through certain veins of Marxist ideological theory to its early progenitor in Antione Destutt de Tracy in the time of the French Revolution. Brown’s work predates Tracy’s, but evidence of a strong Trans-Atlantic connection between European and American post-revolution socio-politics is well established. So even if Brown was not directly influenced by Tracy, the latter’s work on ideology has clear parallels to some of Brown’s gothic allusions, and serves as a convenient theoretical point for making sense of the issues of ideology and contradiction that Brown was weaving into his gothic plotlines.

If the essence of Gothicism is a sense of cultural subversion, Brown’s work realizes this through a clear combination of juxtapositions and contradictions in American culture. Amid works that mostly express either the optimism of Jefferson’s agrarian utopia or the pessimism towards the “American Experiment” taken up by Federalists in support of their arguments of more traditionally European centralized government and emphasis on strong international fronts that anticipates and aligns with the coming ages of European imperialism and colonialism, Charles Brockden Brown is among the few to view American history objectively and self-consciously, challenging these emerging narratives and becoming critical of the American

democratic process' proneness to manipulation.¹ Perhaps the most direct allusion to his historical stance is in the novel *Edgar Huntly*, after Clithero tells Edgar Huntly his tale of accidental murder and mishaps, he says, referring to the gothic sublimity of the American wilderness, "This scene is adapted to my temper. Its mountainous asperities supply me with images of desolation and seclusion, and its headlong streams lull me into temporary forgetfulness of mankind" (Brown 66). Furthermore, Edgar Huntly responds to his story, "I had heard a tale which apparently related scenes and persons far distant...what should hinder but that the death of my friend was, in a like manner, an act of momentary insanity and originated in a like spirit of mistaken benevolence." In light of his critical historical stance, the words "temporary forgetfulness of mankind" and "insanity originating in a spirit of mistaken benevolence" carry a particular weight of foreboding, especially in the context of *Edgar Huntly* in which the two murder arcs echo each other from across the sea. It is clear that Brockden Brown means to invoke certain integral aspects of the American political unconscious.

Brown's ideas regarding culture and politics can be traced first through his Quaker origins which instilled in him the drive to search for ultimate truth, then to his formative years during and after the American Revolution when he would witness American identity and culture founded on the acceptance of various false truths.² He, therefore, often places characters representing his familial history in a larger historical environment where transatlantic political

¹ Mark L. Kamrath's introduction to, the *Historicism of Charles Brockden Brown*, arguing the significance of Brown's work lies in his aptitude as historian.

² This is the point at which Marxist theory will become applicable as the recognition of "false

truths" for Brown, to the modern reader amounts to ideals and ideology masking the capitalist divisions occurring between social groups

philosophy can be criticized through obvious congruency to Protestant Mysticism—as a main tenet of enlightened philosophy was to disassociate philosophy from theology.¹ Later, his membership in the “Friendly Society” would introduce him to Godwinian theory, which indulged his political nihilism while still preserving his religiously inspired commitment to truth.

These aforementioned false truths of revolutionary republicanism came to be common among Federalist criticism of the revolutionary popularity of Jefferson, yet Brown is no clear Federalist. He is critical of both prominent spheres—the Jeffersonian model for its continuation of the utopian falsity, and the Federalist one for not acknowledging its lineage and position of power to those condemned revolutionary “false truths”—and the ultimate, subtle insinuation being a sense of latent economic individualism and ideological manipulation.

Again, drawing on his own revolutionary experience, and most explicitly displayed in his work *Arthur Mervyn*, Brown seems to be aligning himself with Godwinian rationalism expressed in William Godwin’s *Political Justice*, as was the case with many small intellectual clubs springing up among American elites². Certainly Brown, in his noting of American tendency towards ignorance of dualistic ideological contradictions, seems to be invoking the Godwinian claim that spheres of influence—most specifically those of governing bodies—are in themselves the cause of socially inherent and incentivized corruption through the manufactured environment of individual human competition.³ While this is perhaps a fine assertion in the case of Brown’s early novels, his later works show deeper and more culturally immersive subversion tactics. For

¹ William Turner’s *History of Philosophy*, Chapter 53, *Systems of Political Philosophy*

² Peter Kafer, Chapter 5, *The Anti-Godwin*, before explaining Brown’s theoretical split from Godwinian rationalism, Kafer describes the initial enthusiasm

for it, which resulted in Brown authoring *Arthur Mervyn*.

³ William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Book III: *Principles of Government*

he recognizes Godwin's radical rationalism as yet another ideology and as such a sphere of influence in it of itself. Most importantly, however, is that Brown recognizes Godwin's theoretical anarchy to be essentially as naively optimistic and idealistic as the Enlightened-era schools it had radicalized from.¹ Again, Federalist pessimism stands in clear opposition, a seemingly attractive school of thought for Brown in terms of denying foolish optimism, but given the Federalist counter-mission of centralization and international prowess, it seems the institutional mistrust of Godwin resonates with Brown, even if his anarchic optimism does not. It appears Brown's real issue in his recognition of these blind contradictions with Godwin, the Protestant migration, and with the bipartisan system, then becomes an issue of questioning that most basic ideal of truth, instilled in him from his Quaker youth by the idealized search for illumination. Consequently, he criticizes through gothic fiction but does little to offer in way of a solution himself, as the "truth," in Brown's American Gothic is always shrouded and those characters adhering to truths, almost without exception, are revealed to be severely misguided.

Brown's later works clearly evince his disillusionment with Godwinian theory. *Ormond*, for example, as Peter Kafer puts it, "is about post-Revolutionary Philadelphia society and, in particular, about what an unfeeling, heartless place it was for those truly in need. It is about divergence between rhetoric and reality, between a societies' stated moral codes and the actual way people behave. It's about hypocrisy" (Kafer 164). A Marxist approach to his later works reveal Brown to be expressing similar sentiments to Louis Althusser's work on Ideology. The thread of ideological recognition and subversion in Brown's work, contextualized through

¹ Peter Kafer notes in Chapter 5, The Anti-Godwin, that Brown would eventually come to portray his Godwinian characters, Ludloe and Ormond, as

condemning of institutions except when they serve their individual means.

Tracy's "Ideology," can be applied specifically to his struggle with the concept of truth. Indeed, Althusser defines ideology as, "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence,"¹ and so Brown, being a writer, historian, and political philosopher in one of the most important and tumultuous cities of post-revolution America, in terms of its capitalist well-being—Philadelphia—while being also a man born into a family of Quaker "visionaries," is in many ways the most likely man to come to a similar realization or exasperation with ideologies.

One could say the fracturing of this truthful hope begins with his understanding of the transatlantic movement of ideas—for Brown this is radical Protestantism and Enlightened Political Philosophy—informing what would become American philosophical identity. The two are opposites—both professing an ideological truth—and yet seem to operate in the turning cogs of the American machine cooperatively. And so, from one cultural extreme to another, from the radical spiritualism of the Quakers to the radical rationalism of Godwinian philosophy, Brown uncovers a cultural discord of unwitting dualities among American revolutionary and post-revolutionary society. What his American Gothic ultimately suggests is an intellectual exasperation with ideologies purporting to be ultimate truths, and his novels, often described as ambiguous and complex, with uncertain plots and misleading information, are therefore obvious reactions to the naiveté of ultimate truths, especially regarding society and politics. The intimations that embody the socio-political subtext of Brown's work hold far greater significance by undermining the validity of ideals that would legitimize certain American mythologies—such

¹ *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, Norton Anthology Of Theory and Criticism

as American Exceptionalism contained both in the Jeffersonian promise of internal prosperity and in the opposing Federalist ideal of America as a strong international power.

The Marxists, Lukács and Althusser tackle this issue of contradiction vs. cooperation, duality vs. dichotomy, with their critique of the capitalist usage of ideology. Brown's work lines up with a similar take, in particular, of the strong ideological holds on American's individuality.¹ It makes sense, in the vein of Gothic subversion, then, that Brown aligns with the later Marxists in terms of ideology as his American Gothic deals with subverting the pseudo-utopian sentiments of nascent capitalism in a burgeoning, post-revolution America, and the consequent blind contradictions of the bipartisan political system.

Here it may be conceptually useful to refer to the example of Henry St. John, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke, as an English political philosopher whose ideas were widely influential in establishing the republican zeal of American revolutionaries. John Adams *and* Thomas Jefferson are said to have been influenced by his staunch opposition to corruption, but objectively what is at the heart of Bolingbroke's work is the notion that corruption in English society spawned from the financial revolution and the increased emphasis and development of banking and credit.² Bolingbroke saw England's Augustan Age after the social change of the financial revolution as "the demise of what he considered to have been the traditional political and social structure firmly entrenched since the days of the Tudors" (Kramnick 5). The Federalists would use this as support for their return to tradition and pessimism in the way of the radical republican experiment, but historically, they are again based in contradiction as Bolingbroke viewed the

¹ Althusser states in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, that ideology functions by recruiting or "interpellating" the individual, thus transforming them into subjects

² *Bolingbroke and his Circle* by Isaac Kramnick, introduction: *Bolingbroke, Political Thought, and the Augustan Age*

new era of socio-politics in England as “politics of administration and manipulation that contributed generously to the total degradation of public life...” (Kramnick 6). The Brownian assumption is that the Federalist model truly resembles this Augustan age of financial motivation of “behind the scenes manipulation of interests and ambitions,” but joined with its opposition in Bolingbroke’s ideal of “noble gentlemen who win support by virtue of their eloquence and the compelling aesthetic force of their rhetoric...in order to perform the governmental roles of statecraft properly, one had to be properly bred” (Kramnick 6), with the Federalist ideal of a political aristocracy. It is appropriate in this way, then, that the progenitor of the American Gothic is among few contemporaries to adopt an objective and subsequently critical view of American history, As Lukács says,

“A real popular revolution never breaks out as a result of a single, isolated social contradiction. The objective-historical period preparatory to revolution is filled with a whole number of tragic contradictions in life itself. The maturing of the revolution then shows with increasing clarity the objective connection between these isolatedly occurring contradictions...and in some ways certain social contradictions can continue unresolved even after a revolution or, indeed, emerge strengthened and heightened as a result of the revolution” (Lukács 227).

For Brown, with regard to his personal experience and the intellectual environment of his time, this is not merely a critique of contemporary society but of the realization that “truth” and its subsequent value systems are *useful* to spheres of influence. This informs his critique of the political environment in the 1790s, as one that involved using theories of the advancement of the common citizen to ultimately serve an underlying reality of individualistic-capitalism. As Lukács mentions certain social contradictions continuing after a revolution, perhaps even

strengthened or heightened, allusions of ideological suspicion in Brown's work seem to almost anticipate the climate of France after its revolution and Napoleon's reinstatement of European imperialism as simply a more obvious example of these social contradictions emerging strengthened, and mirroring the political environment of America after *its* revolution. The gothicizing of the American political environment is completed with the eerie sense the reader observes in the plot of Brown's last gothic work, *Edgar Huntly*; the extremely coincidental, almost supernatural, aligning of random events pertaining to Edgar's perspective of social relations can be read as a proto-Marxist take on ideology as the insights from his experience connotes the distinct notion of uncertain manipulation of some kind.

Brown's gothic tactics, beginning in *Wieland* and being completed in *Edgar Huntly*, allow him to include the divine providence and moral rigidity of radical Protestantism; the Jeffersonian Republican model of an agricultural utopia; the shades of more traditional, European-mercantile traits shown by the post-Revolutionary Federalist government; and even the ideas of instinctual human compassion as it exists outside of society asserted by radical Godwinian rationalism, in a total subversive representation of American ideological failure. Played out among Brown's seemingly obscure representative communities, they all prove fatally unworkable at the expense of those citizens whose advancement they were meant to promote.

Part 1: *Wieland*, and Charles Brockden Brown's Metahistorical Narrative

Charles Brown and his American Gothic are in opposition to a wave of realism that arose with the early novel and is associated with the certain elements of the radical Enlightenment. Jonathan Israel notes the psychological roots of radical thought in the Enlightenment lay in pride, the desire to be independent of the Church and of others, and the need for a philosophical screen

of justification.¹ These early American works, often derivative of the preceding popularity of the epistolary novel, were works of fiction that attempted to mirror reality.² America's development is highly connected to enlightened thoughts and its history of tradition does not, at first, seem to lend itself to the Gothic genre as Europe's does. In *Development of American Romance*, David Michael Bell says, "early American values saw reading and writing imaginative fiction as dangerous to society" (Bell 121), and therefore, as gothic works generally invoke traditional and cultural historical elements it is interesting then that the American gothic as a newly formed entity must look to some kind of past, and Brown objectively locates it in America's European roots,³ and in the questioning of prevalent rationality or assumptive reality.

