



This is to certify that the

thesis entitled

**RENDERING UP "THE TALE OF WHAT WE ARE":
GOTHIC NARRATIVE METHODS IN
SELECTED NOVELS OF GODWIN, BROWN & SHELLEY**

presented by

Virginia Susan Gallaher McKinley

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph. D degree in **English**

A handwritten signature in cursive script, likely belonging to the major professor, written over a horizontal line.

Major professor

Date **March 3, 1986**



RETURNING MATERIALS:
Place in book drop to
remove this checkout from
your record. FINES will
be charged if book is
returned after the date
stamped below.

JUN 13 1994

12

SEP 12 1995

FEB 05 1997

AUG 14 1998

~~RECEIVED~~

RENDERING UP "THE TALE OF WHAT WE ARE":
GOTHIC NARRATIVE METHODS IN
SELECTED NOVELS OF GODWIN, BROWN AND SHELLEY

By

Virginia Susan Gallaher McKinley

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

1986

1477

Copyright by

VIRGINIA GALLAHER McKINLEY

1986

ABSTRACT

RENDERING UP "THE TALE OF WHAT WE ARE": GOTHIC NARRATIVE METHODS IN SELECTED NOVELS OF GODWIN, BROWN & SHELLEY

By

Virginia Susan Gallaher McKinley

Although scholars have used the labels "terror gothic" and "horror gothic" according to Ann Radcliffe's definition, they continue to treat these very different strains of literature as virtually the same, and consequently, the more flamboyant terror fiction has been seen as the mainstream of the gothic tradition, while the more philosophical horror fiction, until Frankenstein, has been virtually ignored. Yet early horror writers, who emphasize the monstrous within every individual, are important because they experiment with new and different methods of using self-deluded first-person narrators to reflect their disillusionment with the optimism of the period and to deceive and involve the audience-- methods which are later employed by major authors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

After distinguishing between terror and horror fiction, this study examines the narrative techniques of selected novels of three early writers of horror fiction who were aware of and inspired by each other as serious artists and

thinkers--William Godwin's Caleb Williams, Charles Brockden Brown's Arthur Mervyn, Wieland, and Edgar Huntly and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. The chapters discuss the methods the narrators use to impose their delusions upon their readers, and show how the horror tradition forms a downward spiral from Godwin's forced commitment to Caleb's last-minute realization through Brown's deepening despair to Shelley's belief in the omnipotence of error and the monstrous potential of the individual.

The first-person narrators of Godwin, Brown and Shelley clearly illustrate the indomitable urge of human beings to create truth according to their self-perceptions and to lure others to participate in those delusions. Even authors and readers, who may imagine themselves superior to the narrators, engage in the same process of defining personal error as truth. Godwin, Brown and Shelley, in their profound loss of faith in humankind, provide a stark contrast to the generally optimistic tenor of their time, and look forward to the chaos and pessimism of the twentieth-century vision.

For My Parents,
Charles Richard and Dorothy Rigby Gallaher

I have made my bed
In charnels and on coffins, where black death
Keeps records of the trophies won from thee,
Hoping to still these obstinate questionings
Of thee and thine, by forcing up some lone ghost,
Thy messenger, to render up the tale
Of what we are. . . .

"Alastor," Percy Bysshe Shelley

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the guidance and advice given me by the members of my doctoral committee, Professor Richard Benvenuto, Professor Emeritus C. David Mead and Professor Victor Paananen, and by Professor Emeritus Russel B. Nye who first introduced me to Charles Brockden Brown. Thanks, too, to my friend Pat Julius who inspired some of my best insights into Clara Wieland. I am also deeply indebted to my committee director Professor Cathy Davidson for her enthusiastic assistance, candid criticism and respect; and to my husband Blaine for his patient support, clever suggestions and hours of proofreading.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. The Realization: <u>Caleb Williams</u> . . .	18
Chapter 2. The Breakdown: <u>Arthur Mervyn</u> . . .	59
Chapter 3. The Projection: <u>Wieland</u>	105
Chapter 4. The Degradation: <u>Edgar Huntly</u> . . .	143
Chapter 5. The Monstrosity: <u>Frankenstein</u> . . .	180
Afterword	223
Bibliography	228

Introduction

As Ellen Moers remarks in Literary Women, defining gothic literature is difficult, and no truly satisfactory definition exists, "except that it has to do with fear."¹ But for Ann Radcliffe, one of the most famous and most widely plagiarized gothic novelists of the eighteenth century, gothic literature may be defined by one of two purposes--to terrify or to horrify. G.R. Thompson writes of Radcliffe's view of the gothic:

Mrs. Radcliffe . . . in her often misunderstood essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry," . . . asserts that terror and horror are really "opposite." Terror "expands the soul" and "wakens the faculties to a high degree"; horror "contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them." But this is another paradox of gothic duality; terror and horror represent complementary poles of a single continuum of perception and response. Terror, in her terms, may be seen as coming upon us from without, engulfing us with an awful sense of the sublime in which sense of self is swallowed in immensity--whereas horror rises up from within with a vague consciousness of the "dreader [sic] evil" sinking downward through levels of subconscious "uncertainty and obscurity" into a vast unconscious reservoir of primitive dread.²

Although scholars have used the labels "terror gothic" and "horror gothic" according to Radcliffe's distinction for

some time, they have tended to persist in discussing both types together as "the gothic," i.e. they have treated very different strains of the tradition as virtually the same. Until recently, most scholarship in the area has concentrated on the "what" of gothic fiction--the conventions and trappings--rather than on the "how"--the narrative technique. The terror gothic which depends for its effect more on sensational elements than narrative technique, therefore, is usually seen as the mainstream of early gothic fiction, while the horror gothic which employs elaborate experiments with technique and uses far fewer conventional trappings is virtually ignored in its first stages. In order to understand better the importance of the distinction between terror gothic and horror gothic, one must examine how both types of fictions work to frighten readers.

The terror gothic, as Radcliffe acknowledges, fixes attention on the external world, on that which is distant, foreign, apart. Many of the conventions commonly associated with the whole gothic tradition serve to strengthen the outward focus of terror fiction. For example, terror fiction rarely, if ever, takes place "at home," but rather in distant, sometimes exotic, places and times. The most common settings in British terror fiction are Catholic countries, especially Italy and Spain where the extremities and barbarism of the Inquisition could be used to frighten readers already predisposed against Catholicism.

As an outgrowth of the often religious flavor of their settings, terror novelists exploit the possibilities of the supernatural, the occult, the bizarre or the merely depraved. Consequently, they frequently employ a selection of ghosts, menacing castles with labyrinthine corridors and stairways, mysterious disembodied voices and lights, bleeding statues, devils, magic mirrors, locked trunks, catacombs and graveyards, and other similar "claptrap." Ridiculous as these devices seem, and often are, they perform vital functions in terror novels. First of all, if a reader can accept the given constructs of a particular novel, such supernatural trappings sometimes do increase the reader's feelings of suspense and enjoyment. More importantly, however, the "claptrap" strengthens the underlying assumption of terror fiction that the sources of evil and fear in our lives are external. The ghosts and devils may be just around the next corner or through the secret passageway and, therefore, cause our "faculties" to "waken" and "expand," but they are never inside us.

Evil is external on the human as well as the supernatural plane in terror fiction. Innocent and virtuous heroines, separated from their families and virtuous lovers, are constantly harassed and threatened by dark and depraved villains who are always foreign and generally Catholic clerics. The characters, whether virtuous or evil, are basically borrowed from sentimental fiction, and terror

is elicited from the reader more on the grounds of the villain's ominous appearance and the situations encountered by the heroine as she attempts to keep her virtue and freedom safe from the villain, than on any deep identification or empathy with the heroine. The third-person narrative method and the fairly simple clear-cut nature of the characters support a consistently outward gaze. But these conventions also prevent the audience from becoming directly involved in the novel by maintaining distance between the characters and the reader, forcing the reader into the role of detached observer. Because terror fiction rarely uses first-person narration, the characters evoke little sympathy or identification in the audience. What is more, because the villain is the only truly aggressive character, he is more interesting to the audience than the virtuous heroine, sometimes contrary to the intentions of the author. Terror gothic, then, invites the reader to watch a dramatic confrontation between the clearly defined forces of good and evil, a conflict which the reader may observe with interest, awe and terror, but without becoming personally involved.

Fortunately, the best terror fiction equals more than the sum of its apparently silly and insipid elements. Virginia Woolf recognizes in Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho both "the beauty and absurdity of romance,"³ and, indeed, not only are the descriptions of scenery in Udolpho and Radcliffe's other well-known work, The Italian, beautiful,

they correspond in a way not previously employed to the psychological state of her characters.⁴ Further, both Radcliffe and M.G. Lewis in his The Monk explore the behavior of very different characters oppressed by psychological stress, as Richardson does earlier in Pamela and Clarissa. Radcliffe's heroines, Emily and Ellena, on the one hand, deal with the chaos and terror of their circumstances by trying to impose a sense of order on those things and people they still control, and by keeping alive the sense of well-being and calm which informs their early lives. Panic and hysteria may creep through periodically, but Emily and Ellena manage to overcome their emotions with reason, faith and a little luck.

Lewis's hero-villain Ambrosio, on the other hand, reacts to stress with confusion and violence. So powerful and ungovernable is Ambrosio's passionate energy that every role imposed on him proves stressful for him. He cannot be content as the most pious and charismatic monk in Madrid, nor is he satisfied in his role of debauched and sadistic murderer. Like Milton's Satan before him and Shelley's monster after, Ambrosio experiences hell whichever way he turns. Lewis implies, as Radcliffe never does, that a character may himself be hell, that evil may come from inside, but he obscures the implication by numbering Ambrosio among the victims in The Monk. Where Emily and Ellena are victimized by petty criminals intent on a larger

purpose than murdering the heroine, Ambrosio is tormented and besieged by human and supernatural forces alike, which bring about his destruction. Thus, while Radcliffe and Lewis create very different victims for their readers to observe, and come to nearly opposite conclusions about an individual's power to regulate his/her own life through reason, they both explore the psychology of entrapment. For all their ability to represent truths about human psychology and behavior in a new and terrifying way, however, neither Radcliffe nor Lewis is particularly innovative with regard to narrative technique. Although they occasionally employ the tale-within-a-tale technique, both writers keep the audience firmly outside the narrative framework with the use of the third-person perspective.

Early terror literature in America differs from that of eighteenth-century Britain in several ways. For one thing, the first examples of terror literature in America, which predate Mrs. Radcliffe by a full century, are not, properly speaking, fictions, but rather, accounts of actual events. For another, they are written in the first-person. Thirdly, they take place in the author's own country. But like terror fiction, the captivity narratives by such authors as Mary Rowlandson focus the reader's attention on the forces of good and evil in the external world. Rowlandson's sense of passivity, of being a pawn in the larger struggle between the evil Indians and God is reflected

in the title of her account: The Sovereignty & Goodness of God, Together with the Faithfulness of His Promises Displayed; Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson. Although Rowlandson tells her tale in the first person, sometimes describing her situation and emotions quite carefully, her account is not the least introspective. She believes death and salvation are both out of her power, so while her fear and hatred of her captors is clear, she awaits God's intervention with confidence and fortitude. Later, Indians as symbols of evil and sources of terror figure prominently in American literature, perhaps most notably in the Leatherstocking Tales of James Fennimore Cooper. But Charles Brockden Brown, as I will discuss shortly, overturns the convention in Edgar Huntly by using Indians as mirrors of the horror he perceives in the internal life of the individual and society.

Terror literature in its original form is not especially popular today. The novels of terror gothicists such as Radcliffe and Lewis are not universally known or appreciated (although Lewis's eroticism may attract some curious readers), nor are captivity narratives. Many types of fictions which have roots in early terror literature and which develop throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries remain immensely popular, however. Terror gothic gives rise, for example, to the mystery and detective literature of writers like Wilkie Collins (The Moonstone, The Woman in

White), Edgar Allan Poe ("Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Roget," "The Gold Bug"), and Arthur Conan Doyle (the Sherlock Holmes canon), and, of course, their successors G.K. Chesterton, Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers. Supernatural or ghost stories also grow out of terror fiction. Wilkie Collins is a major figure in this area (The Haunted Hotel), as are Sheridan Le Fanu ("Carmilla," "Green Tea") and Washington Irving ("Rip Van Winkle," "The Adventure of the German Student"). The extremely well-liked and enduring forms of gothic romance and science fiction are yet other forms related to the terror gothic which have attracted innumerable writers and readers.

Horror fiction becomes much more recognized and widespread after the publication of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein in 1818, for with Frankenstein the possibilities of monstrousness as a metaphor for the human condition and as a narrative technique become obvious. James Hogg (Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner, 1820) and Charles Robert Maturin (Melmoth the Wanderer, 1821), for instance, continue experimentation with gothic narrative structure and character development. Hogg's work, in fact, is an amazingly convincing account of a psychologically fragmented character suffering from a personality disorder which psychiatrists are only now beginning to understand. At the end of the century in a novel distinguished by narrative chaos, Bram Stoker creates a nightmare figure to rival Shelley's

monster, a figure who lives on even in the imaginations of those who have never heard of Stoker's novel--*Dracula*. But while a few writers devote their creative energies to further developing horror fiction, others turn their attention to "civilizing" the monster, i.e. to incorporating the strategies for horror so effective in popular fiction into "serious" literature. Many major authors in nineteenth-century Britain and America depend heavily upon the horror gothic: Edgar Allan Poe ("William Wilson," 1839; "The Fall of the House of Usher," 1839; "The Tell-Tale Heart," 1843; "The Cask of Amontillado," 1846), Charlotte Brontë (Jane Eyre, 1847; Villette, 1853), Emily Brontë (Wuthering Heights, 1847), Nathaniel Hawthorne (The Scarlet Letter, 1850), Charles Dickens (Bleak House, 1852-3; Great Expectations, 1861), Herman Melville (Moby Dick, 1855; "Benito Cereno," 1856), and Henry James (The Turn of the Screw, 1898). The influence of the horror gothic is even present in our own century, perhaps most obviously in the works of Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner.

The horror gothic, concentrating as it does on the springs of evil and delusion in the human soul, has never enjoyed the widespread popular acceptance afforded the descendants of terror fiction, except when, as with Frankenstein and Dracula, it can be transformed into a "we versus it" terror story. Horror fiction is, even at its least successful, more philosophical and more technically complex

than terror fiction, but although it may be compelling and provocative, it is often neither pleasant nor entertaining in its outcome. Its purpose is, after all, to horrify, which necessarily implies, I think, an attack not only on the audience's psychological state, but on its attitudes about itself and humankind as well. Writers of horror fiction frighten readers by holding a mirror in front of them. They set their works in their own countries or, in the cases of some American writers, in an allegorical "Everymansland"; they may employ foreign settings occasionally in parts of their works, but they always bring the horror home to England or America. The horror gothic breaks down the traditional moral distinctions so important in terror fiction, in addition to national distinctions. The villainous and virtuous blend together in the same character or in a set of symbiotic characters, making the characters more complex and the reader's judgments more problematical. Moreover, the first-person narrative technique allows deluded and destructive narrators to gain their audience's sympathy and thereby to implicate the audience in horrifying crimes. Because the narrators are self-interested and self-deluded, they are able to make readers believe the narrators are ordinary people and their actions are justifiable. The reader is thus linked closely with the dark underside of human nature, and ideally, forced to recognize his/her own monstrousness.