Brown's first work to be applicable to the genre of the American Gothic is *Wieland; or The Transformation, An American Tale* (1798). In *Wieland*, he begins his dissection of the two formative ideologies of Protestant mysticism and enlightened political philosophy. Through the guise of a family history of migration from "old" to "new" worlds, he alludes to American history, cleverly incorporating the familial symbolism in an act of joining the two opposing ideologies, similarly related by a kind of family history. In identifying these points, Brown begins to question the legitimacy of the burgeoning "American Identity,"—be it Federalist or Jeffersonian, both could be said to be based in different approaches to materialism and individual capitalism in the 1790s—by reminding readers of the earlier version of American ideology (classical republicanism unconsciously supported by Protestant "illumination" theology) that existed before and during the revolution, and how it was so easily overwritten. He does so by

¹ Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, Chapter 3, *Society, Institutions, Revolution*

² Ian Watt, *Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*, from *Theory of the Novel*

³ This connects Brown's Gothicism to his German Protestant heritage; the Trans-Atlantic migration of Protestant sects is expanded upon in Chapter 4, *Sins of Fathers*, of Kafer's work

being among the first American writers to view American history, as Mark L. Kamrath puts it, “self-consciously.”

Simply put, in *Wieland*, Brown probes the ultimate truths being professed by both revolutionary ideologies, using similar language (“illumination”), to describe the palpability of their sentiments to a utopian “fresh start” in the New World and identify these certain integral “Old World” ties and kinship to one another.¹ Viewing history self-consciously for Brown thus is a process of tracing lineages of thought and the familial histories of ideas; both connote an ultimate idealism of America. All the while the truth of the matter, remains that this very idealism is grounded in a contradiction of two opposing truths. The two coexist in a cooperative duality, and therefore their opposition is contradictory. This neat, gothic construct can then be viewed itself as a symbol or representation, used in the broader historical allusion of the different political stances and immediate goals of the two emergent parties of late eighteenth century.

Theodore Wieland believes in the professed certainty of things, and he knowingly champions both Protestant mysticism and enlightened political philosophies while viewing them separately. He ultimately ignores that he is shaped by both, so he represents them dichotomously. His sister Clara, the novel’s narrator, is aware of both rational and superstitious reactions available to her when experiencing unexplainable events but is forever in doubt. In many ways, her character is the most confusing to deal with because she can be seen as representing different sentiments of this ideological allusion at different times, but what can indeed be safely said of her is that she is unsure of even her own self—her own mind and senses—due to an

¹ Brown, at times, seems to vaguely ponder theoretical territory later expounded upon by Roland Barthes, in *Mythologies*, as he constructs the post-

structuralist idea of all spheres of Western thought being incorporated together in a self-serving system of meaning

understanding of her family's history and perhaps a suppressed but unrelenting anxiety towards it.

It is Charles Brockden Brown's unique experience with regards to various aspects of early American society and thought that makes him the perfect writer for the first American Gothic, but it is his competence as a historian that informs his initial recognition of contradiction. It is the understanding of his family history and the history of revolutionary sparks, an understanding of the Trans-Atlantic movement of ideas. Brown is "historically self-conscious," because his gothic fiction, particularly the dark implications of familial lineage included within *Wieland*, spearheads criticism, "challenging metanarratives about historical objectivity...including the manipulation of democratic processes for political purposes and power" (Kamrath xiv).¹

In *Wieland*, he does this by joining the history of Protestant mysticism and its migration with his own familial history, resulting in his gothic tale, driven by the heavily connotative "sins of the father" theme. Indeed, Peter Kafer notes that at the time of the Elder Wieland's demise, Clara Wieland would have been the same age as Brown when his own father was exiled from Philadelphia. However, the stronger allusion is to his Quaker lineage and its place in the history of the migration of radical Protestant theology.

William Turner in his *History of Philosophy*, said that the, "fullest expression of all mystical tendencies of Protestantism can be found in the writing of Jakob Boehme" (Turner 439). Boehme's work during majority of the eighteenth century would have been rarely read, other than by occultists, but the disdain of being linked with Boehme at the time, the irrationality

¹ Mark L. Kamrath, *The Historicism of Charles Brockden Brown, Part 1: Remembering the Past*

described of his work, is exactly the kind of deep cultural contradiction that Brown's gothic invokes and reflects onto reality. Boehme, writing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, taught of the *eternal dualism* of God, that all is known by its opposite.¹ As Turner puts it, "without evil there would be no revelation of God" (Turner 439), and in *The Signature of All Things*, Boehme himself states, "Time past, present, and to come, as also depth and height, near and afar off, are all one in God, one comprehensibility."² This idea of sustaining opposites under a single spiritual umbrella is in significant opposition to many of his contemporaries and successors who defined the Protestant spirit by its opposition to scholasticism. Historically speaking at least, Boehme is right to view the spheres of piety and intellectualism as deeply related because scholasticism can be associated with the medieval church's efforts in the intellectual and more acute avenues of theology and traced to the early Enlightenment thinkers such as Descartes.³

In *The Passion of the Western Mind*, Richard Tarnas indeed says, "Descartes's natural light of the human reason was the direct and half-secularized inheritor of that medieval conception" (Tarnas 299), and notes that the early players of the scientific revolution all spoke of their work "in terms conspicuously redolent of religious illumination" (Tarnas 299).

Furthermore, Tarnas notes of the Protestant movement after Boehme, that

"Intellectually sensitive Christians attempted to reinterpret and modify their religious understanding to accommodate a universe drastically different from that of the ancient and medieval cosmology...yet the deeply rooted principles of Christian belief could

¹ Richard Tarnas states that Jakob Boehme was part of a wave of Rhineland "mystics" whose theology was mainly grounded in spiritual autonomy, the de-emphasizing of institutional authority and suggesting the world is "suffused with the divine" and therefore no church or even sect should be necessary.

²Jakob Boehme, *the Signature of all Things*, Part XV: *Of the great Mystery in Good and Evil*

³ Richard Tarnas, *The Scholastic Awakening and The Triumph of Secularism*

scarcely be negated altogether. Thus arose, the psychological necessity of a double-truth universe. Reason and faith came to be seen as pertaining to different realms” (Tarnas 302).

Obviously in this invoking of historical lineage, Brown reveals that at the very least he means to question realms of culturally upheld truths regarding the separation and non-compatibility of certain ideas.

Jakob Boehme once said “A Christian is of no sect.”¹ This rhetoric clearly shared the anti-institutional sentiment of Protestantism in general but can be a hypocritical critique in hindsight when considering the Protestant migration to America had yielded numerous sects. The character of the Elder Wieland choosing no sect, being described even as a perfectionist in this way, perhaps alludes to this. Boehme also spoke of the principle of life, what he called the “divine fire,”² something that is thoroughly transmogrified by the sects of Germany, England, and the Netherlands, in the Trans-Atlantic migration of radical Protestantism, as in the Quakers’ idea of divine illumination. The symbols of divine fire and illumination appear center-stage (perhaps in a form more appropriate to the original) in Brown’s works of American Gothic. Brown makes the setting of *Wieland*—the rural “Mettingen”—extremely reminiscent of the community that settled in Germantown, near Philadelphia, known as “the Hermits of Wisshacken.” Their spiritual leader, one Johann Kelpius, began his journey in Germany, and similar to the Elder Wieland was influenced by the Camisard sect, and the Camisards were interested in the interpretation of Jakob Boehme’s doctrines.³ In Germantown, also reflecting the

¹ As quoted by William Turner, Chapter 52, *Protestant Mysticism*

² William Turner, in, *History of Philosophy*, chapter 52, *Protestant Mysticism*, provides detailed description of Boehme’s doctrine specifically,

suggesting his work to be generally indicative of the early Protestant Lay Mysticism of Europe

³ William Turner *History of Philosophy*, chapter 52, *Protestant Mysticism*

actions of the Elder Wieland, the hermits built a temple and practiced “contemplative solitude,” aimed at bringing them toward what Kelpius called—quite literally echoing Boehme—the “spiritual fire.”¹ Considering then, that the Elder Wieland suffers death by mysterious spontaneous combustion, his similarity to the Hermits, yet lack of identifying sect is to be considered alongside the doctrines of Boehme. For, if the purest essence of the soul is the divine fire then it is reasonable to view the Elder Wieland’s fate as a kind of success for him, knowingly or not, it was what he had always been in search of. Brown uses this historical lineage to connect his Protestant background with political and socio-economic theories of the Enlightenment, particularly the implications of a suggested purposeful latent quality to the anti-institutionalism shared by radical Protestant sects and revolutionary republicanism, through the language of forgotten early Protestant mystics like Boehme.

It is reasonable to notice first the interwoven themes of knowledge and “illumination,” in the plot of *Wieland*, yet Brown appears to prod deeper towards Boehme’s doctrines of eternal dualism and the nature of opposites to invoke contradiction in subsequent understandings of truth and illumination. For, the growing trans-Atlantic movement of political philosophy develops from the early scientific revolutionaries like Bacon, Newton, and Descartes who, according to Turner, worked under the conceptual umbrella of “illumination,” and Descartes’s philosophical work on rationality, in particular, expressed distrust of the senses.² Subsequently, as the development of Protestant radicalism would reject notions of intellectualism, more modern brands of secular philosophy contributed to the widening of this gap with the spiritual, “the growing sense of political individuality and the gradual dwindling of the ideal of a universal

¹ Peter Kafer, Chapter 4, *Sins of Fathers*

² William Turner, Chapter 51, *the Scientific Movement*. As Boehme of the early Protestant Mystics did not condemn scholasticism like his

contemporaries, the early scientific, rationalists, pre-dating the Enlightenment did not disallow expressions of spirituality in their philosophic reasoning

Christian Empire were most important factors in the change from ancient to modern modes of thought” (Turner 443). The subsequent result that manifests in the emergent political philosophy of the Enlightenment is a trace of opposition to its Cartesian predecessor, most notably found in the work of Thomas Hobbes. The work of Hobbes is clearly irrelevant to the political environment of the Revolution in all of its specifics, but the general notions of the power of human empiricism is a facet that perseveres, and of which Turner defines in terms starkly contrasting Descartes, “neither is there in human knowledge any element superior to the sense” (Turner 444), thus suggesting a certain intellectual infallibility that Brown will recognize and criticize as it takes shape in America.¹

One particularly useful passage for these purposes is when Pleyel, Catherine, and Clara hear Theodore’s explanation after hearing the first mysterious voice outside the temple of his father’s death. All three individual responses are given in some suggestive detail,

“It was heard by us with different emotions; Pleyel did not scruple to regard the whole as a deception of the senses...Catherine was endowed with an uncommon portion of good sense but her mind was accessible on this quarter to wonder and panic...As to myself, my attention was engaged by this occurrence. I could not fail to perceive a shadowy resemblance between it and my father’s death” (Brown 34).

Pleyel clearly thinks himself a rationalist of the Enlightenment and speaks accordingly. Catherine, for all her good qualities, reacts by her mystical and religious training as Pleyel does his perceived rationalism.² Clara is depicted as both rational and superstitious, and she is so both simultaneously and in compatibility. One could say her suspicion is superstitious by denying a

¹ This intellectual infallibility ultimately can be said to reveal to Brown the social mechanics of ideology, and invoke suspicion of political bipartisanship.

² Pleyel perceives himself to be rationalist because he repeats Cartesian sentiments by “mistrusting the

sense” but he is mistakenly doing so. He only makes this conclusion because it is the most immediately apparent. He employs logic in this sense yet does no logical investigation.

culturally agreed upon pretense for how reality works, but that her arrival at suspicion is rational because she makes the historical connection to the Elder Wieland as a lingering, evident notion that cannot be ignored for the sake of false peace of mind.

When she continues, “I could not deny that the event was miraculous and yet I was invincibly averse to that method of solution,” one may begin to think she will join Pleyel in conventional rationalism, perhaps attributing the familial history to some predisposition to mental instability, but she stifles this assumption when she follows up with Theodore alone in the temple itself and says to him, “how almost palpable is this dark; yet a ray from above would dispel it...But why must the Divine Will address its precepts to the eye!” (Brown 34). Early on, it is apparent that Clara is no reliable narrator in the traditional sense of perspective and reality, but her confused state of opposing ideas and influences, the way her mind reacts to and reasons with the supernatural events of the story is significant; especially so when hearkening back to the familial history as an allusion because Clara is a Wieland alongside Theodore. Furthermore, her chosen words of, “why must the Divine Will address its precepts to the eye,” uses religious language to connote similar themes as the Cartesian mistrust of the senses that Pleyel was assumptively using in his assertion that the most rational explanation for this auditory phantom is that Theodore’s senses were deceived. It also subverts Pleyel’s words as he speaks of the deceptions of someone else’s senses while maintaining a steadfast position of rationalism for himself, whereas a more accurate reading of Descartes would lead him to consider the possibility of Theodore’s voices being real because of a mistrust of the foundation of that assumptive position of rationalism.

Ultimately Clara's characterization mirrors Brown's "metahistoricism."¹ She says finally of the occurrence of the first voice, "its effect on my brother's imagination was of chief moment, all that was desirable was that it should be regarded by him with indifference" (Brown 33), making the point that her personification of the precarious combination of mysticism and rationalism is the lens by which the Wieland history is correctly read by her instincts. This makes her statement about the ideal circumstance being the indifference of the present Wieland, to be both ominously prophetic and clearly sensible.

Brown has thus shown that the Wieland lineage represents the history of the migration of Protestant mysticism to America and the place that it found there, while also showing the newest Wieland generation, the first to be born American, to be representative of its place in the formation of ideas that would shape an American identity.² Regarding this aspect of Brown's weaving of historical allusions through lineage and abstracted kinship, Kamrath argues, in the sense of the two spheres in question, "he [Brown] frequently engages in religious and familial history as a means of responding to political debates about the separation of Church and State in governance," and is often characterized by his, "willingness to stage—and then theoretically interrogate—the dynamics of political power and cultural hegemony" (Kamrath xviii). This assertion of extrapolating the familial history and its obvious connections to Protestant theological history outwards to include the political and cultural spheres, begins to take shape at the beginning of the following chapter, after "some time had elapsed" since the last mysterious event. Pleyel, in the aforementioned time lapse, had been away and, "On his return from Europe,

¹ Mark L. Kamrath uses this term in the *Historicism of Charles Brockden Brown* to refer to his use of the novel as a platform for "reflecting more fully on the meaning and function of history—and historical truth."

² In Chapter 4, *Sins of Fathers*, Peter Kafer notes that the two Wielands are quite similar, except that "where the father searched Camisard tracts for 'the light,' Theodore parses Cicero."

brought information of considerable importance to my brother. My ancestors were noble Saxons and possessed large domains in Lustia. The Prussian Wars had destroyed those persons whose right to these estates precluded my brothers” (Brown 35). The obvious connection to Old World imperialism is to be noted but what’s more interesting is Theodore’s response. He is against Pleyel’s proposal that he leave for Germany to claim his inheritance and when Pleyel presses with claims about the privilege of wealth and rank, resoundingly counters, “no spot on the globe enjoys equal security and liberty to that I at present inhabit” (Brown 36).¹ He uses specific rhetoric of American revolutionaries to indicate, perhaps, the more specific location of Mettingen itself, which is indicative of radical Protestant “seeking” sects, such as Quakers, often settling the frontier wilderness while simultaneously carrying the echo of Jefferson’s Monticello.² Keeping in mind the thematic grounding of Brown’s gothic fiction, criticizing the state of socio-politics in the 1790s, *Wieland’s* function seems to aim specifically at Jeffersonian Old World suspicion.

Theodore’s language carries two ideological sentiments, first the classical republican principle of civic humanism and government devotion to promoting the public good.³ Ironically, this Jeffersonian model aims at explicitly rejecting tyrannical monarchical notions that would have been found in the apologetic work of Hobbes, but shares a similar and unsettling implication with these condemned Hobbsean theories. That is, the state asking such faith of the citizen that it, “carries the doctrine of state absolutism to the extreme of subjecting even conscience” (Turner 444).⁴ Second, the Protestant idea of seeking illumination in the wilderness,

¹ Francis Canavan writes in the Third Edition of *History of Political Philosophy* that representative government was staunchly considered the only legitimate form of government because of the assumption that if a collection of individuals originally contracted among themselves to form a government, that meant individual men had a right to govern themselves

² Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* and *History of Philosophy*

³ Steven Watts, *Masks, Morals, and the Market: American Literature and Early Capitalist Culture*

⁴ *History of Philosophy*, Chapter 53, William Turner’s thoughts on the Doctrines of Thomas Hobbes

supposedly away from corruption—both of these sentiments find a post-revolutionary home within ideals of the Jeffersonian commercial agrarian society.

This is an appropriate statement, then, for the man who adorned his father's temple of Protestant mysticism with a bust of Cicero, the literal face of classical republicanism. Both ideologies require a civic self-sacrifice for an idea of public good, and the historical placement of the story invokes a revolutionary mindset that called for the adoption of some enlightened political thought which tended towards absolutes and implied individualism in the frame of classical republicanism, for Thomas Paine says of the principles of the republic, "All great laws of society are laws of nature... They are followed and obeyed, because it is the interest of the parties so to do" (Strauss 680). Paine's particular intimation is obviously similar to the religious motivation of blind faith believed to be assuring of salvation, but what's more, Theodore does not recall the story of Roman, Ciceronian Republicanism; on this, Linda K. Kerber says, "the usefulness of the Roman example was blunted by the fact that Romans had transmuted republican precedent into Caesarian autocracy" (Kerber 3).¹ The details of the Republic's fall therefore adds to the weight of the historical allusion to American politics through the autocracy of dualistic idealisms in Theodore's mind, and the fact that Cicero becomes popular for his works of tireless promotion of the republic against Caesarian autocracy but is ultimately martyred defending the cause of the latter.

Referring to Kamrath's statement about Brown's specific use of familial history, it is interesting how the two Wielands, the two recipients of the family history and the accompanying "chimeras of the brain" (as Clara puts it, once again including herself in the line of what she

¹ Linda K. Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, Chapter 1: *The Federalist Era as an Augustan Age*

ultimately opposes and subverts), each represent the other's foil. This is meant in the sense that Clara refers unreliability unto herself and unwittingly embodies a working dualism between the two expressions of "illumination," while Theodore is always certain of himself—certain that he correct is in his early debate with Pleyel about certain points of Latin grammar in his Ciceronian texts, which leads him to venture to the temple for a confirming source and thus to the spot where he hears the first voice, and certain when he kills his family that it was God's direct instruction to do so. He champions both spheres separately, and therefore in a blind contradiction.

As Peter Kafer notes of the relationship between the greater American revolution, inspired by republicanism and enlightened political philosophy and the "Philadelphia Revolution," inspired by religious fervor, both were founded on the Lockean spirit of a "fresh start."¹ Clara in her internal struggle to process her perceived reality says, "The will is the tool of the understanding, which must fashion its conclusions on the notices of the sense. If the sense be depraved, it is impossible to calculate the evils that may flow from the consequent deductions of the understanding" (Brown 73). Harkening to the ideals of classical republicanism which facilitates utopian sentiment towards migration to America and ultimately revolution—this set of ideas which defined virtue as a willingness to put the public good before private gain and emphasized a representative government committed to such endeavors²—Clara's anxiety about "senses depraved," is subtly hinting at that operation of said representative government. Metaphorically speaking, if the classical model is believed and citizens lead lives of civic virtue and entrust representation to political entities, such entities become the "senses" of the public

¹ Kafer, Chapter 4, *Sins of Fathers*

²Steven Watts, *Masks, Morals, and the Market: American Literature and Early Capitalist Culture*

and if they are indeed operating by latent individualistic influence then the “senses” can indeed be described as depraved. Again, the metahistorical background of the 1790s enters the picture in that it appears Brown is portraying it in subversive contrast to revolutionary-era classical republicanism regarding the function, duty, and direction of representative entities.

The historical allusion can be completed with a bit more insight from the work of Linda K. Kerber, on the state of post-revolutionary American society and politics. She aptly describes, in opposition to Theodore’s ideals and in agreement with Clara’s doubts, “When Jeffersonians found that the revolution had not produced the golden age they had so confidently expected, they re-defined the terms of the golden age” (Kerber 4). Thus all the layers of the familial allusion are invoked at once by suggesting the “depraved sense” to be that notion of idealism which facilitates the trans-Atlantic migration—for the radical Protestants manifesting as a spiritual intuition, for the politically-minded revolutionaries as Lockean “right-reason.”¹ This therefore informs Kafer’s concurring claim that *Wieland* suggests,

“in view of the vagaries of the human mind, there can be no such clean start, for in the real world, testimony of the senses is necessarily cockeyed...and given the moral reality that all actions, good and particularly bad, engender their own autonomous, long-term consequences, how was the American Revolution, through its often inglorious not to say hypocritical means to bring into being the glorious and candid and sincere republic that the Revolutionaries themselves so rousingly proclaimed?” (Kafer 126).

When again referring to the metahistorical narrative of the 1790s setting, Kafer’s assessments of the novel take on added meaning. For, both political parties had moved away from the classical republican model; Jeffersonians advocated for the agricultural-commercialism, championing the

¹ Richard Tarnas, *Philosophy, Politics, Psychology*
from the *Passion of the Western Mind*

yeoman farmers in his cause but stressing an ideal of plenty which heavily implies incentivized private gain as synonymous with public good, and Federalists denied the public had much say in matters of foreign policy, yet when the Jay Treaty was being proposed (a treaty that did not realistically do much except protect growing American mercantilism) they rallied to a chosen population of the public for support, appealing to the mercantile classes of New York and Philadelphia of which it would economically benefit.¹ Needless to say, both can be seen as contradicting classical republicanism with nascent individualistic capitalism.

The champions of the revolutionary American ideological sentiment, those like Theodore Wieland, forget both Boehme's doctrine of eternal dualism and Descartes's warning to, "admit nothing as truth which is not perceived so clearly and distinctly as to admit of no doubt" (Turner 449). The contradictory denial of each other, caused by an ironically totalitarian misunderstanding of "truth," makes the link of shared heritage apparent. Clara then—whose name, as many scholars have noted, sounds suspiciously like the connotative word, "clear"—is the Wieland who shows the allusion to Brown's American "metahistoricism" through self-doubt and thus self-consciousness. Theodore Wieland, a usually troubling and ambiguous character to pin down, can then be viewed, in a certain sense, as the self-proclamatory contemporary state of each respective ideology. More specifically he is the radical Protestant defining trait of seeking illumination through a blind faith in religious intuition and the classical republican sentiment of citizen's faith to the republic,² which becomes blind in the midst of revolutionary fervor, leading to the change from government devotion to political integrity and the small producer to the

¹ Todd Estes, *The Politics of Public Opinion: Federalists and the Jay Treaty Debate*

² Willaim Turner, Chapter 53, *Systems of Political Philosophies*, writes that the social contract stipulates the individual to vest all his rights in the

supreme and absolute authority of the state, and notes this aspect of Hobbsean theory lies starkly in contrast to the revolutionary use of proclaiming the citizens' could break contract when they decided the government had violated its portion of the contract.

obligatory faith of citizens for their regional and economic best-interest party in post-revolution society.

The ultimate result of his endeavors in *Wieland* is a focus on the American identity, as inescapably linked to its European heritage, and the implications of the denial of this lineage required of American society by existing ideologies. Robert Miles suggests that gothic writing is, “a manifesto of new writing based on the authority of the old” (Miles 42), which, indeed, seems to be a definition of *Wieland* in general, but with the subsequent realization of a troublesome contradiction: this new writing informs the present that it is beholden to the authority of the old, while believing itself to be a separate entity made up of values assumed too progressive for it.

The Enlightenment’s preoccupation with human nature and Brown’s revelation of its latent perseverance of ideas, fits in with the fundamental gothic trait of historical self-critique. As Miles put it, “Gothic works reflect on the late sixteenth century anxiety over its place in history; a belief in providence endures, faith as fundamental benevolence did not. History’s pattern now seemed malign” (Miles 40). In other words, Brown gives a depiction of an American identity formed on a foundation of European history that when placed under the microscope of the *Wielands* at Mettingen is shown to be quite unstable, due to not only the idealistic fresh start of Protestant mysticism and its combination with Calvinistic expressions of pessimistic certainty, but also the allusion to faith in the mission of William Penn’s religious community of Philadelphia, which came into being by way of a real-estate charter given by King Charles II, restorer of monarchy in England. Clara’s statement earlier about Theodore remaining indifferent, noted as both foreboding yet sensible now seems almost like clever sarcasm, as Calvinist grim pretensions on truth and certainty—which will ultimately influence those sects like the Quakers who use terminology such as, “illumination,” to change the semantic connotation to something

feeling more positive or idealistic—settles in comfortably next to republicanism in early America stressing liberty as an avenue of individual citizen sovereignty in ways that resemble the Lockean utopia.¹ Of course the foreshadowed change will occur, in the novel by way of Theodore’s murderous spree and in the metahistorical narrative by the bipartisan separation, which was itself evidence that revolutionary notions of individual sovereignty—meaning a trust in the individual’s deciding and carrying out civic duty—did not remain true of the emergent political system.