Horror gothicists' concerns about human monstrousness may be detected in their narrative designs as well as in their characterizations. Writers experiment with various ways to make first-person narration more horrifying, more representative of the mind in the process of disintegration. They fashion their narratives into patterns resembling Chinese boxes, adjacent boxes, frames, circles and zigzags, occasionally allowing bits of information to escape from the narrators' control. They do not strive for the symmetrical, but for the freakish, the distorted, the unexpected, which they see as the true shape of existence. Mary Shelley, one should remember, refers not to the monster in her novel but to the novel itself as "my hideous progeny." And always appended to the hideousness of the narrative design itself, like a grotesque extra limb, is another Doppelgänger of the narrator--the reader.

ii

If Shelley's Frankenstein marks the beginning of horror fiction's visibility, it also marks the end of the earliest stream of the horror gothic. Overshadowed at first by the terror gothic dominated by Radcliffe and Lewis, the fictions of William Godwin, Charles Brockden Brown and, finally, Mary Shelley have never been considered the impetus of the entire horror tradition. Indeed, although scholars have seen links and similarities between these three writers,

no one has ever suggested that they constitute a distinct artistic and philosophical group within the stream of horror literature. The evidence of the novels and these authors' journals and correspondence confirms that they were aware of each other as serious artists and thinkers, and that each was inspired by the visions and innovations of the others. Thus, Godwin's Caleb Williams (1794), Brown's Wieland (1798), Arthur Mervyn (1799), and Edgar Huntly (1799), and Shelley's Frankenstein (1818) form the earliest group of horror novels--novels which present, qualify and contradict Godwin's belief that human beings can achieve perfection through the exercise of reason, and which develop the types of narrative strategies and characters which survive in horror fiction to the present.

In 1794, Godwin published Caleb Williams, a work he called "the offspring of that temper of mind in which the composition of my Political Justice left me."⁵ Using horror as his vehicle, Godwin hoped to teach "a valuable lesson, without subtracting from the interest and passion"⁶ necessary to good fiction--the lesson that reason, sincerity and benevolence were truly more useful than passion, deceit and the laws of society to eradicate the "domestic and unrecorded despotism, by which man becomes the destroyer of man."⁷ But Caleb Williams is even more a tale of internal despotism, in which the narrator destroys another man and thereby himself because of self-delusion. True to his passion for truth,

Godwin has Caleb recognize the enormity of his actions in the end, but Godwin apparently contradicts his own optimism, for Caleb (and his reader) discovers the truth through passion, not reason, and is annihilated by truth, not saved.

The American Brown, to whom Godwin refers as the author "of distinguished genius" who inspired Mandeville (1817),⁸ was fascinated by the possibilities and contradictions of Godwin's philosophy and by the techniques Godwin uses in Caleb Williams to engage the audience's passions rather than its reason. Indeed, in his own novels, Brown tested Godwin's doctrine of human perfectibility and set Caleb Williams as an artistic standard for himself. As he struggled with his first work which remained unfinished, he wrote in his journal:

When a mental comparison is made between this and the mass of novels, I am inclined to be pleased with my own production. But when the objects of comparison are changed, and I revolve the transcendent merits of Caleb Williams, my pleasure is diminished, and is preserved from a total extinction only by the reflection that this performance is the first.⁹

Even after Brown could no longer share Godwin's optimism and his works took on an increasingly desperate and morbid tone, Brown continued to experiment with the first-person narrative style he found so powerful in Caleb Williams. Despite his ability to invent interesting and meaningful narrative designs, however, Brown was not able to control his fear and melancholy over the nature of humankind, and his novels,

though compelling and horrifying, are not as great as they might have been.

Mary Shelley is the literary heir of both Godwin and Brown, and Frankenstein is the culmination of the early horror gothic, as well as the first flowering of horror fiction as we know it today. Shelley learned her Godwinism both from Godwin's example and from his writings. As a father, Godwin was aloof and later, often petulant, providing Shelley with ample evidence that benevolence and reason frequently do not govern individuals' everyday lives and that self-delusion and self-justification can be insurmountable obstacles even to those who are committed to truth. Although the bond between Godwin and Shelley seems to have been strong, it was not usually happy, and so, Shelley honors only Godwin the author in the dedication to her first novel: "To William Godwin, Author of Political Justice, Caleb Williams, &c. These Volumes Are respectfully inscribed By The Author." Her journal entries and reading lists show that between the end of July, 1814 and the end of December, 1817, Shelley read Political Justice and Caleb Williams twice each, in addition to Fleetwood, St. Leon, Mandeville, the Miscellanies, Godwin's biography of Chaucer and a variety of essays. In that same period, Shelley also read Brown's Edgar Huntly, Wieland, Arthur Mervyn and Philip Stanley, the English version of Clara Howard, all works which contradict Godwin's belief in human perfectibility. Drawing on the

lessons provided in the works of Godwin and Brown, Shelley created a masterpiece of gothic horror in which she remained faithful to her sober view of humankind without compromising the impact of her artistry on the reader.

Taking Godwin, Brown and Shelley as a coherent group, then, my study examines the development of first-person narrative technique in the earliest stage of the horror gothic, from Caleb Williams to Frankenstein, concentrating especially on how these three authors manipulate, involve and horrify readers through the use of deluded and self-justifying narrators. Godwin, for example, creates Caleb Williams, a completely isolated narrator who appropriates other characters' tales and modes of conduct into his history, who nurtures a desperate belief in his virtue, and who engages the reader's identification and sympathy, until he is confronted with the consequences of his actions and is destroyed. The audience, which ideally loses itself in Caleb, suddenly finds itself victimized by Caleb and implicated in his crimes--a situation which, Godwin hopes, jars the audience out of its own self-deceit and complacency. In all three of his novels discussed here, Brown also uses the general formula worked out in Caleb Williams (always omitting the recognition scene at the end), but in each case, he gives it a different twist. In Arthur Mervyn, Brown provides a frame narrator, Dr. Stevens, who introduces, comments on and ostensibly records three quarters of Mervyn's

narrative. Then, after allowing Dr. Stevens to provide perspectives contrary to Mervyn's, Brown abruptly turns the account over to Mervyn, who plunges himself into isolation and insanity, and ends the novel without resolution. Brown complicates the narrative structure of Wieland, in contrast, by creating a female narrator who refuses to allow herself a history and who seems, therefore, strangely divorced from her own narration. Clara Wieland, unlike Caleb Williams or Arthur Mervyn, reveals her account not to exonerate but to condemn herself. In still another experiment with narrative technique, Brown creates Edgar Huntly, a narrator whose delusions and brutality are obvious to the audience early in the novel and who loses control of his narration so completely that he cannot finish it; Brown ends the account of Huntly's life with condemnatory letters written by one of Huntly's victims. Finally, Shelley creates a trio of narrators who are and are not separate from each other in the whirling nightmare world of Frankenstein; who inform, qualify and contradict each other; and who ultimately demonstrate for the reader the horrible confusion of life, the futility of human endeavor and the impossibility of Godwinian perfection. Although the artistry of these novels and their importance in the horror tradition have not been sufficiently appreciated, Godwin, Brown, and Shelley explore and exploit the gothic possibilities of first-person narration and, indeed, produce the first and some of the most effective examples of gothic horror fiction.

Notes

¹Ellen Moers, Literary Women (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), p. 90.

²G.R. Thompson, "Introduction: Romanticism and the Gothic Tradition," in The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism, ed. G.R. Thompson (Pullman, WA: Washington State Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 3-4.

³Robert Kiely, The Romantic Novel in England (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), p. 66.

Edwin: His Friends and Con-
t. New York: AMS Press,

o Caleb Williams, in Caleb
New York: W.W. Norton, 1977),

o Mandeville, in Mandeville,
y in England, 3 vols. (Edin-
ndon: Longman, Hurst, Rees,

Charles Brockden Brown,
Henry Colburn, 1822), p. 74.

JUL 24 1998

⑦

Notes

¹Ellen Moers, Literary Women (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), p. 90.

²G.R. Thompson, "Introduction: Romanticism and the Gothic Tradition," in The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism, ed. G.R. Thompson (Pullman, WA: Washington State Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 3-4.

³Robert Kiely, The Romantic Novel in England (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), p. 66.

⁴Kiely, p. 80.

⁵C. Kegan Paul, William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries, 2 vols. (1876; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1970), p. 78.

⁶William Godwin, Preface to Caleb Williams, in Caleb Williams, ed. David McCracken (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), p. 1.

⁷Godwin, Preface, p. 1.

⁸William Godwin, Preface to Mandeville, in Mandeville, A Tale of the Seventeenth Century in England, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable; London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1817), p. x.

⁹William Dunlap, Memoirs of Charles Brockden Brown, The American Novelist (London: Henry Colburn, 1822), p. 74.

Chapter 1

The Realization: Caleb Williams

In "Of an Early Taste for Reading," one essay in a collection entitled The Enquirer (1797), William Godwin thus describes the experience of losing himself or becoming egoless as he reads his favorite authors:

It is impossible that we can be much accustomed to such companions, without attaining some resemblance of them. When I read Thomson, I become Thomson; when I read Milton, I become Milton. I find myself a sort of intellectual camelion [sic], assuming the color of the substance on which I rest.¹

Clearly, in Godwin's mind, the reader is, or ought to be, an active participant in the author's creation. Godwin further explains in the essay that an audience which is evil or unwilling to lose control will not experience a book as the author intends, whereas the virtuous and educated reader will gladly surrender to the powerful insights a book offers.

Although his notion of reading seems to emphasize the audience's passivity as it loses itself in a book, Godwin's view of the relationship between author and reader actually gives a great deal of power to the reader. A reader re-creates what the author creates according to the "temper"

of his or her mind and, therefore, absolves the author of responsibility for the effect of the book. A virtuous reader, says Godwin, will derive virtue from books, but "he that would extract poison from them, must for the most part come to them with a mind already debauched."² Yet even though he violently opposes censorship on moral grounds, Godwin is also keenly aware that, pursued to excess, reading may prove detrimental to an individual's ability to live in the world. In "Of Choice in Reading" he cautions:

It is not good, that he should be shut up for ever in imaginary scenes, and that, familiar with the apothegms of philosophers, and the maxims of scientific and elevated morality, he should be wholly ignorant of the perverseness of the human heart, and the springs that regulate the conduct of mankind ("Of Choice," pp. 143-44).

Thus, as desirable as it is to lose the self temporarily and become part of an author's creation, it is equally important to be able to recover and reassert the self in the everyday world.

Despite the fact that the Enquirer essays, which contain much of Godwin's "reading theory," were written four years after Caleb Williams, I do not think it too rash to assume that Godwin hopes to provide for his reader the sort of experience Thomson and Milton provide for him--to make his novel's ideal reader play the "camelion." Only in this way could Caleb Williams truly be "a tale, that shall

constitute an epoch in the mind of the reader, that no one, after he has read it, shall ever be exactly the same man that he was before."³ Early in the composition process, Godwin explains in his Preface to Fleetwood, he realized that in order for his work to have such a profound effect, he needed to make "the hero of my tale his own historian" (App. II, p. 339) so that the reader would assume the color, not of the author Godwin, but of the narrator Caleb Williams. Hence, as Godwin wields his "metaphysical dissecting knife" (App. II, p. 339) to uncover and express Caleb's feelings and motives, he dissects the reader as well, and the reader who will become the "camelion" risks losing his character as Caleb ultimately does.

To make the reader identify only with Caleb Williams, Godwin absents himself completely from the narrative, and because Caleb alone speaks directly to his audience, one forgets that Godwin exists at all. Even the periodic philosophizing, which critics have usually seen as Godwin's own undisguised didacticism, appropriately belongs to Caleb; these passages may justifiably be considered awkward or inappropriate to a fictional work, and hence, examples of Godwin's flaws as a novelist, but they are certainly not uncharacteristic of Caleb. The narrator is Godwin's creature, of course, but Caleb is not Godwin, nor does he hold Godwinian standards for his personal conduct.

If one attends closely to the description Caleb Williams

gives of himself at the beginning of his narrative, one will see that Caleb defines and conducts himself as an emotional rather than a philosophical being. His remarkable skill at storytelling has presumably been fostered by his immoderate emotional attachment to reading narrative and romance:

I panted for the unravelling of an adventure, with an anxiety, perhaps almost equal to that of the man whose future happiness or misery depended on its issue. I read, I devoured compositions of this sort. They took possession of my soul; and the effects they produced, were frequently discernible in my external appearance and my health.⁴

In his willingness to participate in books, Caleb seems to exemplify Godwin's notion of the ideal reader. But with Caleb, Godwin has pushed his theory of reading to its limits, even to its reductio absurdum. Caleb's early zeal for reading and his later compulsion to write are not healthy. His admission that he has "no practical acquaintance with men" (CW, p. 5) and his "considerable aversion" (CW, p. 4) to the activities of his peers contradict Godwin's admonition in "Of Choice in Reading" to avoid isolation. Not only has Caleb isolated himself from mankind, his long association with fiction, while rendering him an excellent and powerful narrator, has muddled his ability to distinguish responses appropriate to fictional situations from responses appropriate in real life. As I will show, Godwin sees clearly the

distinction between fiction and life--a distinction his fictional character, Caleb Williams, overlooks and encourages the audience to overlook as well.

ii

Caleb's naivete, isolation and unharnessed curiosity--traits nurtured by his compulsive reading--combine to make every event in his life a "reading experience." When he moves to Falkland's home he reacts to his intercourse with others, especially the squire, the same way he reacts to books. "I was excited by every motive of interest and novelty to study my master's character, and I found in it an ample field for speculation and conjecture" (CW, p. 6). This one sentence betrays two important facts about Caleb's relationships with others: first, he tends to treat people as he treats fictional characters, as subjects of empirical observation rather than complex feeling human beings; and second, he is more concerned with "speculation and conjecture," i.e., a good story, than with the truth. The nature of Caleb's dealings with characters inside and the audience outside the novel is largely defined in terms of reading and storytelling.

In the world of the novel, of course, Caleb's primary relationship is with Squire Falkland, a character conceived by Godwin "so that every reader should feel prompted almost to worship him for his high qualities" (App. II, p. 337).

Caleb too reveres Falkland greatly and supposedly out of pity for his master's obvious distress, consults Collins about his master's history. Like Caleb's own introduction of himself as a reader, Collins's history of Falkland begins with an account of the squire as a reader, not of narrative prose, but of heroic poetry:

Among the favourite authors of his early years were the heroic poets of Italy. From them he imbibed the love of chivalry and romance. . . . But, while his imagination was purged by a certain infusion of philosophy, he conceived that there was in the manners depicted by these celebrated poets, something to imitate, as well as something to avoid. He believed that nothing was so well calculated to make men delicate, gallant and humane, as a temper perpetually alive to the sentiments of birth and honour. The opinions he entertained upon these topics were illustrated in his conduct, which was assiduously conformed to the model of heroism that his fancy suggested (CW, p. 10).