The relationship between the two, deemed an unstable one, by its Mettingen micro-representation, is then put through a gothic test of sorts, the specifics of which James P. Carson describes: “Gothic novelists defend their form as a quasi-scientific exploration of natural human nature under supernatural stress” (Carson 143). Therefore, in being subjected to the mysterious voices, Pleyel who initially seems a rational opposite to Theodore’s blind obsession, is shown under supernatural stressors, to blindly trust his own misguided senses; this is first demonstrated by his accepting of the voice informing him of the death of the German Baroness in spite of his resolute—but transparently flawed—sense of rationalism when Theodore purported to hear the voices, and second when he hears Carwin and Clara together and does not explore the source of the voices but forms an opinion based on the circumstantial presumption—which, at this point in the story, one would assume a true rationalist would have learned to treat with some skepticism. Furthermore, these contradictions between Pleyel’s professed philosophy and his actions become

¹ *History of Political Philosophy*, Robert A. Goldwin writes a section on the Doctrine of John Locke and spends considerable time parsing out the various contradictions in his suggested “state of nature.” Locke makes claims about how a true civil society remains a peaceful society in a state of war by adhering to violence only for means of self-

preservation, and that self-preservation is known by the laws of nature but the laws of nature in this context are left open to interpretation, especially with confusing additions such as, “the state of nature will frequently be indistinguishable from a state of war.”

reconciled when considering the underlying motivation of his character. The most basic trait in this sense is his unacknowledged passion for Clara, but the important factor being that his romantic love for her proceeds unacknowledged as a latent motivation for his actions.

Blind faith in religion, as aforementioned, is not a new phenomenon, a main tenet of any religion is often salvation after death, a comfort to the anxieties of the ultimate unknown. Though Brown incorporates both secular and sacred in his criticism and indeed views them as intrinsically related, it is easier to sympathize with blind faith in religion because of the human anxiety of death and the afterlife. Pleyel, then can be said to represent the implications of obligation to government, which he supports with learned enlightenment, “rational,” philosophy, while constantly ignoring or suppressing his other defining trait of romantic passion. So, he initially speaks of Cartesian mistrust of the senses, but when faced with acknowledging the emotional and irrational—in the supernatural events of the story, but also within himself—he, almost instinctively, finds a false reassurance in the empiricist notion of superiority of the senses.¹ His complacency in not acting, upon what to the reader seems obvious, because of a faith in sensible rationalism and intellectual understanding, truly appears to be more of a tactic of seeking comfort from that which he does not understand.

Pleyel’s character explicitly suggests that there is danger in allowing intellectual infallibility to exist as an adhered-to cultural norm. Both Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans would use this to their regional advantage in campaign—but the Federalists more doctrinally so, with their meritocracy of professional intellectuals. There is a definite sense of human frailty and vulnerability ascribed to Pleyel at this point in the novel, which seems to make

¹ William Turner on Thomas Hobbes, “Neither is there in human knowledge any element superior to sense.”

a statement about the inadequacy of cosmopolitan rationalism when considering the full breadth of the human experience.

If Clara represents the two revolutionary ideologies of radical Protestantism and revolutionary strains of classical republicanism in an anxious, precarious duality and Theodore represents the disastrously blind dichotomy, if the Mettingen community represents early America as a microcosm, and Clara's foreboding and intuitive hope that Theodore remain indifferent to supernatural stressors therefore intimates both to be unstable, then Carwin's entrance into the story as an outsider, unknown in origin and ambiguous in character must be significant. Clara assures this is the case with her similarly ominous foreshadowing, "Now I come to mention the person with whose name the most turbulent sensations are connected. It is with a shuddering reluctance that I enter on the providence of describing him... Let me stifle the agonies that are awakened by thy name" (Brown 45). Carwin essentially represents the individual spirit, the reality of the lay-man within these over-arching socially governing ideologies. He represents the plight of the Scots-Irish immigrants—a population which, according to Peter Kafer seems to more readily grasp the changing environment towards individualism¹—encroaching upon the sacred wilderness territory of the Quakers and other Protestant sects and carrying the capitalistic drive for individual comfort that is present under the revolutionary republican principle of selflessness for social commonality.²

¹ Peter Kafer notes in *Revolutionary Reverberations* that the immigrant population latched on conceptually to the Lockean "fresh start" and the Jeffersonian "promise of prosperity" in ways that anticipate America as an environment of economic

opportunity such as serving readily as militiamen during the revolution and settling outlying wilderness lands towards agrarian commercialization.

² Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*

Carwin's embodying Brown's tactics of subversion is well represented as Clara first observes him walking through the rustic and picturesque Mettingen fields. She describes him as a "clown," in other words a laboring-class person, and his appearance sets her off musing,

"I reflected on the alliance which commonly subsists between ignorance and the practice of agriculture, and indulged myself in airy speculations as to the influence of progressive knowledge in dissolving this alliance, and embodying the dreams of the poets. I asked why the plough and the hoe might not become the trade of every human being, and how this trade might be made conducive to, or, at least, consistent with the acquisition of wisdom and eloquence" (Brown 46).

Though she lives in a rural area, her intellectual community and proximity to Philadelphia instills in her language the Federalist predisposition of viewing "plain folk" as ignorant in socio-political philosophic matters, yet she continues to muse and begins to express a progressive hopefulness in the Jeffersonian model. She is invoking the allegorical image of the "yeoman farmer,"—an enlightened, virtuous, republican, gentry farmer that is idealistically romanticized in Brown's era, notably in Jefferson's own *Notes on the State of Virginia*.¹ This image goes along with the poetic picturesque, which similarly expresses a vein of idealism and utopia in the image of some place of perfect and beautiful balance between forces of nature and of civilization.

Brown therefore invokes the image ironically as his picturesque Mettingen community will drastically change towards that of the sublime, and the allusion to the image of a "yeoman farmer" is another example of Brown's manipulation of language and semantics for the purpose of showing latent contradiction. This is due, first, to the etymological origins of the "yeoman

¹ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Queries VI and VIII

farmer” being distinctly rooted in feudal—not to mention Catholic—Europe,¹ therefore the original cultural archetype lends itself more to the centralized power of Federalism, and second, to the Jeffersonian yeoman farmer expressed in terms of “virtue,”—remaining in the sense of the idealized classical republican way (public good before private gain)—because Jefferson also pushed an individual-capitalistic approach to agriculture included in his yeoman farmer image resting on the still idealized promise of prosperity. He uses the classical republican language of “virtue” to appeal to the public but inverts the meaning as incentive of gain—and nobody would have individually benefitted more than Jefferson himself from an American shift in emphasize to commercial agriculture.

Clara asks herself in these musings, “why not,” the plough and hoe could become the trade of every human being, again showing there is some republican idealism in her character but also subtly refers back to her self-awareness, by pointing out the present reality is not so. Such an ideal is simply that, an ideal. Furthermore, this passage connects to Clara’s statement in the end about Carwin being the only character to remain in rural America and noting he is best suited for it. Again, this is meant to reveal such political contradiction because Carwin is of the agricultural class, and he is certainly given the description of being enlightened, but he is anything but virtuous and embodies a disregard for republican notions of communal concordance. Clara, as Brown’s lens of historical self-awareness and Carwin as the ambiguous “other” to the ideological realms of comfortable certainty, therefore come together to make the final point.

After the initial appearance of Carwin amongst a picturesque Mettingen—“This lawn was only traversed by men whose views were directed to the pleasures of the walk, or the grandeur of

¹ Michael Wood, *The Story of England*, Chapter 8, *The community of the Realm*

the scenery” (Brown 46)—the rural community is immediately set upon by the awesome power of the sublime, “Next day arose in darkness and storm. Torrents of rain fell during the whole day, attended with incessant thunder, which reverberated in stunning echoes from the opposite declivity” (Brown 48). Also, keeping with the theme of Clara’s dualistic character providing ominous yet historically valid foreshadowing, it is interesting that the appearance of Carwin, heretofore unknown to her, and the sublimely described storm cause Clara to give another eerie prophecy, “Something whispered that the happiness we at present enjoyed was set on mutable foundations” (Brown 49), directly juxtaposing her brother, whose republican zeal influenced him to proclaim earlier, “no spot on the globe enjoyed equal security and liberty to that which we at present inhabit” (Brown 36).

Ultimately Carwin as the spirit of the individual unwittingly holds the power to undermine the representative republic, as it operates on the citizen fully buying in to the professed truth of the republic¹ (even though in the allusion to the 1790s such truths become fractured and regional). However, the ambiguity of the plot never clarifies whether Carwin was the voice that told Theodore Wieland to murder his family. Even though he admits to be the cause of the earlier voices for purposes of simple mischief, he adamantly denies the morbid accusation of being that final one.

David Michael Bell says, “The unreality of romance was above all psychological. What matters most in discussions of romance is psychological motive and effect” (Bell 121). In *Wieland* this constant changing of Clara’s considering Carwin as a threat, a friend, or a mere

¹ Laurence Burns writes in *History of Political Philosophy*, that Thomas Hobbes’ ultimate goal was twofold: to contribute to the establishment of civic peace, and to the disposing of mankind toward fulfilling their civic duty. He notes that, to Hobbes, the two ideas are intrinsically connected. Again,

Hobbes is historically and, for the most part, theoretically separate from republicanism in America, but these specifically persevering ideas towards civic duty seem to support Brown’s assertions of contradictory ancestry or lineage in American ideals.

nuisance is indicative of Brown's gothicizing of these purported traits of American Romance. Bell goes on to say that the early American romances were, "focused on psychology and morality,"¹ and Brown pretends to imitate this in painting Carwin, the "other" to the ideal Mettigen society, as the villain of the tale. Yet, in muddling the typical romantic separation of fancy vs. reason and imagination vs. actuality, Theodore, somewhat abruptly, emerges as the true threat to the ideal—a threat from within, brought to light through the catalyst of its reaction to the "other." The strength of this reaction, also, stems from his steadfast position of certainty; narratively, this is his belief in mystical religious experiences under the guise of "illumination," and the greater implication is the classical expression of citizen's faith in the republic existing under false pretense.²

This intimation is supported by Carwin himself when he is discovered in Clara's closet. He tells her, "You believe yourself completely in my power; that you stand upon the brink of ruin. Such are your groundless fears. I cannot lift a finger to hurt you...the power that protects you would crumble my sinews, and reduce me to a heap of ashes in a moment, if I were to harbor a thought hostile to your safety" (Brown 81). First, Carwin tells her that her belief in his devious powers are unfounded, suggesting that while his role as an outsider is a threat to the ideal and therefore perceived as the cause for all Clara's foreboding statements, he is not the real cause of danger to the stability of their community. That danger, obviously, comes from within, spearheaded by Theodore's trust in conventional truths. Then, he specifically refers to himself as being averse to any action that is hostile to her safety, suggesting a Rousseauian³ or Godwinian notion of natural human compassion outside the influence of governing bodies—as he is the

¹ David Michael Bell, *Developments in American Romance*

² William Turner, Chapter 53, *Systems of Political Philosophy*

³ *Second Discourse* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, second part, theories on natural man and the initiation of private property

individual, outside the citizen-government republican pact (or the regional citizen to that of their respective party). For, Godwin says in *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, “Society is nothing more than an aggregation of individuals,” referring to a natural form, non-beholden to government. Godwin continues to speak on the principles of government, responding to the Lockean notion of civil society and the social contract,

“The whole principle of an original contract proceeds upon the obligation under which we are placed to observe our promises. The reasoning upon which it is founded is, ‘that we have promised obedience to government, and therefore are bound to obey.’ It may consequently be proper to enquire into the nature of this obligation to observe our promises. (Godwin 87)”

Godwin seems to take issue with Lockean liberalism in the same way Turner criticizes Hobbsean empiricism in *History of Philosophy*, “Hobbes carries the doctrine of state absolutism to the extreme of subjecting even conscience and religion to the authority of the state” (Turner 444). The Godwinian perspective in Enlightened political philosophies informs Brown weaving of cultural and Trans-Atlantic contradiction, as he questions the ultimate breadth of influence this contractual obligation actually implies. He reveals that this same strain of obligation remains an underlying factor in post-revolution bipartisanship, specifically in propagandizing and the manufacturing of public perspective. Theodore’s belief in dichotomous truths serve the same governing agenda, as Turner suggests, his *conscience* has become subject to the state. The allusion to governing entities holding weakly-founded principles on morality and natural man comes full circle when Clara, after hearing of the deaths of Catherine and her children but not yet having found Theodore to be the murder, says, “. . .presumptuous would it be to attempt the classification of all nature, and the scanning of supreme intelligence” (Brown 113). Theodore’s actions remain shrouded in the sense that the reader is never imparted with the knowledge of

whether he was truly spoken to by the divine or if he suffered from mental instability, but in light of Clara's words spoken before she even knows of his involvement, it becomes clear that such a distinction is not what is important. What is important is that his unwillingness to question the principles delivered to him by his mere position and location in American society, leads him to commit heinous acts against his own family—significant because if there is one semblance of nature or instinct of humanity that is accepted in the arena of civilized society it is familial loyalty—while preserving his blind certainty in the maintained belief of his righteousness after the fact.