Falkland's character is shaped by his early reading as much as Caleb's is; in fact, Collins does not specifically mention that the squire had any other form of education, and notes that Falkland's travels in Europe confirmed rather than destroyed the reverence for reputation in his mind. But Caleb's and Falkland's reading, instead of bringing the two men together, makes their communication difficult and uncomfortable.

This difficulty of communication results from a conflict in the ways the two men read the world and the reading

methods by which they define themselves. On the one hand, Squire Falkland's reading serves as a mode of instruction, a model from which he extracts rules for his own conduct and a set of expectations for the conduct of his acquaintances. Until Tyrrel humiliates him, he is just and benevolent to those who do not do violence to his expectations. His view of literature as primarily didactic in purpose, however, leads him to live by a code of conduct emphasizing reputation, a code Collins maintains Falkland absorbed from his reading rather than developed from his own experience or moral sense. Even the Malvesi incident which ends happily comes close to being a tragedy because of Falkland's code. As Falkland speaks to Malvesi, it becomes clear that concern for his reputation controls Falkland's life and overrules his more humane instincts:

But the laws of honour are in the utmost degree rigid, and there was reason to fear that, however anxious I were to be your friend, I might be obliged to be your murderer. Fortunately the reputation of my courage is sufficiently established, not to expose it to any impeachment by my declining your present defiance. It was lucky however that in our interview of yesterday you found me alone, and that accident by that means threw the management of the affair into my disposal. . . . But, if the challenge had been public, the proofs I had formerly given of courage would not have excused my present moderation; and, though desirous to have avoided the combat, it would not have been in my power (CW, pp. 15-16).

Since his code of conduct is not internally generated,

Falkland is unable to act appropriately when Tyrrel publicly shames him. Instead of challenging his assailant to a duel, the squire murders Tyrrel and, even worse, allows the Hawkineses to be executed for his crime.

Caleb, on the other hand, treats reading as a source of experience and emotional fulfillment rather than as a guide for conduct. He passionately participates in narrative fiction, i.e., in the lives of fictional characters, apparently losing himself in the vicarious feelings reading affords him. Moreover, the only people Caleb knows are fictional characters and seemingly the only passions he experiences result from assuming fictional identities as he reads; therefore, his only way of dealing with those around him is to attempt to read and assume their lives and passions too. Clearly, Falkland's reputation cannot bear such a close reading, and thus, the two men are inevitably pitted against each other, Falkland trying desperately to protect his reputation and Caleb trying just as desperately to get inside Falkland. Their early reading has instilled in each of them their life's obsessions, but they cannot survive together. Falkland must maintain a false reputation in order to create a sense of self, and Caleb, in order to exist as a feeling human being at all, must assume Falkland's self for his own.

If Caleb and Falkland subscribe to conflicting reading

methods they have in common an overwhelming and often vicious selfishness. Falkland's selfishness cuts many different ways, all of them destructive. First of all, the ideals of romantic and chivalric perfection which he acquires from his reading require constant self-scrutiny and more than a little arrogance. Once his desired reputation is established, Falkland must guard it carefully against a careless act of his own or an insult from someone else. By the time Caleb enters his household, however, the squire is engaged simultaneously in maintaining his former impeccable reputation, scarred by his having had to reply to criminal charges after Tyrrel's murder, and wallowing in equally ego-centric self-accusation. Caleb remarks that "when reflexion recurred, he appeared willing that the weight of his misfortune should fall wholly upon himself" (CW, p. 7) and describes Falkland as a man, who tormented by guilt, seeks to bury himself in a self-consuming solitude.

The weight of Falkland's guilt might well have fallen only on himself but for Caleb's peculiar brand of selfishness. Because Caleb has had no experience with the rest of humankind and because he derives his only meaningful experiences from the lives of others, he is concerned with gratifying his sole native passion--curiosity, "the spring of action which, perhaps more than any other, characterized the whole train of my life" (CW, p. 4). At the very first, it does not occur to him that anyone else has feelings which might

be hurt by his unharnessed curiosity; his perception of Falkland as an object of "speculation and conjecture" implies a detachment that keeps him from acknowledging his master's emotions. Although Caleb approaches Collins for information ostensibly out of concern for Falkland, Caleb responds to Collins's account not by empathizing with the squire, but by noting that the account "tended to inflame my curiosity" (CW, p. 9). Thus, while Falkland's egocentricity has reduced him to a largely passive fugitive vulnerable to exposure, Caleb enters the relationship actively and aggressively seeking gratification for his selfish curiosity.

The actual conflict between the two men begins almost immediately upon Caleb's employment. Not content to observe Falkland only in his more public moments, Caleb is driven to invade his master's moments of solitude as well. Caleb's first act of aggression occurs in the first trunk episode, in which he surprises the closeted Falkland apparently in the midst of a paroxysm of guilt:

I had conceived that there was no person in the room. . . . As I opened the door, I heard at the same instant a deep groan expressive of intolerable anguish. The sound of the door in opening seemed to alarm the person within; I heard the lid of a trunk hastily shut, and the noise as of fastening a lock. I conceived that Mr. Falkland was there, and was going instantly to retire; but at that moment a voice that seemed supernaturally tremendous exclaimed, Who is there? The voice was Mr. Falkland's. The sound of it thrilled my very vitals. I endeavoured to answer, but my speech failed, and being incapable of any other reply,

I instinctively advanced within the door into the room. Mr. Falkland was just risen from the floor upon which he had been sitting or kneeling. His face betrayed strong symptoms of confusion. With a violent effort however these symptoms vanished, and instantaneously gave place to a countenance sparkling with rage. Villain, cried he, what has brought you here? I hesitated a confused and irresolute answer. Wretch, interrupted Mr. Falkland with uncontrollable [sic] impatience, you want to ruin me. You set yourself as a spy upon my actions. But bitterly shall you repent of your insolence. Do you think you shall watch my privacies with impunity? I attempted to defend myself. Begone, devil! rejoined he. Quit the room, or I will trample you into atoms (CW, pp. 7-8).

I have quoted from this scene so extensively because it is, as Caleb says, extraordinary, and because, perhaps more than any other single scene in the book it illustrates the nature of the conflict between Caleb and Falkland.

First of all, this episode clearly demonstrates Caleb's propensity for speculation and conjecture at Falkland's expense; what he does, in fact, is to create for himself a "reading" of the situation which excites his intellect and satisfies his curiosity. He "conceives," that is, imagines or supposes, that the small apartment is empty, and when he finds that it is not, further supposes that the groan he hears emanates from Falkland. He speculates as to the cause of the groan ("intolerable anguish"), the sensation of the person upon being discovered (alarm), and the actions occurring (hastily closing and locking a trunk)--all this before he ever enters the room. Once inside his fabrications

continue: Falkland has been on the floor; he is confused; he disguises his confusion with rage after great effort. That Caleb's continuing suppositions ultimately prove correct does not diminish the injustice he does to Falkland by originally making them.

This episode also shows that Caleb suffers as much from Falkland's suppositions as Falkland does from Caleb's. At first Caleb appears guilty of nothing more than assuming incorrectly that the room is empty. He does not deliberately set out to spy on Falkland, or at least is not conscious of doing so. Falkland, however, acutely aware of his own guilt, especially at this moment when he seems abandoned in a frenzy of remorse, projects his guilt onto Caleb. He assumes because he has been looking upon his naked guilt that Caleb also enters the closet for that purpose. Caleb's reply to Falkland's demand to know who is intruding on him--the silent physical insinuation of himself into the closet--is more significant than a verbal answer would have been; his mere presence is enough to confirm Falkland's suspicions. Falkland's violent rejoinder to Caleb's silent assault on his privacy still seems excessive and unfair to Caleb, and unwise besides, since his master's ferocity only piques Caleb's curiosity all the more.

In addition, this scene is important because it marks the beginning of a whole series of situations in which Caleb

tests Falkland and Falkland reacts irrationally. After he hears Collins's tale, Caleb's reading of Falkland is excited by the conjecture that Falkland is truly guilty of Tyrrel's death: "Was it possible after all that Mr. Falkland should be the murderer? The reader will scarcely believe that the idea suggested itself to my mind that I would ask him. It was but a passing thought; but it serves to mark the simplicity of my character" (CW, p. 107). Rather than asking Falkland whether he murdered Tyrrel, Caleb now consciously chooses to fulfill Falkland's trunk scene accusation--"to be a spy upon Mr. Falkland!" (CW, p. 107). To carry out his role as spy, Caleb plans a series of conversations, carefully rehearsing his lines and actions as if he were staging a scene from one of his favorite narratives. These conversations, together with some other occurrences, comprise the early chapters of Volume II in which Caleb tries to prove Falkland is guilty while searching for a good story to assuage his curiosity.

The events of the first two chapters of Volume II are linked directly with Caleb's reading. The conversation in Chapter i arises from his reading of eighteenth-century commentaries on Alexander the Great. Caleb and the squire approach Alexander's worthiness on two very different levels which correspond to their ways of reading. Falkland finds Caleb's attitude judgmental and urges him never to take for for his own the opinion of a "clerical pedant or a

Westminster justice" (CW, p. 110). The squire himself sees Alexander as "a model of honour, generosity and disinterestedness" (p. 110), and instructs Caleb that "it is mind . . . the generation of knowledge and virtue that we ought to love" (CW, p. 111). The hundred thousand who died because of Alexander are to Falkland as important as so many sheep. Clearly, Falkland has formed his own opinions with regard to Alexander, opinions whose egocentric emphasis on individual honor and reputation can dismiss ten thousand lives as meaningless. As distasteful as these views are likely to be to the audience, however, Falkland's implication that Caleb does not form his own opinions is important, for it identifies Caleb's tendency to absorb and parrot the view of others. Certainly Falkland has reason to be wary of Caleb's hasty conclusions and condemnations of Alexander, for he has cause to suspect that Caleb has learned of Tyrrel's murder and is condemning him as well.

By contrast, Caleb, who mentions Alexander solely so that he may set up Falkland, focuses only on Alexander's "devastations," maintaining that his reputation was bought with other men's blood:

Suppose it were admitted that the lives of men were to be sacrificed without remorse if a paramount good were to result, it seems to me as if murder and massacre were but a very left-handed way of producing civilization and love. But pray, do you now think this great hero was a sort of madman?

.

It is impossible sure that a word can be said
for a man whom a momentary provocation can
hurry into the commission of murders (CW, pp.
111 & 112).

With this utterance Caleb's designs on Falkland are completed, as his master loses composure; but here Caleb experiences a momentary flicker of compassion. He recognizes Falkland's pain and realizes he has treated the squire and his feelings callously: "My own mind reproached me with the inhumanity of the allusion" (CW, p. 112). Yet in spite of his passing guilt, Caleb is delighted with the control he can exert over Falkland's happiness. He realizes that while a "reader" or observer is in the power of another, a "narrator" can be more active and powerful in shaping events. From this point on, Caleb becomes more assertive and creative in his assault on the squire, while Falkland becomes more defensive and passive, his "situation . . . like that of a fish that plays with the bait employed to entrap him" (CW, p. 109).

The bait Caleb uses in the second chapter of Volume II is a letter from the elder Hawkins to Falkland which Caleb discovers behind a chest drawer. Caleb, of course, reads the letter, finding it to be an appeal for help against the injustices of Tyrrel. The letter itself contains nothing that would harm Falkland's reputation, but it provides Caleb another opportunity to create a situation in which the squire loses his composure, thereby making himself look guilty. Instead of destroying or replacing the letter, Caleb

carefully positions the letter so as to "suggest to [Falkland] the idea that it had possibly passed through my hands" (CW, p. 116). It is not enough to read the letter; Falkland must know he has read it. The following day, Caleb executes his planned scenario successfully. His language in this passage proves that he is fully conscious of his designs on Falkland: "I exerted myself to lead the conversation, which by this time I well knew how to introduce, by insensible degrees to the point I desired" (CW, p. 116). Caleb has obviously planned this dialog carefully, even to the point of measuring Falkland's responses, for after he has whipped the squire into an emotional storm, he drops a supposedly soothing comment and notes with apparent surprise that the idea "did not give Mr. Falkland the proper degree of delight" (CW, p. 117). Rather than being delighted, Falkland becomes furious when he realizes for an instant that he is being played like an instrument at Caleb's command.

Falkland's suspicions that he is being used for Caleb's purposes are strengthened when he finally discovers Hawkins's letter. In Chapter iii, the squire attempts to regain control of Caleb by frightening him. Caleb admits he has committed the "foolish, wicked, despicable" (CW, p. 119) act of reading Hawkins's letter, but even in his supposedly repentant posture he takes the offensive by first desiring to leave the estate and then by challenging Falkland to

kill him. Falkland, in trying to reassert his power, indicates he is aware that Caleb is manipulating him: "Am I then, thus miserable and ruined, a proper subject upon which for you to exercise your ingenuity, and improve your power of tormenting?" (CW, p. 120). The language Falkland uses is, I think, significant. The squire here acknowledges both that he is being treated as an object instead of a human being, and that Caleb's investigation is, therefore, an exercise for his inventive skills, not a search for the truth. But Caleb is not susceptible to intimidation, and the squire appears so nervous and guilty that Caleb's main reaction is "wonder at finding myself, humble as I was by my birth, obscure as I had hitherto been, thus suddenly become of so much importance to the happiness of one of the most enlightened and accomplished men in England" (CW, p. 121). From this point on, the game becomes even more titillating for Caleb because now Falkland knows that he is being watched and that Caleb is in full control. The besieged squire suffers more frequent fits of insanity which further reinforce Caleb's suspicions of his master's guilt: "The suggestion would continually recur to me, in spite of inclination, in spite of persuasion and in spite of evidence, Surely this man is a murderer!" (CW, p. 125).

In Volume II, Chapter v, Falkland nearly proves his guilt to Caleb's satisfaction during the trial of a young peasant man accused of murdering an old rival. Because of

the similarities he sees between the young man's and Falkland's situations, Caleb is certain that the squire will react in a guilty way during the hearing. Caleb's view of human behavior, that identifying with another's experience gives rise to our own experience, is derived from his reading method. He experiences life through others and so assumes that Falkland does also:

I conceived the possibility of rendering the incident subordinate to the great enquiry which drank up all the currents of my soul. I said, This man is arraigned of murder, and murder is the master key that wakes distemper in the mind of Mr. Falkland. . . . Surely at such a time his secret anguish must betray itself" (CW, p. 126).

The validity of Caleb's theory seems to be upheld when Falkland rushes out of the room in horror without rendering a decision. Caleb retires to the garden in an ecstasy of passion to proclaim Falkland's guilt aloud; but as soon as he has uttered his conviction Caleb tries unsuccessfully to reason himself out of believing what he is determined to believe. He realizes he has no proof or evidence except his own prejudiced reading of Falkland's reactions:

If it be such as would not be admitted at a criminal tribunal, am I sure it is such as I ought to admit? There were twenty persons beside myself present at the scene from which I pretend to derive such entire conviction. Not one of them saw it in the light that I did. . . . Did it really contain such an extent of arguments and application, that nobody but I was discerning enough to see? (CW, p. 130).

Rather than putting an end to his pursuit of Falkland, however, this momentary exercise of reason intensifies Caleb's spying. His observations to this point have confirmed Falkland's guilt in his mind, but he requires some more concrete evidence in order to hold Falkland completely in his grasp. In the fever of his lust for power, Caleb once again intrudes into Falkland's private apartment and breaks into the trunk.

The squire again prevents Caleb from a glimpse at the trunk's contents as he did in the first trunk scene. In fact, Caleb never does discover what the trunk contains, but to the end of the narrative he remains convinced that it holds Falkland's written confession and narrative of Tyrrel's murder--something that he may read. That Caleb never gets into the trunk is necessary to his narrative. Any discoveries he might make in the trunk would put an end to his governing passion--curiosity--and to all "speculation and conjecture." A confession would likely force Caleb to recognize Falkland as a human being and would certainly present him with a version of the "truth" very different from his own reading of it.

iii

Just as his reading shapes his relationship with Falkland in the internal world of the novel, Caleb's reading also has a great effect upon his relationship with his audience. While Caleb's reading experience clashes with

the squire's and finally drives them apart, however, this same experience enables Caleb to develop a strong bond with his reader, or rather, to create the sort of reading audience he requires. Like Godwin, Caleb has a specific albeit changing purpose for writing his history, a purpose which molds the audience as well as how the narrative is told.

In the very first paragraph of his history Caleb specifies his purposes for writing as escape and self-defense:

I am incited to the penning of these memoirs, only by a desire to divert my mind from the deplorableness of my situation, and a faint idea that posterity may by their means be induced to render me a justice which my contemporaries refuse" (CW, p. 3).

With this sentence, coming as it does after vague references to undeserved misery, ruin and tyranny, Caleb clearly intends to arouse sympathy for himself, and also to awaken the desire in the reader for more specific information about his unfair treatment. In other words, Caleb does verbally what Falkland does mostly by his actions: he inflames curiosity by playing the role of the persecuted innocent. Unlike Falkland, though, Caleb promises to deliver a complete explanation of "things as they are"--that is, the truth.

Immediately following his original statement of purpose, however, Caleb slips in a sentence which casts doubt upon the reliability of his memoirs: "My story will at least appear to have that consistency, which is seldom attendant but upon

truth" (CW, p. 3 emphasis mine). Whereas he emphasizes his innocence in the title and the earlier part of the introduction and presumably, therefore, his intention to bring the truth into the open, in this section Caleb hedges considerably; rather than the truth, he promises only a story executed cleverly enough to masquerade as truth. The language of this remark, which the audience could attribute to an unfortunate choice of words at this point, later proves to be prophetic, as it becomes more and more obvious that Caleb is fabricating a story that supports his delusion of innocence. The deception of the masquerade is so successful, however, that Caleb and his audience are devastated when the truth does emerge.

Throughout most of his narrative, Caleb maintains that his main motive in writing is to seek justice for himself, but he mentions at least two other purposes as well. In Volume II, Chapter xiii, for example, where Caleb prepares to escape from prison with the unwitting help of his jailor, he acknowledges his duplicity by saying, "I am writing my adventures and not my apology" (CW, p. 194). Yet while he is not apologetic about those acts of dishonesty he commits to remain free and alive, Caleb is on another level constantly pardoning his conduct toward Falkland, an indication that he feels the need for absolution. In Volume III, on the other hand, Caleb admits his kind intentions toward the squire have been succeeded by "something like abhorrence"

(CW, p. 274) and vows retaliation as his new purpose:

I would encounter the calumny in its strong hold, I would rouse myself to an exertion hitherto unassayed, and, by the firmness, intrepidity and unalterable constancy I should display, would yet compel mankind to believe Mr. Falkland a suborner and a murderer! (CW, p. 302).

Like any other author, Caleb uses his three purposes to select the details necessary to accomplish his goals. Given his background as a reader of romance and narrative, for example, Caleb is able to infuse his memoirs with a sense of adventure, one of his stated reasons for writing. As one who has himself "panted" to know the outcome of an adventure tale, he surely knows what makes a narrative interesting and exciting. His history is full of such conventional characters and situations as he would have encountered in his reading--the tyrant, the damsel in distress, the faithful servant, the innocent persecuted victim, the noble outlaw, the virtuous woman, the jail, the chase, the mysterious trunk--all are stock features of romance. Caleb uses these narrative formulae first to excite the reader's curiosity and to create suspense, and then to give variety and complexity to a history which basically involves only two characters and very little action.

Caleb's second and third purposes are closely related, for one way to justify one's own transgressions is to accuse someone else of still worse crimes. Yet even before Falkland's admission of guilt and his persecution of Caleb,

indeed, from the very beginning of the narrative, Caleb employs techniques which insure that he will be seen as the wronged party in the conflict. The first paragraph begins a litany of protestations and complaints which pervades the entire book:

My life has for several years been a theatre of calamity. I have been a mark for the vigilance of tyranny, and I could not escape. My fairest prospects have been blasted. My enemy has shown himself inaccessible to intreaties and untired in persecution. My fame, as well as my happiness, has become his victim. Every one, as far as my story has been known, has refused to assist me in my distress, and has execrated my name. I have not deserved this treatment (CW, p. 3).

The tone of this paragraph is desperate, the words chosen carefully to excite the sympathies of an audience acutely sensitive to the demands of humanitarian conduct and the rights of individuals.

As desperate as he is to cultivate sympathy for himself, at first Caleb seems meticulous in his fairness to Falkland. His respect for his master appears genuine enough and his unfortunate curiosity stems from no evil intentions. His attempts at self-justification are often accompanied by self-castigation similar to that in the second trunk scene:

I have always been at a loss to account for my having plunged thus headlong into an act so monstrous. . . .

And yet what was my fault? It proceeded from none of those errors which are justly held up to the aversion of mankind; my object had

been neither wealth, nor the means of indulgence, nor the usurpation of power. No spark of malignity had harboured in my soul. I had always revered the sublime mind of Mr. Falkland; I revered it still. My offence had merely been a mistaken thirst for knowledge. Such however it was as to admit neither of forgiveness nor remission. This epoch was the crisis of my fate, dividing what may be called the offensive part, from the defensive (CW, pp. 133-34).

This passage illustrates the confused message Caleb sends out to Falkland and to his audience. On the one hand, he loves and admires his master, and he recognizes that he has caused pain to the squire by his incessant spying. For causing pain he feels remorse. On the other hand, Caleb believes his motives arise more from ignorance and self-indulgence than from cruelty, and Falkland does prove to be guilty of all Caleb has speculated; therefore, Caleb points to his innocence and suffering and Falkland's guilt in an effort to excuse his own immoral conduct. Caleb's moments of remorse for his treatment of Falkland also serve him well as a narrative tool. Just as a rhetorician gives "fair" consideration to an opponent's view before persuading his audience to follow his opposing view, Caleb imagines what his master feels, humbly admits his own wrongdoing, and continues to damn Falkland as he justifies himself.

In order to accomplish his vindication and Falkland's ruin, Caleb must establish a very large rhetorical distance between his audience and the squire while practically

eliminating the distance between himself and his readers. He accomplishes this in two major ways. First, Caleb establishes himself as the sole narrator of this history. He does employ several other tales told by other characters, of course, but although those tales are presumably related in their original form, all are filtered through Caleb. Not one other narrator speaks directly to the audience. In fact, particularly with Collins's tale of Falkland's travels in Italy, Caleb boldly appropriates the story as his own: "To avoid confusion in my narrative, I shall drop the person of Collins, and assume to be myself the historian of our patron" (CW, pp. 9-10). Later, although he records Falkland's words and actions, and even interprets his inner thoughts and emotions, Caleb prevents the squire from having any direct contact with the audience. As long as he can maintain complete and sole control over the narrative and monitor everything that is presented to his audience, Caleb is able to nurture his self-delusion and then pass it along to the reader.

At first Caleb's narrative method seems innocent enough. After all, who could write Caleb's history better than Caleb? Yet Caleb's purposes insure that his will be no ordinary autobiography. He intends to set the record straight, to present the world with "things as they are." But as Gay Clifford in "Caleb Williams and Frankenstein: First-Person Narratives and 'Things as They Are'" writes of Caleb's

narrative:

Caleb's account of himself invites criticism from the outset; the structure of the narrative and its matrix in the first-person singular (things as I would like them to be) invites scepticism about literary forms based on the absolute authority of self.

.

[Godwin] saw that to seek to be your own historian entailed a consequential fallacy; a fallacy given form in Caleb's parasitism on other narratives (Emily's, Collins', Falkland's, Raymond's, Hawkins') while maintaining the "delusive medium" of the I.⁵

I agree with Clifford that the narrative structure ought to prompt criticism and skepticism, but, on the contrary, contemporaneous readers of the novel accept Caleb as a trustworthy narrator, and there is no evidence in any of the reviews that the first-person structure elicited any response but credulity: "Strong feeling, and a depth of reflection on the state and habits of society, claim our attention, and lead us forward at the will of the writer."⁶ Indeed, as I will discuss later in more detail, if Caleb invites criticism for anyone, it is for Falkland and not for himself. Caleb's appeal for sympathy, his promise to tell the truth and his gradual discovery of evidence to support his speculations about the squire successfully outweigh suspicions awakened in the reader by "the 'delusive medium' of the I."

The second way in which Caleb allies the audience with himself and against Falkland demonstrates his expert

manipulative abilities. As I pointed out previously, Caleb is very careful to appear just in his treatment of Falkland. He must not seem to be guilty of the same unreasonable and tyrannical behavior as the squire. Consequently, when Caleb bewails his misery and persecution, he often rails not only at Falkland, who is after all just one man, but at society and the whole human race:

My resentment was not restricted to my persecutor, but extended itself to the whole machine of society. . . . I regarded the whole human species as so many hangmen and torturers. I considered them as confederated to tear me to pieces" (CW, p. 183).

Also when Caleb justifies his digressions and self-pity to his audience he writes: "The man must indeed possess an uncommon portion of hardness of heart, who can envy me so slight a relief" (CW, p. 124). Of course, statements such as these are calculated to challenge the audience's self-perception and to put it on the defensive. The choice Caleb presents is clear: one can stand with Falkland for evil, tyranny and unwarranted destruction or with Caleb for innocence, justice and truth. Few would admit to being so base as to side with Falkland after this, and thus, Caleb links himself tightly to his reader.

The rhetorical distance between himself and his audience is not the only gap Caleb must eliminate from his history. He must also overcome the time difference between

the actual events and his recording of them. Making the events seem recent and immediate is another way of adding excitement to his adventures, but even more importantly, it creates the illusion of accuracy and reliability. In fact, most of the history takes place years before Caleb begins to write, a fact which he does not emphasize and which is largely disguised by the overwhelming flood of detail he provides. In several places throughout the novel, Caleb takes great pains to reinforce his authority and accuracy. At the end of the first chapter he anticipates and then dismisses the possible charge that he presents information to which he has no access--"To the reader it may appear at first sight as if this detail of the preceding life of Mr. Falkland were foreign to my history. Alas, I know from bitter experience that it is otherwise" (CW, p. 10)-- and later offers assurances that he has uncommon retentive powers--"I re-passed in my thoughts whole conversations, I recollected their subjects, their arrangement, their incidents and frequently their very words" (CW, p. 185). Most often, however, Caleb simply ignores the time gap of "several years" and obviously hopes his audience will do the same.

The space and time that separate Caleb from Falkland and the events of the past are more crucial to the outcome of his history than Caleb (or his audience) imagines. According to Caleb's account, he spends the entire period from his

imprisonment to the final confrontation with Falkland in virtual isolation. He sees the squire on two separate occasions, when Falkland asks him to sign a statement and when he is freed from prison, but only for a few moments. He also meets some other people--Raymond and his band of thieves, Mrs. Marney, Spurrel, Laura--but for the most part he conducts his intercourse with them in disguise, not as Caleb Williams, and because of his fugitive mentality and lifestyle, he is able to form no lasting bond with any of them. Isolation or even ostracism nurtures Caleb's narrative creativity, but as with his original fabrications against Falkland, this creativity depends on "speculation and conjecture" and on delusion.

At the point when he starts writing, moreover, Caleb is less able than ever to distinguish delusion from "things as they are" because of his isolation and abdication of identity. From the moment he escapes from prison, Caleb assumes he is being followed by Falkland or his hired agent, Gines. While he is recovering in Raymond's hideout from a wound inflicted by Gines, Caleb dreams that "the design of the murderer [the squire's agent] was to come upon me by surprise" (CW, p. 230). Shortly thereafter when he is arrested for robbing the mail he notes: "I now took it for granted that I was once more in the power of Mr. Falkland" (CW, p. 240). Indeed, each time Caleb runs into trouble, he assumes

Falkland is to blame, until he finally has conjectured himself into a frenzy:

But I now ascribed a character so inhumanly sanguinary to his mind; I saw something so fiend-like in the thus hunting me around the world, and determining to be satisfied with nothing less than my blood, while at the same time he knew my innocence, my indisposition to mischief, nay I might add my virtues; that henceforth I trampled reverence and the recollection of former esteem under my feet (CW, p. 274).

Since Caleb alone controls the narrative, Falkland has no opportunity to explain or defend his conduct and thus, Caleb is able to convince the reader to share his paranoia, which is, after all, his original design.

The success of Caleb's design depends, as I have indicated, upon how well he disguises the delusiveness of the "'medium of the I'" and deflects criticism from himself to Falkland--i.e., upon his ability to sell his performance to his audience. Judging from a selection of anonymous contemporaneous reviews, his conquest is virtually complete. Almost all of the reviewers take Caleb's representation of "things as they are" as legitimate; one favorable reviewer from the Critical Review remarks that "Mr. Godwin will by some be thought to have been guilty of a misnomer, since, instead of 'Things as they are,' the novel might, perhaps, as well have been intitled, 'Things as they ever have been.'"⁷

Even so, critics do not respond to Caleb as a distinct character. Many of the comments the early critics make on the story

itself commonly concern Falkland, whom the reviewer for the Monthly Review considers "the principal actor in this drama."⁸ That readers see Falkland as the major character in the novel illustrates how completely Caleb has succeeded in making the narrative appear to be the history of Falkland in which Caleb fulfills the role of the omniscient narrator. Not once do these reviewers address the problem of Caleb's motivations for telling the story, nor do they see him as much of an actor. If Falkland is seen as the "principal actor," Caleb is more likely to be viewed as a passive victim, as he desires.