Turner describes Locke's view on how civil society emerges, "when man discovered the disadvantages of continuous strife, and realized that the safety of life and property is a condition essential to progress, they entered into a contract, by which it was stipulated that the individual should vest all his rights in the supreme and absolute authority of the state," which starkly contrasts Godwin's view of anarchy based on societies of individuals who are compassionate precisely because of a hypothetical lack of social obligations to one another.¹ Carwin aligns with Godwin's individual—albeit he cannot really be called compassionate, but more like harmless—in questioning the nature of his obligation to the state. Godwinian theory attached to the plot of *Wieland* then places the true blame for Theodore's murders, even though the immediate cause remains ambiguous, in his refusal to question the truth and objectivity of assumed constructs. Whether it be his Protestant intuitive search for illumination or the classical republican faith in governing representation, both encompass a contradictory duality under blind obligation. Also, Clara and Pleyel's finally finding their stability back in Europe completes the familial history's

¹ William Godwin, *Enquiries Concerning Political Justice, Chapter III: Of Duty*

allusion to political contradictions about utopia and prosperity in the new world. The early republicans used the clause in Lockean social contract theory about citizens being able to break with a government for breaching contract, to justify the American revolution from England, but they raise new institutions based on the same theories, still swathed in attributes from the Old-World. In the subsequent political environment of the post-revolutionary era, Federalists maintain the necessity of state absolutism to protect the new American republic from criticism from its citizens and sustain ideals in this way, while simultaneously, Jeffersonian language of a prosperous country of commercial agriculture established by a socially esteemed agrarian class is simply an intellectual veil for motivating the public and the “plain folk” to take risks ultimately not in their self-interest—not conceptually far off from a feudal model.

The character of Theodore Wieland offers up a commentary through allusion, then, that becomes broader as history unfolds. He is assumed to represent the hypocrisy of American Revolutionaries’ republican proclamations, yet the wholeness of his demise, the appropriateness of being himself the most perilous danger to his family and community when he viewed the American countryside as a sanctuary from the corrupt and dangerous outside world, speaks to the nature of the American revolution, perhaps even the nature of political conflict in general. In other words, Theodore Wieland’s fate is suspiciously reminiscent of Edmund Burke’s criticism of the later French Revolution—which took condemnation of idealistic republican rhetoric to a place of outright frankness—saying, “The Revolution would end in bloodthirsty disaster,” and that, “men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.”¹

¹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*

With Brown's next few works of gothic fiction—*Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist* and *Ormond*—he seems to undergo some philosophical maturation in considering the intricacies of revolution, power, and influence that will culminate in his final gothic work, *Edgar Huntly*. As aforementioned, Theodore Wieland's demise imitates Burke's condemnation of the French Revolution.¹ Since the catalyst of the French Revolution upon emergent politics in America informs the matter of ideology in Brown's work, it may be appropriate to refer to one Antoine Louis Claude Destutt de Tracy, a man who would pen one of the first intellectual works on the nature of ideology. Tracy was a French aristocrat, but in favor of the revolution, confident that it would result in true liberty for the individual. Though as the revolution unfolded, Tracy would see Burke's words come to reality, and he would narrowly escape the guillotine himself.² Subsequently having experienced a change in viewpoint, he would begin the modern conceptualization of ideology. Though Brown's work does precede Tracy, similar ideological characteristics nonetheless seem present in Brown's work after *Wieland*.

Of Tracy's work, Jeremy Jennings states its main thesis to connote, "Philosophy would put an end to revolutionary barbarism and provide a solid foundation upon which the Republic could be established," while still hopeful that this ideal could, theoretically, be an attainable goal, the point is that Tracy acknowledges of the French Revolution—of revolution in general perhaps—what Brown does of the American Revolution. That is, it is not built upon a solid philosophical foundation at all. Indeed, Kafer, in describing the intellectual club Brown was a part of—"the Friendly Society"—says, "Club discussions persistently and variously took up the radical French Enlightenment doctrine of the 'perfectibility of man'" (Kafer 77). *Memoirs of*

¹ Harvey Mansfield Jr. in *History of Political Philosophy*

² Encyclopedia Britannica

Carwin the Biloquist essentially traces the titular character's rise through the hierarchy of early American society to its pinnacle, where he finds only disillusionment and further alienation, in order to make a self-conscious statement about influence and motive. *Ormond* portrays post-Revolutionary America in dark, dishonest terms, making the leading characters who have fallen upon hard times utterly subservient to the manipulations of Ormond, their mysterious and rich benefactor. The two works profess the common themes of latent individualism and self-servitude at the expense of others, as Tracy would call it in his attempt to define ideology in terms of human nature—reminiscent of Locke's philosophical reasoning for the formation of the social contract—the "duty to the self."

Jefferson, a proponent of championing the reputation of the French Revolution, becomes a similar character in Brownian terms to these mysteriously motivated characters who are revealed to be a part of subversive secret societies—Ludloe in *Carwin the Biloquist* and Ormond in *Ormond*—in his Virginian anti-Federalist work during the early 1790s, which can even be considered propagandizing the French Revolution. Connor Cruise O'Brien writes that Jefferson's followers were "precisely the sorts of Americans who were most attracted to the cause of the French Revolution" (O'Brien 75). He continues that on Jefferson's return from France he would come to stress the favorability of the French revolution in support of anti-Federalist notions regarding the Federalist tendency towards monarchical structures but notes,

"Jefferson was a passionate devotee of the French Revolution, but he was also a subtle and calculating propagandist...the French Revolution had become an aspect of 'the true God,' inseparable and eternally part of 'the holy cause of freedom' proclaimed in the Declaration...These religious terms, so applied, had by now become standard parts of the political vocabulary of the two secular thinkers Jefferson and Madison" (O'Brien 81).

This moral idealizing provides a contradictory conclusion of the Jeffersonian model that individual ambition can be dutiful in the same sense as classical republican civic virtue and public good; this is essentially the exact political circumstance that Edmund Burke in his reflecting on the events of the French Revolution calls “a well-wrought veil.”¹

Essentially, what Brown’s intermediary works are seeking to demonstrate is that “ideology,” as Tracy thought to be the benign “science of ideas” and their insights into the human experience, inadvertently sheds light upon historical, intellectual misdeeds.² Later criticism of Tracy’s work indeed makes this point that Brown anticipates. Emmett Kennedy calls it, “ideological phenomena,”—those points of individualistic justification in Tracy’s work that must be “outlined for investigation—unconscious intellectual habits, the liaison or association of ideas particularly in language” (Kennedy 355). Brown expresses similar suspicious sentiments on power and civic virtue, and in recognizing that which Tracy does not—the “unconscious intellectual habits”—employs the same theoretical sentiments towards his critique of governing bodies, made all the more apparent by the political environment of bipartisanship.

Part II: *Edgar Huntly* and Brown’s Social Commentary

In tracing the historical changes in the term “ideology,” Emmet Kennedy attempts to articulate how Marx would be influenced by, but ultimately change, Tracy’s *Ideology*:

“The uniqueness of Tracy’s liberal economics is its title, which Marx frequently cited as an exemplary defense of capitalism. Ideology, thanks to Tracy, became for Marx neither simply science of ideas nor liberal political theory, but a system of thought which seeks

¹ Connor Cruise O’Brian, *The Long Affair*, Chapter III, *Bring the True God Home: the French Revolution in American Politics After Jefferson’s Return*, Section I, *Virginian Politics*

²Emmet Kennedy, *Ideology from Destutt de Tracy to Marx*

to justify the existing mode of production and the social relationships which spring from it” (Kennedy 368).

This will be what Brown concurrently recognizes in American society and subverts with his gothic fiction. Tracy outlines the most sensible treatise for the mechanism of society and identifies that intellectual progress can be had once these mechanisms have been acknowledged. However, no sooner has he achieved this than he must face realization that his principles on individuals in society extends to intellectual and philosophical spheres, whose ongoing manipulation he had inadvertently justified. Kennedy again specifies, “Tracy had ‘undeniably come the closest of all metaphysicians to the positive state,’ but he had not reached it for no sooner had he declared that ‘ideology is a part of zoology,’ than his ‘metaphysical nature soon gained the upper hand and led him to discard this luminous principle immediately” (Kennedy 365).¹ Tracy is progressive and influential, but it is difficult for his theories to actual achieve progress when he includes justification for that which he seems to oppose. He gives insurmountable support for capitalist endeavors building society and that these are natural to the human drive and therefore when faced with the reality of “ideological phenomena” of the intellectual social elite (inevitably bleeding into politics and “national will”) he seems to almost get lost in his own theories. Kennedy paraphrases Tracy’s defense of criticism: “ideologues did not form a sect, used strictly empirical methods, and adulated no philosopher” (Kennedy 367). Tracy seems to now become slightly contradictory as well, in condemning the nature of forming sects and holding philosophical lineages, which can be justified by capitalist duty to “self,” and he takes on shades of that wretch existing outside of society that he also previously condemned

¹ Here Emmet Kennedy, in *Ideology: from Destutt de Tracy to Marx*, is quoting the words of Auguste Comte.

as the ultimate opposition to one's individual self-interest. It may be safe to assert that the realistic likelihood of Tracy's version of ideology—which he hoped would lead humans towards progressivism—subsequently results in the way of the pessimistic Elder Wieland's spontaneous combustion in solitude and separation from society rather than the advantageous Carwin's fluid and free movement within it.

The reconciled image of the Elder Weiland's "successful" combustion is completed when taken into account a particular criticism of Tracy's theories on the foundation of morality in a population, noted again by Emmet Kennedy, "the preacher could be silenced by the legislator who could discontinue his salary. Ideology not religion, was the basis of morality" (Kennedy 370). This is all too true, as he himself had justified the actions of said legislator, which comes from justice, which comes from duty, which proceeds from the self, and therefore "liberty" is only the augmentation of power. Thus, it is appropriate that Napoleon—the man perhaps most responsible for reinstating imperialism in Europe after the revolutionary era—uses the subsequent principles of non-inclusion by Tracy's pupils and followers, to adhere to the populace and claim these principles spelled atheistic tendencies, dangerous to Christian morals.¹

Similarly, Brown's next gothic work, *Edgar Huntly, or Memoirs of a Sleepwalker*, is thematically centered on the twisting of a popular perception, the cultural implications and realistic consequences for the members of the public. As Tracy's work on ideology served to identify the concept, it also served to justify the capitalist drives that had worked beneath the surface of American idealism,² and the Napoleonic reinstatement of the imperialist power

¹ Emmet Kennedy, *"Ideology" from Destutt de Tracy to Marx*

² In Chapter I of her work, *Federalists in Dissent*, Linda K. Kerber brings attention to Jefferson's changes over time to the "republican idea," remarking that when his professed ideals did not

pan out in the years following the Revolution, he simply made the necessary changes in theory at will to maintain ideological legitimacy. Thus, the criticism he received from Federalists—accusations of self-servitude—was for writing of the Republicans not as a political party but as his own personal faction.

structure to Europe exemplifies the problem with identifying ideology and not condemning moral codes based on individual motive and ascension. It seems apparent that Brown had already come to this conclusion in his last and perhaps most complete work of gothic fiction, *Edgar Huntly*, with its deep allusions to a commentary on American socio-political culture. He succeeds where Tracy does not because the subtlety of his gothicism served to criticize but not to offer certainty or validity of other theories in opposition, more so to question and perhaps validate a cultural anxiety that stands in opposition to ideological holds on real individual freedoms.