This is not to say, however, that Godwin's contemporaries are all sympathetic to Caleb. They take his view of reality seriously and attack it precisely because they equate Caleb's views entirely with Godwin's; they also believe that Caleb reports the truth as he sees it, which means they have bought his story. This interpretation of the narrative once again indicates Caleb's capabilities as an active character and storyteller, but accepting him as Godwin's fictional spokesman gives him heightened respectability as a thinker. Clearly, those critics who see Caleb as Godwin and hence, as a worthy opponent, have overlooked both the delusive nature of first-person narration and Caleb's obvious reprehensibility according to Godwin's own philosophy. Critics find Caleb's political and social opinions blameworthy, to be sure, but because

they presume him to be Godwin's representative, fail to see that Caleb's "domestic and unrecorded despotism"⁹ violates rather than illustrates Godwin's belief in benevolence and the disinterested exercise of reason to combat error.

The apparent failure of most of Caleb Williams' contemporaneous critics to see the unreliability inherent in first-person narration not only demonstrates the power Caleb commands as narrator to instill his delusions in his readers, but also supports Godwin's comments in An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice on human motivation and rationalization:

It is probable that no wrong action is perpetrated from motives entirely pure. It is probable that conscientious assassins and persecutors, have some mixture of ambition or the love of fame, and some feelings of animosity and ill will. But the deception they put upon themselves may nevertheless be complete. They stand acquitted at the bar of their own examination; and their injurious conduct, if considered under the head of motive only, is probably as pure, as much of that conduct which falls with the best title under the denomination of virtue.¹⁰

Until the Postscript, which contains the only events of the narrative recorded up to the minute, Godwin might have written these words specifically about Caleb, who persists in presenting himself as innocent and virtuous until the novel's eleventh hour. Had Caleb ended his memoirs still protesting his innocence, still insisting on his delusion

as in the original unpublished manuscript ending, the early critics might be justified in thinking Godwin's sympathies lie with Caleb, but the published second ending, the Postscript, severely undermines that interpretation.¹¹ In fact, Godwin sacrifices his original intention to write a social protest novel with a clear moral lesson in order to remain true to the moral complexities and uncertainties he finds inherent in Caleb's and Falkland's characters, thus giving up propaganda for art.

Had the readership of Caleb Williams consisted only of conservative critics, the novel's power to horrify individuals with the truth and thereby perhaps to initiate humanitarian reforms in society might have been completely ignored. While the conservative critics concentrate on defending the status quo, however, other of Godwin's readers, most notably Elizabeth Inchbald and William Hazlitt, are struck by the novel's ability to rivet the reader's attention and to horrify. Inchbald writes in two undated letters to Godwin:

My curiosity is greatly increased by what I have read, but if you disappoint me you shall never hear the last of it, and instead of 'God Bless,' I will vociferate, God ---myou.

.

Sir,--Your first volume is far inferior to the two last. Your second is sublimely horrible--captivatingly frightful.

Your third is all a great genius can do to delight a great genius, and I never felt myself so conscious of, or so proud of giving proofs of a good understanding, as in pronouncing this to be a capital work.

It is my opinion that fine ladies, milliners, mantua-makers, and boarding-school girls will love to tremble over it, and that men of taste and judgment will admire the superior talents, the incessant energy of mind you have evinced.

In these last two volumes, there does not appear to me (apt as I am to be tired with reading novels) one tedious line.¹²

Inchbald's comments, although undated, seem to have been written either while the novel was still in manuscript or immediately after its publication, and, as she recorded these reactions as she read, she appears to base her projections of the audience's responses on her own quite enthusiastic ones.

Like Elizabeth Inchbald, William Hazlitt recognizes the power Caleb Williams exerts on the emotions of its readers. Twenty years after the novel's publication, Hazlitt, one of Godwin's most astute critics, writes:

No one ever began Caleb Williams that did not read it through: no one that ever read it could possibly forget it, or speak of it after any length of time but with an impression as if the events and feelings had been personal to himself.¹³

From this remark, it is obvious Hazlitt's reading experience of the novel is similar to Inchbald's. The novel has for both readers the power to engage them in a very personal way and to change them forever. Godwin seeks to provide

just this sort of reading experience, as he acknowledges in the Preface to Fleetwood:

I said to myself a thousand times, 'I will write a tale, that shall constitute an epoch in the mind of the reader, that no one, after he has read it, shall ever be exactly the same man that he was before (App. II, p. 338).

Hazlitt's and Godwin's comments particularly emphasize the novel's power to initiate change in human behavior; as I have suggested, Godwin accomplishes his design by appealing to basic emotions, most especially fear, not to reason.

iv

Godwin seemingly reconciles in Caleb Williams his two contradictory beliefs that "self deception is of all things the most easy" (PJ, p. 82) and that "sound reasoning and truth, when adequately communicated, must always be victorious over error" (PJ, p. 55) in the Postscript. Yet the resolution of the conflict is by far more terrifying than it is comforting, especially for one like Godwin whose philosophy absolutely depends on the exercise of reason. Reason does not provide access to the truth in the Postscript. Neither Caleb nor Falkland is capable of rational processes by then, but instead they respond to each other on an emotional plane. Caleb presents to the magistrates a speech very different from the one he had "impartially

and justly" (CW, p. 319) planned, one which is more condemnatory of himself than of Falkland, because when he sees the now corpse-like squire, "all these fine-spun reasonings vanished" (CW, p. 319). Falkland's first response--"[he] threw himself into my arms" (CW, p. 324)--is likewise an emotional act and not the coldly reasoned defense Caleb had expected. Caleb carries the Postscript to its conclusion on a more humane note which is consistent with Godwin's notion of virtuous conduct:

I began these memoirs with the idea of vindicating my character. I have now no character that I wish to vindicate: but I will finish them that thy story may be fully understood; and that, if those errors of thy life be known which thou so ardently desiredst to conceal, the world may at least not hear and repeat a half-told and mangled tale (CW, p. 326).

Despite Caleb's self-realization and repentance, the disturbing fact remains that where self-delusion exists, reason itself is corruptible. For Caleb, the road to truth lies not where Godwin had believed, in reason, but in the emotions or "domestic affections" of which Godwin was extremely wary.

If Godwin was reluctant to allow the "affections" much latitude, he was certainly not hesitant to seek the truth, a fact documented by his continuous revising and refining of his philosophy. The truth, therefore, might surprise Godwin, but, at least as a philosopher, he seems never

to have viewed it as a personal threat. For Caleb Williams, on the other hand, whose whole identity depends on duplicity and delusion, discovery of the truth means annihilation of his character, of Falkland and of his reading audience's tranquility. The final confrontation of Caleb and Falkland in the Postscript forces both men to embrace the truth and its attendant guilt. Falkland, consumed for years by guilt, is literally destroyed by this blow, while Caleb lives on, miserable and completely divested of his self-esteem.

When Caleb admits at the end of the Postscript, "I have been his murderer. . . . I wantonly inflicted on him an anguish a thousand times worse than death" (CW, p. 325), Godwin expects the audience to feel for the first time the perilous position it is in as a result of Caleb's rhetorical cleverness. Throughout his narrative Caleb creates for himself an image of innocence and righteousness and seems to present a coherent and reasonable representation of the truth. The reader is asked to weigh the facts presented and to respond in a just way, but although the novel's structure should inspire doubt as Gay Clifford notes, the reader falls into Caleb's trap because the story is crafted to appeal to the reader's sense of decency and fairness. Consequently, when the reader attempts to exercise reason to evaluate the evidence, he or she is foiled because Caleb's account is indeed a "half-told and mangled tale" (CW, p. 326).

Moreover, the audience experiences Caleb's plight almost as its own, and thus, its reason is immobilized. As the crisis of the Postscript unfolds and Caleb realizes that he no longer has a character because he is responsible for Falkland's death, the audience too is forced to accept some guilt. It has been led to sympathize and identify with a man who now characterizes himself as a murderer and who refuses to defend his own actions. But even more frightening is the sudden realization that in Caleb's place the audience probably would have behaved the same way--that is, it too is capable of murder.

This sudden encounter with the murderer within, which is all the more horrifying because it is so unexpected, is a gothic experience for the audience. Given Godwin's system of beliefs, however, discovering a shocking truth about oneself is far less gothic than admitting that error may sometimes be victorious over truth or, worst of all, that no absolute verifiable truth exists. Hence, even though Caleb is emotionally destroyed by the truth he learns and the audience shaken, Godwin cannot allow Caleb to end the narration still deluded. Caleb may be blasted, but truth and reason must be vindicated. Yet in Caleb Williams the truth never emerges and reason proves a poor thing--easily feigned, subservient to passion and error, virtually powerless to prevent catastrophe and pain. In the face of

his own fictional example of humankind's capacity for self-deception, Godwin remains optimistic that the immutable truths of the universe and human perfection are available through reason and benevolence. Using Caleb Williams as a philosophical and structural model, Charles Brockden Brown and Mary Shelley challenge the hopefulness of Godwin's Postscript, and instead concentrate on illuminating the darkest recesses of the human psyche which Godwin does not explore and which reason cannot penetrate.

Notes

¹William Godwin, "Of an Early Taste for Reading," in The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature (1797); rpt. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1965, p. 33.

²William Godwin, "Of Choice in Reading," in The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature (1797); rpt. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1965), p. 14. All further references to this work appear in the text.

³William Godwin, "Godwin's Account of the Composition of Caleb Williams," originally published as the Preface to Fleetwood (1832), in Caleb Williams, ed. David McCracken (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), Appendix II, p. 338. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁴William Godwin, Caleb Williams, ed. David McCracken (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), p. 4. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁵"Caleb Williams and Frankenstein: First-Person Narratives and 'Things as They Are,'" Genre, 10 (1977), pp. 606 & 612.

⁶Rev. of Things as They Are, or The Adventures of Caleb Williams, Analytical Review, 21 (Feb. 1795), p. 166. Additional reviews of the first edition of Caleb Williams which are readily available are in The British Critic and Theological Review, 4 (July 1794), pp. 70-71; The Critical Review, 2nd ser. 11 (July 1794), pp. 290-96; and Monthly Review, 2nd ser. 15 (Oct. 1794), pp. 145-49.

⁷Rev. of Things as They Are, or The Adventures of Caleb Williams, Critical Review, 2nd ser. 11 (July 1794), p. 296.

⁸Rev. of Things as They Are, or The Adventures of Caleb Williams, Monthly Review, 2nd ser. 15 (Oct. 1794), p. 146.

⁹William Godwin, Preface to Caleb Williams, in Caleb Williams, ed. David McCracken (New York: W.W. Morton, 1977), p. 1. All further references to this work appear in the text.

¹⁰William Godwin, An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, abr. and ed. K. Codell Carter (1793; rpt. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press/Clarendon, 1971), p. 82. All further references to this work appear in the text.

¹¹Because Godwin was not satisfied with the original manuscript ending of Caleb Williams, it was never published as part of the novel; he replaced it with the Postscript the ending used in every printed edition. The original manuscript ending is published as Appendix I in David McCracken's edition of Caleb Williams, pp. 327-34. For a complete description of the manuscript of Caleb Williams, see D. Gilbert Dumas, "Things as They Were: The Original Ending of Caleb Williams," Studies in English Literature, 6 (1966), pp. 575-97.

¹²Elizabeth Inchbald, Letters to William Godwin, in C. Kegan Paul, William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries, 2 vols. (1876; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1970), p. 139.

¹³William Hazlitt, "William Godwin," in Lectures on the English Poets: The Spirit of the Age, Everyman's Library (1825; rpt. New York: Dutton, 1967), p. 190.

Chapter 2

The Breakdown: Arthur Mervyn

Critics and scholars have repeatedly pointed to the philosophical or ideological link between William Godwin and Charles Brockden Brown, and, indeed, so much has been written on the subject that one would think the relationship had been fully explored. But if the influences of William Godwin the philosopher on Brown have been examined and reexamined, the influences of Godwin the novelist have been virtually ignored. The reason for this oversight is perfectly obvious when one considers that not even the most charitable and patient scholars feel justified in making stylistic or technical claims for either Godwin or Brown. Rather, critics such as Brown critic W.B. Berthoff have routinely apologized for the novelistic imperfections of these two "men of ideas," and have treated their flaws as embarrassing obstacles to understanding:

The novels of Charles Brockden Brown have not been remembered as contributions to the art of fiction. Their plots are conceded to be improbable, arbitrary, disconnected; the style is awkward and ponderous; there is not one of them that does not betray haste and carelessness of composition. . . . Brown's fiction has not been neglected without reason, and comes down to us as the work of a considerable talent imperfectly fulfilled. . . . We probably cannot, with the

best intention, read one of Brown's novels through without a suspension of standards and a labor of translation.¹

I certainly have no intention of making claims for either author's turgid prose style, but I am convinced that Brown, like Godwin, has been unfairly maligned with regard to his narrative technique, especially in Arthur Mervyn, and that his "contributions to the art of fiction" are greater than commonly acknowledged.

Carl Nelson, in his article "A Method for Madness: The Symbolic Patterns in Arthur Mervyn" calls Arthur Mervyn Brown's "most vilified novel,"² and identifies the "irresolution and disappointing ambiguity"³ of Mervyn's character and the unfocused plot as particularly unsatisfactory. Nelson is not alone in his criticisms of Arthur Mervyn. Until quite recently, criticism of the novel carefully avoided even dealing with the second volume, which was often summarily dismissed as tiresome and unnecessary; thus, the work has not consistently been treated as a coherent entity. This negative attitude has persisted, I feel, because the ambiguities of Mervyn's character, the tiresomeness of parts of the novel and, above all, the abrupt change of narrative distance in the second volume have been seen as examples of Brown's novelistic incompetence which obscure the meaning of the work. While I agree with Nelson and others that Mervyn's character is ambiguous and

wearisome, I am convinced that the meaning of Brown's work absolutely depends on Mervyn's inadequacies. My interpretation contradicts positive critical opinion as well as negative, for mine presupposes that Brown purposely creates a character who, instead of exemplifying the "successful and moral American" as James H. Justus says,⁴ perverts the romantic ideal of the innocent and virtuous new man.

The narrative structure of Arthur Mervyn, while similar to that of Caleb Williams, is also in many ways innovative, and reflects a more pessimistic and, therefore, an anti-Godwinian view of humankind. Whereas the structure of Caleb Williams reinforces Godwin's belief in the omnipotence of truth by moving Caleb from error to enlightenment, Arthur Mervyn is designed to indicate its narrator's lapse into deeper and deeper self-deception. This pattern of regression is not immediately apparent, and can be overlooked altogether if Volume I is considered alone. In fact--given the circumstances of the novel's composition, with the writing of Edgar Huntly coming between the two volumes--Brown himself may not have realized at first the gothic tendency of Mervyn's narrative. Patrick Brancaccio sees in the novel a shift from:

a simple demonstration of the ways in which a virtuous young man resists temptation . . . to an attempt to convey the ironic interplay between Arthur's conscious and unconscious

motivation and the sense of bewilderment that
results from the ambiguity of appearances.⁵

Certainly, the disparity between Arthur's conscious and unconscious motivation, between his words and his actions, becomes clearer in Volume II, but examples of the same kinds of inconsistencies may be found in Volume I as well, perhaps an indication that Brown never intended Mervyn to be just "a virtuous young man." In fact, Brown uses the narrative structure to help thwart Mervyn's unconscious designs on the audience.

Brown assists the reader in realizing Mervyn's narration is based on delusion in several ways. First of all, he creates Dr. Stevens as a device to increase the distance between Mervyn and the reading audience. Until he assumes charge of recording his own story, Mervyn speaks to and through Stevens, and the reader benefits somewhat from the space Stevens provides. Stevens, however, is not simply an objectifying device to alert the audience to Mervyn's foibles, but a character who is himself struggling to comprehend Arthur's narration. The distance Stevens maintains is thus inconsistent, for he sends conflicting and ambiguous signals as he vacillates between doubt and credulity. Not even his final decision to believe Mervyn is unambiguous, as his remarks to the reader, which I will discuss later, show.

Secondly, Stevens, in his doubtful moments, provides the reader with further clues that Mervyn's account is fabricated and not to be trusted. He seeks out and records other people's impressions of Mervyn hoping to find corroboration for his young friend's story. What he hears instead are tales which depict Mervyn as a selfish and self-important young man with capacities for viciousness and deception. Stevens chooses to dismiss these unflattering portraits of Mervyn, but he does repeat them to Arthur for refutation, and sets them down for the reader to ponder. He even half instructs the audience not to believe Mervyn's story. But Stevens ultimately abdicates his roles of listener, scribe and intermediary, allowing Mervyn to sweep the reader along into his isolated fantasy world; he becomes Mervyn's partisan and participates in Mervyn's deception.

Brown uses Stevens and, more especially, characters like Wortley and Mrs. Althorpe to interrupt and qualify Mervyn's narration, a function valuable to the audience, but wholly undesirable from Mervyn's point of view. Under such attack and scrutiny Mervyn cannot manipulate the narrative in his favor effectively enough. He is repeatedly faced with questions and contradictions which he must dispel to his own and his audience's satisfaction. To serve better his self-justifying ends, then, Mervyn assumes

complete control over the narrative halfway through Volume II. He writes the end of his history out of an isolation similar to that which surrounds Caleb Williams. But the reader who has attended to the clues Brown has provided has doubts which Arthur cannot dispel by simply removing himself from confrontation. Perhaps Mervyn even senses the precariousness of his virtuous pose, for the last chapters of the novel have a terrified frenetic tone about them, as if his marriage to Achsa Fielding might force him to confront his true self and his true motives for his life and his narration.

Brown offers the reader glimpses of Mervyn's true nature through the eyes of his narrator's worst enemy, Mervyn himself. Unlike Brancaccio who sees Mervyn as a young man who originally resists temptation, I view Mervyn as a seriously deluded and aggressive young man who literally defines himself in terms of his unconscious drives. He structures his life according to the compulsions for power, money and women which feed his fantasies. Then, aware of only the purest motives, he creates for himself a romantic storybook existence which allows him to act out his aggressions and desires while maintaining his innocence. The elements of Mervyn's fantasy life form a pattern which is repeated over and over again: attachment to a father figure who possesses a sum of money and control over a

desirable woman, and who dies as the result of Mervyn's actions. Mervyn envisions his role in this fantasy as that of the virtuous knight who saves the woman, acts as a conscience to the evil, distributes money wisely and generously, and serves as a model of compassion and rectitude.

Arthur's ever-deepening delusion not only allows him to act out his fantasies in ignorance of his true motives, but also shapes his narration and his designs on his audience. The virtuous appearance Mervyn assumes is his defense against self-realization and outside detection, and with it he finally manages to deceive two of his harshest critics, Wortley and Mrs. Wentworth. The narration, then, is Mervyn's public declaration of virtue. Prompted as it is by criminal accusations, the self-justifying tone it takes is not unexpected. Yet Mervyn's purpose in narrating his history is less to defend himself against charges of criminal association with Welbeck (though that is the most apparent purpose) than to legitimize his delusive existence. That is to say, to verbalize his inner fantasy life is for Mervyn to make it real, just as to don elegant clothes is actually to change from a beggar to a man of wealth; telling is becoming. Mervyn himself believes that he is what he appears to be, despite the obvious contradictions in his life, and is, therefore, able to convince others of his

virtue and sincerity. But I believe Brown's criticism of Mervyn, and by extension of Godwinian optimism, stems from Mervyn's chronic inability to respond to any but imaginary and self-indulgent impulses, whereby he becomes an agent of misfortune and destruction to those around him.

ii

Although he is in a sense the least injured by Mervyn's fantasizing and reading of situations, I wish to begin this roll call of Mervyn's victims with Dr. Stevens, because he provides not only the framework for the narrative, but most of the narrative itself. He is Mervyn's first audience and first dupe, and he is also precisely the ideal character Mervyn is not--Justus's "successful and moral American." Critical opinion on Dr. Stevens is nearly as divided as that on Mervyn himself. Carl Nelson sees Stevens as a dupe who is finally "the disillusioned man of sense,"⁶ aided in his realization of Mervyn's true character by the always skeptical Wortley. Kenneth Bernard, in "Arthur Mervyn: The Ordeal of Innocence" dismisses Stevens out of hand as "a negligible factor."⁷ Patrick Brancaccio in "Studied Ambiguities: Arthur Mervyn and the Problem of the Unreliable Narrator" views the doctor as a benevolent man who chooses not to judge Mervyn logically.⁸ The first two of these views seem to me to conflict with the evidence

Brown provides, whereas Brancaccio's assessment seems most consistent with the novel. I would add that Stevens's original irrational response to Mervyn is likely involuntary and not the result of choice. Later in the narrative he indeed consciously chooses to believe in Mervyn in spite of the problems his choice causes him.

The attitude Stevens first assumes toward Arthur Mervyn is determined both by his own morality and by the unaccountable hold Mervyn has over him. In taking a plague-stricken Mervyn into his home, Stevens is accused by his neighbors of presumptuousness and cruelty for exposing his family to great danger. As a doctor, he is certainly aware of the risk he is taking, yet neither he nor his wife can leave Mervyn to die. Surely this is uncommon charity, especially in a time when people are abandoning and burying alive members of their own families. Thus, Stevens chooses to create an almost familial bond with Mervyn which probably fosters his belief in Mervyn's virtue, even when the evidence indicates the opposite. This relationship with Stevens is the only one in a long series of "parental" relationships which is not initiated by Mervyn and which does not end with the father figure's death. In addition, Stevens acknowledges that his predisposition in Mervyn's favor is somehow imposed on him: "I scarcely ever beheld an object which laid so powerful and sudden a

claim to my affection and succour."⁹ Here Stevens is clearly responding to appearances, a habit he is never able to shake with regard to Mervyn, and one which he shares with Robert Walton in Frankenstein.

Steven's morality and innocence cause him to invest early and heavily in his belief that Mervyn is as he appears to be. In fact, by the time Arthur begins his narrative, Stevens is already confirmed as the willing dupe. The doctor is not a stupid man, but rather, one whose kindness makes him susceptible to Mervyn's peculiar power. Even when Arthur is too ill to speak much, Stevens interprets his features and behavior positively: "His silence seemed to be the joint result of modesty and unpleasing remembrances. His features were characterized by pathetic seriousness, and his deportment by a gravity very unusual at his age." (AM, I, p. 9). Stevens's interpretation of Mervyn's character is challenged by Wortley, Stevens's best friend. Stevens is forced to make a choice between his belief in Mervyn's innocence and Wortley's plausible and convincing evidence that Mervyn is guilty of conspiracy. Mervyn refuses at first to reveal his story, so Stevens hears Wortley's side of the story and, laying logic aside, concludes that:

His suspicions were unquestionably plausible; but I was disposed to put a more favorable construction on Mervyn's behaviour. I recollected the desolate and penniless condition in which I

found him, and the uniform complacency and rectitude of his deportment for the period during which we had witnessed it. These ideas had considerable influence on my judgment, and indisposed me to follow the advice of my friend, which was to turn him forth from my doors that very night (AM, I, p. 14).

That Stevens opts to believe in Mervyn's innocence over the testimony of his best friend when Mervyn will not defend himself clearly illustrates that Stevens chooses not to deal with Mervyn logically, and that more is involved here than Mervyn's virtue or lack of it.

For Stevens, Mervyn is a "test case." Less at issue than Mervyn's virtue is Stevens's own virtue and his ability to distinguish virtue from evil. Mervyn's narrative and Wortley's account continue to be at odds, and the conflict becomes partially a question of whether Stevens's or Wortley's assumptions are more accurate, as neither one actually knows much about Mervyn. By the beginning of Volume II, however, it becomes clearer that while Wortley, who has already lost his pride and a good portion of money, has nothing to lose if Stevens is right, Stevens has a great deal to lose if Wortley is right:

"If Mervyn has deceived me, there is an end to my confidence in human nature. All limits to dissimulation, and all distinctness between vice and virtue, will be effaced. No man's word, nor force of collateral evidence, shall weigh with me a hair."

"It was time," replied my friend, "that your confidence in smooth features and fluent accents should have ended long ago. Till I gained from

my present profession some knowledge of the world, a knowledge which was not gained in a moment, and has not cost a trifle, I was equally wise in my own conceit; and, in order to decide upon the truth of any one's pretensions, needed only a clear view of his face and a distinct hearing of his words. My folly, in that respect, was only to be cured, however, by my own experience, and I suppose your credulity will yield to no other remedy. . . ." (AM, II, pp. 32-33).

This dialogue reveals that morally, Stevens is every bit as innocent as Mervyn purports to be, that, as R.W.B. Lewis says of the American Adam, "his moral position was prior to experience."¹⁰ Stevens identifies with Mervyn's innocent appearance and indeed has invested his own sense of self and spiritual well-being in his perception of Mervyn.

Yet, on the other hand, Stevens appears to recognize how speculative his investment in Mervyn's character is. He staunchly defends Mervyn to Wortley, but he also refuses to withdraw his trust from Wortley in favor of Mervyn. Instead, he uses his faith in Wortley as a threat to wrest the truth from Mervyn: "Wortley is not short-sighted or hasty to condemn. So great is my confidence in his integrity that I will not promise my esteem to one who has irrecoverably lost that of Wortley" (AM, I, p. 13). This is the one challenge to Mervyn that Stevens makes himself, and it prompts Mervyn, after a night of reflection, to disclose his version of the truth. Stevens's wife regards Arthur's mere decision to talk as an "unerring test of his rectitude,"

but Stevens notes, "I did not fully participate in her satisfaction, but was nevertheless most zealously disposed to listen to his narrative" (AM, I, p. 16). This remark indicates, I feel, the attitude Stevens would like to maintain with regard to Mervyn--one which allows him to be a skeptical observer--but the doctor's sincerity and innocence, along with his commitment to his notion of Mervyn, overwhelm any desire he has to remain objective.

While Stevens chooses to lose his objectivity and to reaffirm his faith in appearances, he also concedes that Mervyn's narrative has not removed all his doubts, nor does he expect it to remove the reader's doubts. At the beginning of Volume II, in fact, Stevens seems virtually to acknowledge that Mervyn's tale is a fabrication, about which he betrays his own ambivalence by warning the reader to be skeptical in one breath and reassuring the reader in the next:

Nothing but his own narrative, repeated with that simple but nervous eloquence which we had witnessed, could rescue him from the most heinous charges. Was there any tribunal that would not acquit him on merely hearing his defense?

.

Had I heard Mervyn's story from another, or read it in a book, I might, perhaps, have found it possible to suspect the truth; but as long as the impression made by his tones, gestures, and looks, remained in my memory, this suspicion was impossible. . . . He that listens to his words may question their truth, but he that looks upon his

countenance when speaking cannot withhold his faith (AM, II, pp. 13-14; emphasis mine).

This reflection of Stevens's is perhaps his most important contribution to the novel, for it offers some important and insightful observations about himself, about Mervyn, and about reading.

This passage, in my view, may be seen as Stevens's conscious realization that Mervyn's tale is a lie, and that Stevens chooses to believe the lie rather than pursue the truth. Although Stevens tries unsuccessfully to get corroboration for Mervyn's story, an act which itself implies suspicion or uncertainty, his words belie his apparent trust. One should note when reading the sentence I italicized in the quotation, that the word "suspect" may mean "surmise" as well as "distrust," and that both meanings make sense from Stevens's point of view. His words may be intended to reassure the reader about placing trust in Mervyn (in which case, one must wonder about Stevens's motives), or to warn the reader that Mervyn is not trustworthy. He certainly is saying, "If I were you, I wouldn't believe him," which I interpret as criticism of Mervyn and of himself.

Stevens's comments on reading in this paragraph also explain what Stevens's technical function is in the novel. Brown very cleverly creates in Mervyn a character whose story is vulnerable at every turn. He then creates Stevens--a character whose own innocence insures that he

will be attracted to Mervyn, whose reason tells him no reader will believe Mervyn's story, and whose honesty and sincerity force him to acknowledge the validity of the audience's disbelief. Thus, through a complex narrative process, Brown uses Stevens as Mervyn's foil, defender and critic, and as a guide to move the audience from the attitude of skeptical observer to that of credulous participant. Stevens provides an account of Mervyn's "tones, gestures, and looks" (AM, II, p. 14) by which he has been so affected, so that the reader cannot find it "possible to suspect the truth" (AM, II, p. 14).

Stevens's comments also signal the difference between written and oral discourse, especially as each works its effects upon a reader or an auditor. On the one hand, he notes, the written word is an incomplete statement of the truth. Mervyn's story is credible only if accompanied by the "tones, gestures, and looks" (AM, II, p. 14) of the oral narration; the words alone do not adequately express the man, nor will they "rescue him from the most heinous charges" (AM, II, p. 13). The truth, according to Stevens, resides more in the sincerity of Mervyn's countenance than in his words. But a reader, on the other hand, must rely upon the written word alone, which, while it offers fewer sensual impressions, is manipulated by the narrator with much more difficulty. Mervyn can manipulate the narrative

during the performance, but once written and circulated, it is beyond his influence. The reader is then free to make judgments based on the word itself without being swayed by eloquence or an assumed sincerity. Thus, reading may deprive one of an affecting subjective experience, but it can provide the sort of objectivity which, Stevens seems to imply, one needs to read Mervyn's narration. Yet one purpose of the intervening narrator (Stevens) is to encourage the reader to lay aside objectivity and to join him in being mesmerized by Arthur's eloquence--in other words, to be duped.

Stevens is prevented from completely carrying out his technical function, however, because the narration accuses Mervyn faster than Stevens can defend him. Practically every character who deals with Mervyn directly is somehow harmed by him, and despite his self-justifying tone throughout the narrative, Arthur's language proves that his motives are not always as pure as he suggests. In addition, his off-hand remarks often reveal that he is not motivated by virtue and charity, but by greed, jealousy and vengeance.