The forming of the bipartisan political structure influencing the political affiliation of American citizens, for the most part, did not yet greatly damage the structure of American Exceptionalism—or more correctly the separate claims as to the ideal path to Exceptionalism. However, it would be untrue to say Brown is alone in his suspicions. One of his contemporaries, who expressed views almost exactly parallel to Brown's in his layering of historical allusions in *Edgar Huntly*, was Fisher Ames. Ames penned *Dangers of American Liberty*, in which he wrote on the bipartisan system and present American culture, "The clamor of party are so loud, and the resistance of national vanity is so stubborn, it will be impossible to convince any but the very wise that our democratic liberty is unattainable; that we are devoted to the successive struggles of factions, who will rule by turns."¹ It makes sense in agreeing with Ames on the American issue, and in preceding Tracy's work on ideology with the added recognition of inevitable inequalities created through its usage, Brown's *Edgar Huntly* seems to align closest with the Marxists who would succeed him. This is because Ideology conceptualized in Marxist theory

¹ *The Dangers of American Liberty* by Fisher Ames from, *A Library of American Literature: An Anthology in Eleven Volumes*. Vol IV: *Literature of the Republic*.

serves the purpose of working with the same social mechanisms, without the invocation of capitalism regarding economic competition oriented as instinctual drives incorporated in human “zoology.” This part of Tracy’s work on ideology and the defense of capitalism, Auguste Comte appropriately refers to as “truths” that act as social barriers in society.¹ Furthermore, in lieu of what *is* useful about Tracy’s work, Brown’s recognition of contradiction in *Wieland*, conceptualized through Boehme’s eternal dualism re-enters philosophical consideration in an impactful way. That is to say, political spheres of influence, backed, as Paul C. Rogers says “anthropologically,” by the ideas of Hobbes and Locke²—such as Jeffersonian Republicanism and Federalism—as well as the subservient religious spheres of influence—such as the Protestant “seeking” sects—could be said to presumably satisfy Tracy’s duty to the “self” through a belief that advancement in power for their leaders is beneficial to their own social positioning. But achievement of this loyalty is tied to the promise of prosperity, ultimately an expression of unattainable—at the very least decidedly hypothetical—ideals for their followers. One major implication of *Edgar Huntly* is that regional and cultural separation of political perspective and adhered-to values becomes a transparent projection of subjective or temporary self-satisfaction onto the various social spheres of the American public.³ They are therefore capitalistic in nature, through emphases on individual concern and the joining of individual well-being not with the “public good” as with classical republicanism but with the success of the public economy and in structure, through Brown and Ames’ specific criticisms, which sound quite similar to the later Marxist critique of capitalism as a whole.

¹ As quoted by Emmet Kennedy in *Ideology: From Destutt de Tracy to Marx*

² Paul C. Rogers, *Villainy and the Fear of Conspiracy in Charles Brockden Brown's Ormond*

³ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, from the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*

This individualistic-capitalistic sentiment in American politics is exemplified best by Alexander Hamilton in the Federalist Papers when he appeals to the citizen's self-interest in arguing commerce over agriculture, "A prosperous commerce is now perceived and acknowledged by all enlightened statesmen to be most useful, as well as the most productive, source of national wealth. And as such as accordingly become a primary source of our cares." He uses the term "enlightenment" now as merely a tool of language to support his cause and subsequently argues that there should exist no more rivalry between the agriculturalist and the merchant, that the agriculturalist should agree with Federalist protocol based on the expressed unequivocal sensibility of Hamilton's words that a strong national government built on international trade would inevitably raise the value of land as well.¹ Here, in discussing Hamilton's contribution to Federalism—particularly the nascent trends of individualistic capitalism pushed upon a public through ideals—it may be interesting to note Brown's one personal experience with Hamilton himself. According to Kafer, Alexander Hamilton, leading troops during the Revolution broke into Brown's childhood home—a Quaker home and therefore a pacifist one and therefore probably considered a Tory one as well—and stole food, clothing, and blankets, in the name of the revolution and the greater "public good."² While admittedly a stretched claim at best, it does make one wonder about the connection between this purported run-in with the revolutionary Hamilton, expressing all the revolutionary doctrines of classical republican civic virtue in the expression of public good over private gain, yet leaving room for suspicion of genuineness due to the fact that Quakers specifically were often targeted by revolutionary militiamen for these kinds of supplies raids. It would make quite the biographical

¹ *The Federalist Papers*, Note 12, *Utility of the Union in Respect to Revenue*, Alexander Hamilton

² Peter Kafer, Chapter III *Revolutionary Reverberations*

parallel between Brown's gothic fiction calling into question the genuine motives of both Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian political ideas.

The Cartesian sentiments of mistrusting the senses and also mistrusting the authority of the past,¹ that are expressed rather ambiguously, in *Wieland*, now take on a most resounding significance in *Edgar Huntly*. This grand endeavor of displacing the common American perspective on the positions from which their idealistic culture and identity flows forth, calls for an all-encompassing historical breadth, and so Edgar Huntly's interactions with the Indians ties together—socially—the beginning of the American idealistic identity lodged in the distant and unmovable past to the tensions of Brown's present at the end of the eighteenth century.²

Edgar Huntly's adventures in the Norwalk wilderness and the background information of his family being murdered by Indians, is again one of Brown's historically "self-conscious" allusions. Peter Kafer states, "when Edgar travels north and west into Norwalk, he is travelling into a place where the past hangs heavy, where its energies, its angers, its terrors, still haunt" (Kafer 176). However, Brown purposefully displaces the time period from its historical parallel: "Yet the historical incidents that personally shadow Edgar in the time-warp that is *Edgar Huntly* are not from 1755-1757; they are all from the Revolutionary period. This was when, according to Edgar, 'savages' and 'assassins,' had murdered his family. But historically speaking, no such savagery prevailed during the Revolution, at least not here" (Kafer 176). In *Edgar Huntly*, Brown will lead his titular character through trials and tribulations, that include other allusions to countless revolutionary-era social issues—mostly through the various sub-plots—all finding

¹ William Turner, *History of Political Philosophy*, Chapter LIV

² More specifically, Brown seeks to unearth what common motives different and opposing social

groups had for migrating to America in the first place, and how the forgotten commonality of the past might provide insight to the social fragmentation of the present

similitude within the backdrop of a seemingly obscure historical occurrence: the alleged defrauding of the Delaware Indians by immediate members of the Penn family.

In 1737, the Chief Justice of Pennsylvania, James Logan, along with three woodsmen used an unfinished deed from 1686 to claim the Delaware Indians had sold land to William Penn in 1686 that had yet to be surveyed. He allegedly did this on the order of William Penn's sons, and accomplished the fraud by showing the Indians a faked map of separate lands that *had* been previously sold. The word Norwalk for the forest wilderness Edgar becomes entrenched within is a play on the word "North-Walk" referring to the walking survey that Logan embarked on in 1737 to mark off the defrauded land. Subsequently he enlisted the help of the powerful Iroquois Indians, cutting them into a portion of the stolen lands of which they had no historical right, to complete the eviction of the Delawares. In 1755, during the French and Indians War, the formerly peaceful Delawares began attacking white Pennsylvania settlements.¹

Nottingham's John Churchman, a powerful members of Pennsylvanian Quaker society, and a relative of Brown was in Philadelphia in 1757 when settlers from Northampton—people who had since purchased lands from the Penns, included in the domain of the defrauded Indians—brought in "two or three of the dead bodies...in wagons, and with the intent as was supposes to animate the people to unite in preparations of war, to take vengeance on the Indians, and destroy them" (Kafer 175). Churchman responds to this event in his own autobiography, "It felt to me that many did not consider, that the sins of the inhabitants, pride, profane swearing, and drunkenness with other wickedness were the cause, that the Lord suffered this calamity and scourge to come upon us."² Needless to say, the Quakers were among those who did not favor

¹Peter Kafer, Chapter VI, *Return of the Present...and Past*

² John Churchman, *An Account of the Gospel Labours, and Christian Experiences, Of a Faithful Minister of Christ*—his 1779 autobiography.

war or defense of the frontiersmen from attack. Churchman first surmises to lay the blame on the victims of attack, when history clearly paints a different picture. These citizens merely inhabit disputed lands, lands that are disputed, no less, because of the actions of the Penn family.¹ The Quakers staunch opposition to retaliation against the Indians places them on the same level of involvement as the Indians who had attacked. This is so because, technically speaking, they have caused the dispute (especially so in the frame of the Brownian gothic, with its emphasis on aspects of forgotten or ignored lineage), sold the land to the unsuspecting, then ignored the call for aid through either deliberate and thus, nefarious, means, or through an ignorance of their own past, as was the morbid fault of Theodore Wieland. They have contributed to the murders the same as the Indians, but merely have an ideology of pacifism and moral superiority to shield themselves.

During the revolutionary period, patriotic republicans in Philadelphia condemned Quakers as Tories for their loathing to fight, and fed the social feud between Quakers and Scots-Irish immigrants by taking advantage of the Scots-Irish readiness to become militiamen.² Kafer notes that to a Quaker in revolutionary Philadelphia the only “savage” they knew were the Scots-Irish. Then in the late 1790s, Philadelphia sees an influx of more Irish immigrants, a subsequent Quaker paranoia about an Irish mob rising, and a Quaker appeal to the new Federalist government who held them in high-esteem—ironically—for their ability in peace talks with

¹The details of the land defrauded of the Delawares by the Penn family and Quaker associates is mentioned briefly in both Francis Jennings *The Ambiguous Iroquois Nation* and Anthony Wallace’s *King of the Delawares*, but the more specific details are contained in Eastburn Reeder’s *Early Settlers of Solebury Township, Bucks County, PA*, in which the compilation of the township’s historical records indicate that in 1737, Charles’ Brockden Brown’s

own uncle, Richard Walln, had ownership of a portion of the disputed lands. This gives a more reflective meaning to Edgar’s statement about the Indians, “the village inhabited by this clan was built upon ground that now constitutes my uncle’s barn and orchard.”

² Peter Kafer, Chapter II, *From Terror to Terror to Terror*

Indians.¹ Furthermore, issues with foreign policy leads to partisan Federalist vs. Republican conflict and American newspapers catering to the specific political views of their separate communal populations.²

This is important to note because it reveals how Brown is once again using his Quaker familial history to illustrate larger social contradictions. For example, during the revolution the patriots justified action with republican principles on the greater good and therefore the Quakers were persecuted as Tories and treated harshly. Also during this time many prevalent Quaker leaders warned against the evils of commerce, Charles Brockden Brown's own father, Elijah, is an example of this, having been expelled from Quaker meetings due to his debts acquired as a merchant. Yet, after the revolution, the Washington administration recognized that Quakers were useful negotiators with Indians, due to a trust the two social groups had formed most likely because of the Quakers' disarming pacifism. This continues as Philadelphia comes under Federalist influence in the 1790s and with the influx of mostly Democratic-Republican leaning Irish immigrants—who still held the title of “savages” to the Quakers—the Quaker community went from revolutionary-era social outsiders to the post-revolutionary environment where they enjoyed greater social esteem due to the change in the interests of those in power. Furthermore, even though the Quakers continue to warn against the greed of commercialism and the Federalists operated on a principle of strong international commerce, the Philadelphia Quaker James Emlen, after a meeting with Timothy Pickering—a Federalist administrator also of Philadelphia—noted, “the contrast between those who formerly executed Government in

¹ Kafer, Chapter 6, *Return of the Present...and Past*, however, with regards to the local (Federalist-leaning) government using the Quaker in peace negotiations with the Indians, Kafer is largely quoting from Bauman's *the Reputation of Truth*, in

the claim that the Indian representatives themselves requested the Quaker presence as a sign of good-faith

²Peter Coviello, *Agonizing Affection: Affect and Nation in Early America*.

Pennsylvania who were impelled by that selfish jealousy which a dark and covetous policy inspires, and the present rulers of the United States.”¹ The present rulers at this time are John Adams and the Federalist Party, therefore demonstrating that Emlen’s blind contradiction to traditional Quaker values is either the result of a complete lack of political understanding, or evidence towards the assimilation of the ideology of self-servitude.

Brown, in the plot of *Edgar Huntly*, encompasses dominant value systems of three different historical time periods in American history, to illustrate different social groups each taking a turn in the disenfranchisement of greater society largely based upon a capitalistic competition between them. Edgar Huntly, in his journey, will take on the roles of the pacifist Quaker, the hearty frontiersman, and the “savage” Indian. When aligned with Brown’s historically self-conscious time line, the convergence clearly serves to join them together in a proto-Marxist Proletariat grouping, supporting and anticipating Althusser’s assertion that “the whole of the political class struggle revolves around the state. By which I mean the seizure and conservation of state power by a certain class or by an alliance between classes or class fractions” (Althusser 1340). Kafer’s statement that Edgar ventures into a place where “the past hangs heavy,” is therefore more telling than perhaps he realizes, as Brown looks to the past for a way of connecting its recessive incidents to the state of things at the present. What this amounts to theoretically, is Brown suggesting a take on ideology similar to the Marxist, Louis Althusser. As Althusser explains, “dominant social systems and institutions subtly mold human subjects through ideology, in turn reproducing the system” (Althusser 1532), and once again Brown seems to be echoing his contemporary, Fisher Ames, specifically the opening passage of *Dangers of American Liberty*, “The political sphere like the globe we tread upon, never stands

¹ Kafer, Chapter 6, *Return of the Present...and Past*

still, but with a silent swiftness accomplishes the revolution which we are too ready to believe effected by our own wisdom.”