If Mervyn victimizes Stevens, he does so by taking advantage of Stevens's innocence and hospitality, but his relationships with all his other father figures are terribly destructive. Mervyn's relationship with his father, for example, is deeply marred by Arthur's conduct. What responsibility Sawn Mervyn bears for the destructive

nature of the relationship between him and his son is uncertain, but Arthur's portion of blame seems substantial. His representation of his father and of the atmosphere in his home varies significantly from one moment in the narration to another. In Volume I, Arthur describes his father as a sober, industrious, mild-mannered, flexible, but unintelligent man who depends for guidance upon his wife, and who, after his wife's death, resents the heavy-handed superintendence of his son. Mervyn depicts himself as a mama's boy who has been indulged and encouraged in his idle and "refractory" tendencies, but who means no harm by his admitted thoughtlessness. In this section, too, Arthur cites his father's marriage with Betty Lawrence as the reason why he has left his father's home; yet clearly his objections to Betty are grounded more in selfishness than in concern for his father:

I had no independent provision; but I was the only child of my father, and had reasonably hoped to succeed to his patrimony. On this hope I had built a thousand agreeable visions. I had mediated innumerable projects which the possession of this estate would enable me to execute (AM, I, p. 20).

His father, by marrying, has thwarted both Mervyn's greed and his fantasies, a sin for which he eventually pays with his life.

At the beginning of Volume II, Stevens interviews a neighbor of the Mervyn family, Mrs. Althorpe, and from her

h
a
g
L
a
c
s
er
fu

He
ne
hi
vi
an
cor
the

fat
fin
ate
tha

hears a tale very different in specifics from Arthur's, a tale which portrays Arthur as rude, lazy, dishonest and guilty of "criminal intimacy" (AM, II, p. 14) with Betty Lawrence before her marriage to his father. Mrs. Althorpe also reveals that Sawny Mervyn is in jail, after being cheated out of his money and driven to drink by Betty. This story Stevens passes on to Mervyn who abruptly changes his entire picture of his parents. First Arthur offers a tearful apostrophe to his father:

Thou art ignorant and vicious, but thou art my father still. I see that the sufferings of a better man than thou would less affect me than thine. Perhaps it is still in my power to restore thy liberty and good name, and yet--that is a fond wish (AM, II, p. 124).

He then goes on not only to reply to Mrs. Althorpe's indictments of him, but to ignore his father's plight and to paint him as a villain. His new version shows his father to be a vicious, drunken and abusive man, avaricious with his money and destructive of his son's frail health. The story now contains an undertone of resentment that is not present in the Volume I version.

Still, the hostile feelings Mervyn cherishes for his father do not become completely obvious until later when he finally visits the jail where his father has been incarcerated, with the idea of freeing the older man. Mervyn says that his "father's state had given me the deepest concern.

I figured to myself his condition, besotted by brutal appetites, reduced to beggary, shut up in a noisome prison, and condemned to that society which must foster all his depraved propensities" (AM, II, p. 174). Though he purports to be terribly distraught about his father's situation, Mervyn delays his visit to the prison for some time, giving these fantasies the air of gloating and wishful thinking. When he finally arrives at the prison, the elder Mervyn has died; but instead of grieving, Arthur views his father's death as a fortunate release for himself:

I was greatly shocked at this intelligence. It was some time before my reason came to my aid, and showed me that this was an event, on the whole, and on a disinterested and dispassionate view, not unfortunate. . . .

He was now beyond the reach of my charity or pity; and, since reflection could answer no beneficial end to him, it was my duty to divert my thoughts into different channels, and live henceforth for my own happiness and that of those who were within the sphere of my influence (AM, II, p. 175).

Certainly there is in Volume II a serious discrepancy between Mervyn's words and his deeds with regard to his father, and one suspects that Mervyn delays going to the jail as some kind of punishment of his father for ruining his fantasies or in the hope that his father will die before he arrives. Arthur clearly has no trouble finding comfort in his father's death, and although he professes good intentions, he never actually offers either charity or pity when his father is

alive.

While it is not possible to prove that Mervyn is wholly responsible for his father's death, one may surely view his willful negligence as an important factor, and also as part of a recurring pattern. Except for Stevens, Mervyn's father figures die, and he is always partially responsible--with the best motives, of course. A second example of Mervyn's "patricide" is Hadwin, a Quaker farmer who allows Mervyn to join his family in exchange for labor. As with his father, Mervyn's fantasies and Hadwin's situation are at odds, and again Arthur's fantasies center around a woman, money and the father's death. Prompted by "an incessant train of latent palpitations and indefinable hopes" (AM, I, p. 125) that he might marry Eliza Hadwin, Mervyn calculates and contemplates various devious courses to overcome the obstacles he perceives. First, Hadwin's estate, divided between his two daughters, is insufficient to Mervyn's wants. Secondly, Hadwin's religion forbids marriage to non-Quakers. Mervyn notes, however, that "it only remained for me to feign conversion, or to root out the opinions of my friend and win her consent to a secret marriage. Whether hypocrisy was eligible was no subject of deliberation" (AM, I, p. 125). Finally, Mervyn says, he decides not to pursue Eliza because "to introduce discord and sorrow into this family was an act of the utmost ingratitude and

profligacy" (AM, I, p. 126).

Despite this resolution, Mervyn acts as a destructive force in the Hadwin household. Once again, he is conscious of only good intentions when he enters Philadelphia during the yellow fever epidemic to find Susan Hadwin's fiancé, Wallace; indeed, the action itself, though foolhardy, seems charitable enough. But Mervyn deliberately does not tell anyone of his plans, choosing instead to vanish, as he had from home, without a word. He assumes wrongly that Hadwin will know where he has gone. Although he knows that Hadwin is distressed by his daughter's declining health, Mervyn never consciously considers the possibility that Hadwin will himself look for Wallace. Nevertheless, when Hadwin appears in Philadelphia, Mervyn does not seem surprised. He himself then admits that he has read the situation wrongly:

I now perceived and deplored the error of which I had been guilty, in concealing my intended journey from my patron. Ignorant of the part I had acted, he had rushed into the jaws of this pest, and endangered a life unspeakably valuable to his children and friends. I should doubtless have obtained his grateful consent to the project which I had conceived; but my wretched policy had led me into this clandestine path. Secrecy may seldom be a crime. A virtuous intention may produce it; but surely it is always erroneous and pernicious (AM, I, p. 162).

Before he encourages Hadwin to leave Philadelphia, Mervyn declares ambiguously, "I was sensible of the danger which Hadwin had incurred by entering the city. Perhaps my

knowledge of the inexpressible importance of his life to the happiness of his daughters made me aggravate his danger" (AM, I, p. 163). Thus, Mervyn causes Hadwin to expose himself to the fever needlessly, and, depending upon how one reads the word "aggravate," perhaps purposely detains him in the city longer than necessary. The wording of Mervyn's statement is certainly very odd and open to interpretation.

However one construes Mervyn's words, the net effect of his actions for the Hadwin family is disastrous. The father contracts the fever and dies, and when Mervyn returns to Malverton some time later, Susan is at death's door. In fact, Arthur's arrival causes Susan's death, because she has been told by mistake that Wallace has returned; she is overcome by shock and dies a few hours later. Accidental though it may be, Susan's death removes the last obstacle preventing Mervyn from obtaining Hadwin's estate. The estate, rather than Eliza's feelings or welfare, truly seems to be foremost in Mervyn's mind, as he hurries Susan into a makeshift grave without Eliza's knowledge or proper ceremony. Mervyn allows that "it may seem as if I acted with too much precipitation; as if insensibility, and not reason, had occasioned that clearness of conceptions, and bestowed that firmness of muscles, which I then experienced" (AM, II, p. 65).

I would suggest that Arthur is indeed both unfeeling and calculating, and that in spite of his innocent claims,

he has his sights set on Eliza and her inheritance, at least for the time being. The warning he gives her against opportunists certainly applies well to him: "How wouldst thou have fared, if Heaven had not sent me to thy succour? There are beings in this world who would make a selfish use of thy confidence and property. Such am not I" (AM, II, p. 68). The only reason this warning does not ultimately apply to Arthur is that his fantasies have reached higher planes, so now that Eliza and her money are attainable, he no longer wants them. Instead of honestly telling Eliza that he views her as inferior, he continually hurts her by toying periodically with her affections. Eliza, however, never identifies Mervyn as the author of her family's destruction.

Yet a third father figure who is destroyed at least partially by Arthur Mervyn is the character whom Mervyn chooses to emulate--Welbeck. Welbeck and Mervyn have in common a native shrewdness, an aversion to honest labor and an ability to deceive everyone around them. Their relationship begins as one of mutual convenience, as each plans to use the other, but gradually becomes a curse for Welbeck. Mervyn and Welbeck also share, because of their own dependence on appearances, the propensity to read and fantasize about people and situations. But neither of them is shrewd enough to discover the true character of the other until they are inextricably bound together, like Caleb Williams

and Falkland, by fraud and murder.

Welbeck's appearance when the two first meet gives Mervyn ample opportunity for romantic fantasies, all of which prove to be erroneous. Mervyn is as prone to reading appearances as Caleb Williams, so he assumes logically that Welbeck is rich and applies to him for money to get back to the country. Mervyn's resolve to leave Philadelphia cannot survive the force of his curiosity and opportunistic tendencies. When Welbeck questions his reasons for returning to the country, Mervyn quickly abandons his plan and enters Welbeck's home. The older man provides Arthur with some elegant clothes, about which Mervyn notes, "Appearances are wonderfully influenced by dress" (AM, I, p. 52). Although Mervyn never considers that Welbeck's appearance too may be influenced by dress, he is convinced that in his own case, appearance equals reality:

"Twenty minutes ago," said I, "I was traversing that path a barefoot beggar; now I am thus." Again I surveyed myself. "Surely some insanity has fastened on my understanding. My senses are the sport of dreams. Some magic that disdains the cumbrousness of nature's progress has wrought this change" (AM, I, p. 52).

In Mervyn's deluded mind, he does not simply look different. He is truly changed, and in keeping with that change, his romantic fantasies become more elevated and outrageous.

He quickly ascertains, for example, the possibility of manipulating Clemenza Lodi and perhaps Welbeck himself by

his new appearance. Mervyn conjectures that he bears a resemblance to someone important to Clemenza and Welbeck, and the prospect of benefitting from that similarity throws him into "transports of wonder and hope" (AM, I, p. 58). Even before Mervyn speaks a word to Clemenza or has a long conversation with Welbeck, the fantasy quickly blossoms into a vision of wealth and fortunate marriage, with Mervyn's only obligations to maintain his new facade and to appear deserving. Arthur's inner monologue here is quite long, but worth quoting extensively to show how little grasp he has on reality, and how devious and self-interested his motives are:

But what was the fate reserved for me? Perhaps Welbeck would adopt me for his own son. Wealth has ever been capriciously distributed. The mere physical relation of birth is all that entitles us to manors and thrones. Identity itself frequently depends upon a casual likeness or an old nurse's imposture. Nations have risen in arms, as in the case of the Stuarts, in the cause of one the genuineness of whose birth has been denied and can never be proved. But if the cause be trivial and fallacious, the effects are momentous and solid. It ascertains our portion of felicity and usefulness, and fixes our lot among peasants or princes.

Something may depend upon my own deportment. Will it not behoove me to cultivate all my virtues and eradicate all my defects? I see that the abilities of this man are venerable. Perhaps he will not lightly or hastily decide in my favour. He will be governed by the proofs that I shall give of discernment and integrity. I had always been exempt from temptation, and was therefore undepraved; but this view of things had a wonderful tendency to invigorate my virtuous resolutions. All within me was exhilaration and joy.

There was but one thing wanting to exalt me to a dizzy height and give me place among the stars of heaven. My resemblance to her brother had forcibly affected this lady; but I was not her brother. I was raised to a level with her and made a tenant of the same mansion. Some intercourse would take place between us. Time would lay level impediments and establish familiarity, and this intercourse might foster love and terminate in--marriage! (AM, I, pp. 58-59).

Welbeck's motives for taking Mervyn in also center around Mervyn's appearance, but his thoughts are much more practical than Arthur's fantasies. When the two meet, Welbeck is in serious financial trouble and, despite his opulent appearance, is nearly destitute; one suspects that he does not even have the few cents Mervyn asks of him. Moreover, Welbeck's passion for the pregnant Clemenza has cooled and he wishes to be rid of her. Welbeck later tells Mervyn that his motives for treating Arthur generously are purely selfish. He intends to use Mervyn's resemblance to Vincenzio Lodi to divert Clemenza's attention, his resemblance to Clavering to extract money from Mrs. Wentworth, and his skill with a pen to translate Lodi's manuscript into English and into a handsome profit. For all his shrewdness and consciousness of outer show, though, Welbeck is still deceived by Arthur's innocent face: "To gain your concurrence, I relied upon your simplicity, your gratitude and your susceptibility to the charms of this bewitching creature" (AM, I, p. 101). Unfortunately for Welbeck, Mervyn is neither simple nor grateful for very long, and his

attraction to Clemenza is marred by his suspicion of her true relationship with Welbeck.

Welbeck and Mervyn differ, then, not in their exploitation of appearances for selfish purposes, but in their degree of self-awareness. Welbeck knows himself quite well. His interest lies in his reputation, similar to Squire Falkland's, but whereas Falkland is preoccupied with personal honor, Welbeck is concerned with appearing wealthy and moral. As Patrick Brancaccio notes:

In the business world of Philadelphia where moral probity and business reputation go hand in hand, it is important to keep up the game of appearances of thrift, industry, and personal purity. But Welbeck hopes to impress with conspicuous consumption instead of following the dictates of Poor Richard (Brancaccio, p. 21).

Welbeck cannot check his criminal tendencies, but he is able to acknowledge and repent for them to himself and Mervyn. Because he is realistic about his failings and because he lives a very compartmentalized life, Welbeck cannot understand Mervyn's compulsion to make appearance equal reality, or his obsession with self-justification; he cannot comprehend that:

Because Arthur is self-deluded, he exists in a world of pressing contradictions. To confess even privately to any act of self-seeking is to condemn himself forever because his whole future depends on the good opinion of the world which, for a man of his temperament, is indistinguishable from his opinion of himself (Brancaccio, p. 22).

Their different self-perceptions cause Mervyn and Welbeck to handle detection or accusation in very different ways, a realization which comes to Welbeck only after Mervyn has betrayed him. Welbeck's method of avoiding prosecution is to disappear before he can be arrested. He knows and admits he is guilty, but his lack of morality keeps him from punishing himself for his crimes, and his cleverness prevents anyone else from punishing him. In other words, he is a criminal, knows he is a criminal and protects himself like a criminal. Mervyn, rather than running from accusations, remains to meet them head-on. So conscious is he of the "rectitude of [his] intentions" (his favorite phrase), that he never examines his actions or the motives behind them objectively. Therefore, as far as he is concerned, any wrong or evil is someone else's, no matter how much destruction or discomfort he may cause. Like Caleb Williams, Mervyn defends himself against charges simply by giving a complete account of others' crimes, chiefly Welbeck's. Mervyn knows that he can manipulate and recreate the truth through language, so he slyly shifts his audience's attention from himself to Welbeck, ignoring his pledge of silence.