Edgar opens his tale, which consists mostly of letters to his fiancé, Mary, with a, now distinctly Brownian, foreshadowing, “What light has burst upon my ignorance of myself and mankind! How sudden and erroneous the transition from uncertainty to knowledge!” (Brown 6). This can be taken in direct reflection of the uncertain, unexplained way his body is manipulated; yet through this dark, irrational plot point, lies his path to a greater understanding of himself and a shedding of light upon the nature of mankind. He thinks upon the past, on the murder of his family years ago by Indians and on the mysterious death of his late friend, Waldegrave. He describes his emotions in such a way: “the insanity and vengeance and grief into which I was hurried my fruitless searches for the author of this guilt, my midnight wandering and reveries beneath the shade of that fatal elm were revived and re-acted” (Brown 6). The elm here is a highly significant symbol. It is a boundary between rural picturesque and sublime wilderness, between the territory of the men of European heritage and that of the Delaware Indians, and also the theoretical boundaries of social groups separated by constructed ideologies and the sublime, primitive wilderness where Edgar truly has the experience of “natural man.”

Althusser argued that societal structures determine lived experience,¹ and indeed, the experiences that Edgar has on either side yield vastly different results in his worldview. On the one side—that of civilized society—Edgar says the Elm revived and re-acted his feelings of vengeance, he is struck in a cycle of which there seems no escape is, as no perpetrator can be identified, but he is fueled nonetheless, because he believes it to be the deed of a “savage,” (be it

¹ Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of the Relations of Production* from the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*

the Indians that had previously killed his family or the revolutionary “savages,” the Scots-Irish whom Clithero represents). After seeing Clithero at the Elm and attaining brief information on his background as an Irish immigrant, he concludes prematurely that Clithero is Waldegrave’s murderer. He is quite obsessed with vengeance but his Quaker pacifism plays upon his conscience,

“That Clithero was instrumental to the death of Waldegrave, that he could furnish the clue, explanatory of every bloody and mysterious event, that had hitherto occurred, there was no longer the possibility of doubting. He, indeed, said I, is the murderer of excellence, and yet it shall be my province to emulate a father’s clemency, and restore this unhappy man to purity, and to peace” (Brown 24).

His accusation of Clithero as a violent man, because circumstantially he appears so, is reflective of when leading Quakers in Philadelphia such as the Churchmans were jailed during the revolution for their pacifism. They wrote vehemently in their personal journals, not of the zealous patriots leading Philadelphia, but of their Scot-Irish jailers, simple enlisted militia-men.¹ His subsequent false moral superiority, as he decides to forgive Clithero which therefore restore him to peace, is reflective of the Philadelphia Assembly of the 1750s when the Quakers refused to aid Scots-Irish frontiersmen from Indian raids due to their pacifism and John Churchman’s morally superior—not to mention hypocritical—statement that it was retribution for their own drunkenness. Only in venturing beyond the boundary and into the wilderness does he find his answer to this initial mystery of Waldegrave’s death, but by then his perception on society has changed and he desires no vengeance. This is facilitated by his experiences in the wilderness,

¹ Thomas Gilpin, *Exiles in Virginia: With Observations on the Conduct of the Society of Friends during the Revolutionary War*

and ironically it is specifically in the act of doing violence and breaking his pacifist code that his vengeful desires completely abandon him.

In learning of Clithero's true tale, the reader is informed that Clithero is impeded from achieving a social ideal through the selfish greed of one Arthur Wiatte—the brother of the lady he serves and whose illegitimate daughter he is betrothed to. Arthur was thought to be sent as a prisoner of debt to America but he returns unannounced. His return subsequently starts Clithero on a downward spiral of deranged events that ruins his ideal. These events begin with the spark of concern and recognition of social institutional practice, “what were the limits of his power? How may he exert the parental prerogatives?” (Brown 48), suggesting that Clithero sees Wiatte first, not as a threat to his safety and that of his fiancé, but of a threat to the marriage that would ascend his social standing to a presumably ideal position. He goes on to say, “It would be hard for those to partake of our fears, who did not partake of our experience” (Brown 48), and here he is not only alluding to the privileged—those social groups who would become conceptualized as the bourgeois—being unable to distinguish barriers to the ideal because their experiences present none, but also to the social barriers based on perceptions formed of specific experiences that will result in Proletariat group competition between each other in a capitalist environment. Therefore the parallel drawn between Edgar, the morally superior Quaker and Clithero, the rugged and wretched Irishman, is that they both experience a threat of capitalistic greed to their ideal marriage. For Clithero, it was the reappearance of Arthur Wiatte, and for Edgar it comes in the form of Weymouth.

Weymouth mysteriously presents himself at the Huntly household, claiming that he lent Waldgrave money before his death, and as Edgar is in charge of Waldegrave's affairs, Weymouth wishes to be paid back. Waldegrave left no will or instructions, but Weymouth says he needs the

money to book passage from Europe for his sick relatives, playing upon the alternate side of Edgar's Quaker moral superiority, and he admits he must give Weymouth the money if he can come up with any more proof. This money was all that he was depending on for his marriage to his own fiancé, Mary. Furthermore, Edgar adds of the precariousness of his own situation, "My uncles' death will transfer this property to his son, who is a stranger and an enemy to us, and the first act of whose authority will unquestionably be to turn us forth from these doors" (Brown 105), which is perhaps the most blatant of connotations to the fickleness of authority under circumstantial changes. Not surprisingly, as Clithero and Edgar now share a common experience or capitalistic anxiety, the night immediately after Weymouth's visit, is when Edgar seems to take on Clithero's sleep-walking condition, and awakes alone in the dark, subterranean cavern.

When Edgar awakes, he does not at first know where he is, his memory is failing him, "I endeavored to recall the past, but the past was too much in contradiction to the present, and my intellect was too much shattered by external violence, to allow me accurately to review it" (Brown 107). This hearkening of contradiction between past and present, again must be noted as reminiscent of the situation with the Pennsylvanian social groups before during and after the Revolution, "the intellect shattered by external violence" recalling once more that part of Tracy's ideology that proves useful for Brown—the inability for the wage-earners to see beyond their present circumstances because subsistence and existence in society are too closely related. Edgar's experience in the cavern is the pivotal point in the theoretical arc of the story. His awaking there, unsure of the location, how he arrived, whether his senses have left him and he is blind, whether his mind has left him and he is mad, ultimately what he describes is utter helplessness. It is only in this state that Edgar's social considerations and pretenses, his morals

and sensibilities, everything that he had made his identity upon, can be evaporated by the invocation of the primitive mind.

The only possession Edgar has with him is an Indian Tomahawk, which he uses to kill a panther lurking nearby in a scene that completes the social breakdown.

“There was no time for deliberation and delay. In a moment he might spring from his station and tear me to pieces. . .all the force that remained was mustered up and exerted in a throw. . .though tottering on the verge of dissolution, and apparently unable to crawl from this spot, a force was exerted in this throw, probably greater than I had ever before exerted. It was resistless and unerring. I aimed at the middle space between the glowing orbs. It penetrated the skull and the animal fell, struggling and shrieking, on the ground” (Brown 112).

Brown seeks to truly isolate Edgar from all connection to humanity and therefore to society, by emphasizing the primitive and animalistic so that all else besides survival and instinct becomes truly arbitrary. He continues this goal to its appropriate end, “The first suggestion that occurred was to feed upon the carcass of this animal. My hunger had arrived at that pitch where all fastidiousness and scruples are at an end. I crept to the spot. . .I will not shock you by relating the extremes to which dire necessity had driven me” (Brown 112). Having killed the panther, through necessity and the instinct to survive, Edgar has become the savage himself, and in consuming it, he takes on the connection to the sublime, in the sense that he is now effectively disconnected from social influences and their fostered anxieties among and between social groupings. In the fashion of a Brownian Gothic, he is entrenched in darkness to become enlightened, he must become primitive to come to a realization about the civilized. Again similar to how Althusser would later conceive ideology as taught to the unconscious by the experiences

the conscious is subjected to,¹ Edgar falls asleep after consuming the panther raw, but this time he does not sleepwalk but dreams, “I was visited by dreams of a thousand hues. They led me to flowing streams and plenteous banquets, which, though placed within my view, some power forbade me to approach” (Brown 113). After his experience becoming a part of the wilderness, Edgar is faced with an inevitable change in perception regarding his own morals and world views—his own ideological chains—and the recognition that arbitrary social fractions develop from *bourgeois* influence and manipulation of tempting yet unrealistic idealisms.

When he finds his way out of the subterranean cavern he comes upon the Indians with the young girl held captive. This sight immediately re-establishes the social positioning for Edgar, but this switching of weaponry—Edgar still with the tomahawk and the sleeping Indian with none other than Edgar’s own musket—represents the seeds of discord sown in his mind pertaining to these social relationships. When he rescues the girl and they escape down the mountainside to the abandoned house of Old Deb he says,

“In spite of the force and uniformity with which my senses were impressed by external objects, the transition I had undergone was so wild and inexplicable; all that I had performed; all that I had witnessed since my egress from the pit, were so contradictory to precedent events, that I still clung to the belief that my thoughts were confused by delirium” (Brown 129).

He ends up killing the rest of the Indians as they approach the house and his Quaker-trained pacifism no longer impedes him. He still does not relish the killing—“I formed a sort of

¹ Louis Althusser, *On Ideology*, specifically from the section entitled *Ideology Interpellates Individuals as Subjects*

resolution to shun the contest with a new enemy...I was satiated and gorged with slaughter” (Brown 132)—but he no longer mentions any religious language involved in this loathing.

The changes in his social perceptions are best exemplified when he kills the final Indian, who, sneaking up on all fours, is reminiscent of the panther that he had killed for survival. Edgar takes his shot and the Indian,

“lost all power of resistance...he rolled upon the ground, uttering doleful shrieks, and throwing limbs into those contorsions which bespeak the keenest agonies to which ill-fated man is subject...Horror, compassion, and remorse, were mingled into one sentiment and took possession of my heart. To shut out the spectacle, I withdrew from the spot, but I stopped before I had moved beyond hearing his cries...Could I not, at least, bring his pangs to a speedy close? Thus he might continue, writhing and calling upon death for hours. Why should his miseries be uselessly prolonged...to kill him outright was the dictate of compassion and of duty” (Brown 133).

This scene connects to the earlier scene when he is about to confront Clithero. In the earlier scene Edgar is consumed with vengeance but observes his social institutional training, his Quaker sensibilities and pacifism, noting that he will force a confession and forgive him, believing this route to be that which they both will find peace of mind. But he completely misreads the Clithero situation; he speaks from a place of moral superiority and pities him, hypocritically not realizing how they are alike. In the later scene, Edgar has done away with his institutionally received values. He kills the Indian, but does not feel any fulfillment of vengeance, and he does not pity the Indian as a wretch but looks upon him with compassion, he is remorseful for killing him, but perhaps it is more correct, in terms of subtext, to say he is remorseful for the circumstances that made killing him necessary. As he leaves the murderous scene Edgar utters a line of thematic reconciliation, “I left him where he lay, but made prize of

his tomahawk...prompted by some freak of fancy, I stuck his musket in the ground, and left it standing upright in the middle of the road” (Brown 134). In having the opportunity to switch back to their socially compatible weaponry, he instead chooses to keep the weapon of the Indian and leaving the gun, completing the cycle of recognition that he and the Indian, and also Clithero, are all alike, taking part in the human social environment that proves more sinister than the awesome and sublime wilderness where Edgar literally cheats death numerous times.

At the very end of the tale, there is finally closure regarding the death of Waldegrave, “Queen Mab,¹ three days after my adventure, was seized in her hut on suspicion of having aided and counselled her countrymen, in their late depredations. She was not to be awed or intimidated by the treatment she received, but readily confessed and gloried in the mischief she had done; and accounted for it by enumerating the injuries which she had received from her neighbors” (Brown 186). Again, this last line must refer to the initial historical inspiration for the novel, the defrauding of the Delaware Indians by the Penns, but at this point in Edgar’s experience there is no emotion left to be attached to this exasperating issue of placing blame and satisfying vengeance, all he has to say on the matter is, “suspicions and doubts, by which my soul was harassed, and which were injurious to the innocent are now at an end” (Brown 187).

What Brown does with his social commentary contained within Edgar Huntly’s historical allusions is take opposition with influential idealism in any socio-political discussion by demonstrating how social spheres may generate and train their population with these ideals based on a subjective perspective or an agenda that influences the individual within a social population—essentially what Althusser called the “unconscious being informed by the

¹Used in the novel synonymously with “Old Deb,” highlighting that she takes on a different identity depending on the social sphere she exists within

experiences of the conscious.” He achieves this with suggestions about the state of the individual consciousness as subjected to the ideological recognition of cyclical patterns appearing in the historical reality. He is again subversive by hearkening to the transmogrified sensibility of classical republicanism, as cyclical readings of history is endemic to classical republican ideology as well, he uses such a principle to criticize its own effect on social reality. As a Marxist would say, he successfully illustrates the greater social consequences of “The reproduction of the means of production.” Joseph Cropsey, in his commentary on Karl Marx states, “Marx repeatedly asserts that the study of man must concern itself with ‘real’ man, not with men as imagined or hoped for or believed to be. Marx means by this that the foundation of social science is not a notion of some wished-for human good, or some reconstruction of pristine ‘natural’ man, but rather empirical man” (Cropsey 803). This social empiricism as Marx described it, is essentially what Edgar Huntly unconsciously gains during his wilderness adventure. Cropsey continues to describe Marx,

“increase in population at some point forced them to produce necessities and thereby to become distinguished from the beasts...man’s rationality or rather ‘consciousness’ is not fundamental but derivative...and the content of his reason must be determined by conditions external to his reason, conditions which are strictly material” (Cropsey 803).

Again, Edgar seems almost meant to awake in the cavern, stripped of his senses and facing a predatory beast to invoke his primitive nature and instantly dissolve the distinction between man and beast. Therefore, he emerges with a subtle change in his social perceptions, exemplified by his handling of the last Indian’s death, the switching of cultural weaponry and the action of leaving the musket as a grave marker for the Indian to represent a mortal comradeship that extends beyond the social consciousness deriving from their respective ideological conditioning. That is, beyond the historical fracturing of their social groups—again it is to be noted that per the

historical connotations, Brown includes the Scots-Irish in the symbolism of Edgar's encounter with the dying "savage." Brown's veiled implication brought to a logical point of frankness is that capitalistic-materialistic competition causes their respective populations to believe they are constantly being threatened by the other, because ultimately they are all simply playing their part in a cyclical pattern that benefits the purveyors of idealism.

If his goal is to subversively criticize latent tendencies of individualism in American politics and society for the contradiction to classical republicanism and the false idealism of respective partisan promises, it is clear why Brown's American Gothic novels culminates with the re-telling of this particular timeline of Quaker-Irish relations. Specifically because, both the Scots-Irish immigrants and the Quakers migrated to America for idealistic, utopian hopes and whatever their ideological differences that kept them superficially opposed, this inherently individualistic floating promise of security and prosperity is applied successfully to both by institutional forces. The Quakers carried European ties to the English Crown through Willaim Penn himself, their journey to America was a spiritual one but finer details such as Penn's land charter acquired from the king seems indicative of European imperialism and underlying commercial motivation. The Scots-Irish immigrants, mostly fleeing famine and their own political upheavals, embraced the classical republican ideal of civic virtue. During the revolution then it is somewhat appropriate the Scots-Irish readily join the revolutionaries, buying into the proclamation of classical republicanism because of the professed idea that if successful it would improve their situation. Having sided with the republican revolutionaries, the Scots-Irish social group gains temporary power over the Quakers in the implied social hierarchy—but also literally as the jailors of the famous Quaker exiles. And in the aftermath of the revolution, the Quakers are elevated again because of their use to the Federalist administration, and tensions with the

Scots Irish rise as their ever-growing population expressed favor with Jeffersonian republicanism—specifically because of the association of the “promise of prosperity” with western expansion and settlement rather than with trade.¹ All considered, they are simply, as Fisher Ames said of the entities on the larger political stage, *taking their turns*.²

Part IV: Conclusion: Brown’s Underestimated Influence on Modernity

As Brown alludes to in *Wieland*, with its archetypal “sins of the father” theme, there is no Lockean fresh start to be had in America because American are not “starting fresh,” they are simply reinventing the Old-World, European model of governance. As the Marxist will point out where feudal and imperial Europe rule with repression, and the outright and blatant establishment of social barriers in reality, the modern states of the post-revolutionary era rule through ideology. Brown initially recognizes this hypocrisy in the expression of nascent ideological tendencies in early America and their transparent manifestation in partisan conflict. Scott Bradfield analyzes increasing transgressions in American Romance, “By presuming to transgress European laws and traditions, Americans acted out a story originally generated by class conflict in Europe...A story describing how humble, self-educated, underprivileged bourgeois men subvert aristocratic justice becomes translated into a story about transgressing foreign lands and people” (Bradfield xiii). Brown lays out this romantic methodology—already seeming to tend towards cultural dissatisfaction according to Bradfield—in *Edgar Huntly* with his opposition of frontiersmen and Indians, and his historical objectivity allows him to further this emerging American Romantic idiosyncrasy towards the gothic, as Scott Bradfield says,

¹ Peter Kafer notes an instance in October 1799, in which one Elizabeth Drinker writes in her diary of the rally around an election concerning the Republican Thomas McKean. She writes that narratives of

triumphant Irish frontiersmen killing Indians in the north were being spread to the Irish population of Philadelphia to sway the Republican vote.

² Fisher Ames, *Dangers of American Liberty*

making “political tropes into psychological ones,” and combing the Old-World European, the New-World idealistic American, and the defrauded Indians in this trans-Atlantic reproduction of class struggle. He first critiqued the prevalent political parties and their respective ideologies through allusions that revealed a shared kinship, but with the arena of social groupings at odds in *Edgar Huntly* and its historical allusions to more points of various social fracturing in the American reality, he is going deeper with his subversive tactics. The state of social relations and Edgar’s insights from his experience of “anti-enlightenment” in the wilderness suggests, through a breakdown of ideology, a validity to suspicions of self-serving or conspiratorial government policy on both sides of the partisan schism. He is going deeper with this subversion because Edgar’s change in feelings of hostility and vengeance as well as his sense of moral superiority from his experience invokes Cicero once again, bringing Brown’s gothic novels full-circle in theme. The allusion of Edgar’s subsequent lack of social animosity or exercising of distinction through differing value systems, is that his experience in the wilderness imparted upon him the Ciceronian sentiment, *cui bono?*¹—“for whose benefit?” Once again incorporating the American historical breadth by indicting the present state of socio-political individualism, as he not only implies hypocrisy because of classical republicanism effecting the idealistic motivation of revolution, but questions the legitimacy of the revolution’s claim of public good.

Brown offers critique and suspicions of the cultural identity of early America but does not offer a solution himself. Yet, for the first works of American Gothic it seems appropriate as American history will further unfold to indeed reveal a country that, while saying it is wholly individualistic would be obviously be an unfounded generalization, *is* of a capitalistic foundation. His work, which can be viewed as identifying proto-Marxist ideology, subverts

¹ Cicero, *Pro Roscio Amerino*, Section 84

essentially through recognition of emergent capitalism. Therefore, although he does not offer direct solutions in his veiled social critique, his recognition of nascent contradictions in emergent capitalist thought anticipates generations of philosophical schools' attempts at understanding the human condition in the modern age.

Richard Tarnas asserts that, "By all accounts the central prophet of the postmodern mind was Freidrich Nietzsche, with his radical persepectivism" (Tarnas 395), yet Brown, writing a century before Nietzsche and on a different continent no less, makes radical persepectivism the central theme amongst the plot's historical subtext, or at least the central avenue of recognizing contradictions. Brown's work is applicable to many lenses, and in this sense, his use of perspective anticipates both the modernists' radical individualism and Nietzsche's dark terms regarding this individualism. Tarnas says that with Nietzsche, "There is an appreciation of the plasticity and constant change of reality and knowledge, a stress on the priority of concrete experience over fixed abstract principles, and a conviction that no single a priori thought system should govern belief" (Tarnas 395). These specified principles seem parallel to the modernists' aims of re-examination of society, which Brown also invokes in *Wieland*, by recalling of the early origins of European radical Protestantism, with Jakob Boehme's "eternal dualism," and therefore the philosophical reconciliation of the Elder Wieland's "successful" combustion into divine fire—or to use the Quaker-seeking term, illumination—by embodying truth through his individualism, his unwillingness to join any sect that held institutional doctrine. Yet, the nature of the Elder Wieland's demise on the hill of radical individualism is still given as a dark tale to the reader—though it seems nothing compared to Theodore's death by blind faith in contradictory ideologies—and so one could say Brown anticipates modernist thought while simultaneously expressing them in a way of dark suspicious indicative of Nietzsche. Tarnas

finishes his summary of Nietzsche, “that the value of all truths and assumptions must be continually subjected to direct testing. The critical search for truth is constrained to be tolerant of ambiguity and pluralism and its outcome will necessarily be knowledge that is relative and fallible rather than absolute or certain” (Tarnas 396). This is wholly embodied by Brown’s giving Clara—“clear”—the distinct Cartesian expression of doubting and mistrusting the certainty of her senses or what the particulars of the landscape of a given situation connotes to her perspective and judgment. His characterization of Theodore Wieland as representative of these “pluralisms” through his expression of pure certainty in the truths he holds, and the outcome of Edgar Huntly’s journey through the sublime leaves him with a realization that his knowledge of the world and of society is “relative and fallible.”

Brown’s use of objective and self-conscious history to subvert the crux of the early American identity—its idealism—lends to his exasperation with truths in general because, as is easily observable in his work, he uses a common Federalist critique of the Jeffersonians—that truths expressed in Jefferson’s sociopolitical environment were riddled with hypocrisies of historical ignorance—to subtly indict the Federalists of the same tendencies, thus highlighting the contradictory basis for ideologies in America. In subverting the American ideal of a fresh start, a clean break from Europe, he also subverts the American romantic sensibility of a place of picturesque and serene landscapes that invokes imagination not burdened by the cold and self-serving European ways, by showing their historical kinship and in turn changing the American landscape from picturesque—which is an ideal and therefore controllable by a man—to the awesome sublime—in which man loses control and therefore loses humanity. This is the essence of the American Gothic and it translates to Roland Barthes take on the essence of poststructuralism, which is that a “‘system of meaning’ underpins Western culture. . .and that this

system of meaning is a result of western's philosophic and religious beliefs that they (and only they) embody the Truth" (Barthes 681). Barthes' work, *Mythologies* was a grand work in the theory of poststructuralism, but Brown is, in a way, alluding to "mythologies" himself with his impossible critique of the historian, ever condemned to share the role of romancer. Barthes' take on signification is that words in language "Share organizational capacity to describe something from different perspectives" (Mahbub 1), and therefore the forming of myth and the working of myth within society has everything to do with an influence of perspective, and subsequently, "these myths create class distinction and represent social functions and norms" (Mahbub 1). Take the example in *Edgar Huntly* of the intricate relationship symbolism between the Irish, the Indians, and the Quakers and its allusion to Brown's present in the 1790s. He draws first on the history of how Quaker affiliates defrauded the Indians of land, sold the land to Irish frontiersmen, and then blamed the subsequent Indian attacks on the settlers' own "drunkenness" and "wickedness," then on the revolutionary Philadelphia when the Quakers were persecuted by the revolutionaries, who used the Irish immigrants as ready and willing militia-men, and finally on his present day when the Quakers are valued by a Federalist rather than Republican government for their ironically acquired skills in Indian peace negotiations and the continued influx of Irish immigrants to Philadelphia resulted in some to call them a "mob" and indeed reassert the term "savages." He places all of this historical context into an ambiguous story that seems an amalgamation the events of the three historical periods in question, and brings them into the sublime wilderness, to the primitive, and the truly savage, where they are ultimately rendered irrelevant. The ironic trade-offs in roles between the three social classes or social groupings as history proceeds is being played upon by Brown here in the same sense of Barthes' conceptualization of myth.

In the second half of Edgar's ordeal, when he has come down from the cavern, the change in his perspective made by the unraveling of relevancy or attachment to his ideals, implies another similar sentiment to Barthes in that myth, "is a system of communication" (Mahbub 2). That is to say, "pacifist" and "savage" are not just relative terms that serve a purpose, as the Marxist reading suggests, but they are words *constructed* by culture and society to convey meaning and therefore may be deconstructed through a radical perspective. Brown's work, as it pertains to his use of this historical self-consciousness, is therefore working in some of ways of the poststructuralist: that is to say, he consolidates all of Western Civilization under one such "system of meaning," which he unravels by taking Edgar out of Civilization and into the cavern. The allegorical setting of literal senselessness, of eye-opening helplessness and ultimately of basic primal survivalism, enables him to quite frankly state outright the meaninglessness of established convention.

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