At least part of the reason Mervyn breaks his promise to Welbeck, and part of the reason he earlier burns the money from the Lodi manuscript, is to exert his power. Brancaccio notes that "Arthur keeps his promise not to reveal

what he knows about Welbeck only until it serves his purposes. He finds, in fact, an obvious pleasure in telling Welbeck that he has ruined him with his disclosures" (Brancaccio, p. 22). Once again, as with his own father, Arthur puts a parental figure in jail, nor is he satisfied to let Welbeck imagine his reputation intact; he must tell Welbeck, in the interest of honesty, that Stevens knows the whole story. Welbeck is sharp enough to see through Mervyn's mask of innocence, however, as his last violent outburst demonstrates:

"It cannot be. So enormous a deed is beyond thy power. Thy qualities are marvellous. Every new act of thine outstrips the last, and belies the newest calculations. But this--this perfidy exceeds--this outrage upon promises, this violation of faith, this blindness to the future, is incredible."

.

"And hast thou then betrayed me? Hast thou shut every avenue to my return to honour? Am I known to be a seducer and assassin? To have meditated all crimes, and to have perpetrated the worst?

"Infamy and death are my portion. I know they are reserved for me; but I did not think to receive them at thy hands, that under that innocent guise there lurked a heart treacherous and cruel" (AM, II, pp. 42-43).

iii

If Arthur Mervyn's relationships with men are shaped by his need to seek out and destroy father figures, his

relationships with women are determined by his attitude toward his mother.¹¹ Whereas his feelings for his father seem uniformly hostile except for his sentimental apostrophe on his father's imprisonment, Arthur's feelings for his mother appear to be more ambivalent and complex. In Volume I, Arthur portrays his mother as an overly indulgent woman who protects him from his father. He notes, "Fond appellations, tones of mildness, solicitous attendance when I was sick, deference to my opinions, and veneration for my talents, compose the image which I still retain of my mother" (AM, I, p. 17), but he also remembers that "a look of tender upbraiding from her was always sufficient to melt me into tears and make me ductile to her will" (AM, I, p. 17). Thus Arthur presents a picture of a woman who shields him from his father and who worships and supports him, but who is also adept at manipulating and humiliating him by her appearance. In Volume II, instead of showing his mother as a domineering presence in the family, Mervyn reveals that she is abused by his father. Mervyn's role, according to his account, changes from protected to protector, and he in effect assumes the role of husband to the mother. His experiences with his mother, his ideal woman, are repeated throughout the narrative as he acts out his compulsion to be protector of and protected by Clemenza Lodi, Eliza Hadwin and Achsa Fielding.

Unlike his relationship with his mother, Mervyn's attraction to all three of these women is inseparable from his third compulsion--to gain money. In fact, gaining a woman and a fortune are the two rewards of his fantasies, rewards appropriate for the successful sentimental hero he imagines himself to be. But when Arthur gains control of two of these women's fortunes, he shows himself to be corrupt, and as inept at managing money as he is at establishing a mature romantic relationship with a woman.

While Mervyn is attracted by Clemenza Lodi's appearance and, true to his sentimental fantasies, imagines himself instantly in love, he is even more interested in exploiting her supposed relationship with Welbeck. Wrongly assuming that Clemenza is Welbeck's daughter, Mervyn plans to use this connection to gain Welbeck's favor and ultimately his wealth. Of course, Clemenza's ability to protect Mervyn by delivering to him her inheritance is as nonexistent as Welbeck's fortune. When he discovers the true identities and characters of Clemenza and Welbeck through the latter's confession, he determines to leave the city and return to the country. Arthur's flight is prompted by his realization that he has implicated himself in Watson's murder and conspiracy against Welbeck's creditors, so that, although he wonders about Clemenza's fate and his ability to help her, he conveniently concludes "my ignorance of her asylum had utterly disabled me" (AM, I, p. 118). Before he leaves,

however, Mervyn returns to Welbeck's to recover his old clothes and identity, and to take from the house the one object which could help himself and Clemenza--Vincentio Lodi's manuscript.

The twenty thousand dollars Mervyn discovers in the manuscript at the Hadwins' presents him with a true test of his virtue, for it requires him to choose between Clemenza's welfare and his passion for money. He first claims the money is legitimately his and fantasizes about how he might spend it:

The money was placed, without guilt or artifice, in my possession. My fortune had been thus unexpectedly and wondrously propitious. How was I to profit by her favour? Would not the sum enable me to gather round me all the instruments of pleasure? (AM, I, p. 128).

Only after he contemplates how Clemenza's money may benefit him does Mervyn assume a more noble and protective attitude, and acknowledge to himself that not only is Clemenza her brother's legal heir, she is also desperately needy: "The precepts of my duty cannot be mistaken. The lady must be sought and the money restored to her" (AM, I, p. 129). Suddenly, finding Clemenza seems very possible and desirable.

From this point on, Mervyn imagines himself to be Clemenza's savior, the hero who will rescue her from the desperate straits in which Welbeck has left her. But, as with his father, Arthur is more talk than action. He does not make

any effort to find Clemenza until he goes to look for Wallace some time later, and his search is very inefficient. Before he can even begin his search for Clemenza, Mervyn is seized by the notion that he is dying from the fever and once again diverted from his role as Clemenza's protector by self-centered delusions. Mervyn apparently conceives that his duty to the money outweighs his duty to Clemenza, for instead of using his waning strength to find the unfortunate woman, he uses it to figure out a way to dispose of her fortune in a philanthropic way:

The evils which had befallen this city were obvious and enormous. Hunger and negligence had exasperated the malignity and facilitated the progress of this pestilence. Could this money be more usefully employed than in alleviating these evils? During my life, I had no power over it, but my death would justify me in prescribing the course which it should take.

How was this course to be pointed out? How might I place it, so that I should effect my intentions without relinquishing the possession during my life? (AM, I, p. 180).

Mervyn insists his virtuous intentions toward Clemenza remain the same, but he shows himself here, as in many other instances, incapable of carrying to completion any virtuous action; in this case, he abdicates his resolve to rescue Clemenza in favor of an abstract and impractical plan to gain a benevolent reputation for himself by doing good with her money.

By the time Mervyn gets around to finding Clemenza, for

in the meantime he has appointed himself Eliza Hadwin's protector, he is in no position to help her. Had he carried out his intentions earlier, he might have spared Clemenza a great deal of grief and saved her child's life, but, having burned her money at Welbeck's, he arrives at her "prison," as at his father's with only the most useless sentimentality:

I sighed. I wept. I even sobbed. I stooped down and took the lifeless hand of the sufferer. I bathed it with my tears, and exclaimed, "Ill-fated woman! unhappy mother! what shall I do for thy relief? How shall I blunt the edge of this calamity, and rescue thee from new evils?" (AM, II, p. 111).

One can only assume, given Arthur's procrastination and designs on Clemenza's money, that this bathos springs from a guilty conscience. Since Mervyn fancies he cannot help Clemenza, he can at least participate in her suffering for a moment. The only actual help Mervyn ever provides Clemenza is to intercede on her behalf with Mrs. Wentworth who takes her in.

If Mervyn's conduct with regard to Clemenza can possibly be laid to inexperience and ineptitude rather than his obsession with power and money, his treatment of Eliza Hadwin certainly cannot. Mervyn's own words betray that his interest in Eliza is purely selfish. When he concludes that he cannot overcome Mr. Hadwin's Quakerism or be satisfied with Eliza's half of her father's estate, for example,

Mervyn refuses to spend time with Eliza at all; instead he closets himself with the Lodi manuscript so he will not have to "contend with eyes which alternately wondered at and upbraided me for my unkindness" (AM, I, p. 126). He maintains that to associate with Eliza would foster a passion "destructive either of my integrity or my existence" (AM, I, p. 126) because he cannot acknowledge either that his passion for Eliza depends upon her inheritance or that he enjoys the power he wields to make her unhappy. Unfortunately for Eliza, she does not possess the kind of power Mervyn's mother had to make him "ductile to her will" (AM, I, p. 17).

When Mervyn returns to Malverton after his recovery from the fever, his greed is even more apparent than before. As I pointed out previously, with Hadwin and Susan dead, Mervyn's unconscious desires seem ripe for fulfillment; he can now step in as protector to Eliza and administrator of her fortune. To appease his desires, he even tries to convince himself that he is in love, that he "pant[s] after the irrevocable bounds, the boundless privileges, of wedlock" (AM, II, p. 76). But Mervyn cannot disguise the fact that his passion springs from greed, not love:

Omitting all regard to the happiness of others, my own interest could not fail to recommend a scheme by which the precious benefits might be honestly obtained. The excursions of my fancy had sometimes carried me beyond the bounds prescribed by my situation, but they were, nevertheless, limited to that field to which I had

some prospect of acquiring a title. All I wanted for the basis of my gaudiest and most dazzling structures was a hundred acres of plough-land and meadow (AM, II, p. 75).

Arthur is clearly willing to use Eliza to gain her wealth, but no sooner does he settle on farming and marriage to Eliza as his goals, than he begins to throw up obstacles for himself.

Now that Eliza and her money seem available, Mervyn's desire for both begins to cool. His greed and fear of a romantic relationship prompt him to "suppress that tenderness" he feels for Eliza and return to the city. Instead of tenderness, however, he betrays scorn for Eliza's innocence and ignorance, and doubts "the permanence of her equanimity and her docility to my instructions". (AM, II, p. 76). He convinces himself that he deserves and can win a much better woman, "one who more nearly approaches that standard of ideal excellence which poets and romancers had exhibited to my view" (AM, II, p. 81). Although Mervyn discovers through his interview with Eliza's uncle that her inheritance is quite small, a discovery which "necessarily produced a change in my views with regard to my friend" (AM, II, p. 95), he continues to toy with her affections. One suspects he derives pleasure from his ability to cause her pain, and security from knowing she is his if he can find no one who measures up to his fanciful ideal woman.

Mervyn does eventually bring Eliza to the city, but not as his wife. As with Clemenza, he finds himself incapable or unwilling to carry out his protector role, so he instead arranges for her to live with a wealthy friend of Mrs. Wentworth's, Achsa Fielding. Arthur's action here demonstrates just how psychologically regressive he becomes after he takes over the narration from Stevens, for the only way he can interact with Eliza or Achsa is through fantasy. Thus, he creates in his mind a sister/brother relationship for himself and Eliza, and a sisterly bond between the two women. Such relationships, of course, preclude any romantic attachments. Although Eliza gains some companionship and security by this arrangement, she must continually be reminded of Arthur's thoughtlessness to her as she watches the growing romance between him and Achsa. For the second time, Arthur transforms himself in his fantasies into the brother of a woman for whom he no longer has any use.

Mervyn's need for Achsa Fielding extends far beyond finding protection for Eliza, for in Achsa he discovers the wealthy mother/lover who fulfills his fantasies. Although Arthur's original encounter with her takes place in what he assumes to be a brothel, he is sure Achsa's appearance indicates she is yet undepraved. At the second encounter, after Mrs. Wentworth has assured Mervyn that Achsa is rich and without heirs, he experiences "certain tremors which I had not been accustomed to feel" (AM, II, p. 146). Mervyn

offers no other details about the nature of his feelings for Achsa at this point, but I think it significant that he assumes control over his narration immediately after he meets her, signalling that even before he consciously realizes his love for Achsa, his actions betray his guilt.

Arthur's need to be cared for and protected makes impossible any kind of healthy relationship for Achsa, just as it ruins his associations with Clemenza and Eliza. But this relationship is particularly destructive because of the construction Mervyn imposes upon it. While he arranges in his mind sibling ties between himself and Eliza, and between Eliza and Achsa, Mervyn creates a parent/child bond for himself and Achsa:

I related the little story of my family, spread out before her all my reasonings and determinations, my notions of right and wrong, my fears and wishes. All this was done with sincerity and fervour, with gestures, actions, and looks, in which I felt as if my whole soul was visible. Her superior age, sedateness, and prudence, gave my deportment a filial freedom and affection, and I was fond of calling her "mamma" (AM, II, p. 179).

Mervyn's new "mamma," however, is only twenty-five--six years or so his senior--but she tries to play the part he assigns her by keeping from him for a long time her own sorrows and vulnerability; when she can withhold her story no longer, she confesses, "I was desirous that you should know nothing of me but what you see" (AM, II, p. 198).

Before Achsa tells him of her life, what Mervyn sees is a female idol, a fantasy mother who is also the model for his ideal wife. She fits his notion of perfect womanhood, but she is also his "mamma," so he refuses to accept the implications of his own words. In a discussion of Eliza's defects, for example, Mervyn overtly declares his love for Achsa, but sees his passion only in hypothetical terms:

The creature whom I shall worship: --it sounds oddly, but, I verily believe, the sentiment which I shall feel for my wife will be more akin to worship than anything else. I shall never love but such a creature as I now image to myself, and such a creature will deserve, or almost deserve, worship. But this creature, I was going to say, must be the exact counterpart, my good mamma-- of yourself (AM, II, pp. 188-89).

As long as Mervyn sees in Achsa only a fantasy creature, he can at once revel in the security and protection of his "mamma" and maintain the delusion that he is a virtuous man.

After Achsa tells Mervyn her life story, though, he begins to see that she is a real person, and that not only is she imperfect, she is not nearly as wise and confident as he thought. Although he persists fiercely in his idolatry, the realization that Achsa is a real person brings about a crisis for Arthur which ends in his psychic downfall. Brown incorporates into one short and powerful section Mervyn's loss of control of his will and his fantasies:

As to me, I was wax in her hand. Without design and without effort, I was always of that form she wished me to assume. My own happiness became a secondary passion, and her gratification that great end of my being. When with her, I thought not of myself. I had scarcely a separate or independent existence. . . .

.

At this time, I had almost done what a second thought made me suspect to be unauthorized. Yet I cannot tell why. My heart had nothing in it but reverence and admiration. Was she not the substitute of my lost mamma? Would I not have clasped that beloved shade? Yet the two beings were not just the same, or I should not, as now, have checked myself, and only pressed her hand to my lips (AM, II, pp. 212 & 213).

Losing his will is, no doubt, a frightening experience for Mervyn, but I see in this passage an unconscious effort to shift the responsibility for his "incestuous" desires onto Achsa. After all, if Mervyn exists only as Achsa's creature, then she is the one guilty of "unauthorized" passions.

Brown is clearly not about to let Mervyn off the hook so easily, however, for he brings Stevens back into the narrative to force Arthur to confront his feelings for Achsa. Arthur's conversation with Stevens is brilliantly written to show Stevens attempting to awaken recognition in Mervyn, while Mervyn, who senses the dangers of recognition, desperately struggles to keep the truth unspoken. Mervyn seems acutely aware of his danger because he begs Stevens to "take care. . . you may do me more injury than you conceive, by even starting such a thought" (AM, II, p. 216).

He warns Stevens that to love Achsa as a woman "would brand me as a lunatic" (AM, II, p. 215), a prophetic phrase, for this conversation does plunge him into the frenzied insanity with which he ends the narration. Stevens seemingly takes Arthur's anxiety as a lover's modesty, for he continues pressuring until Arthur's patience and his sanity snap. His retort certainly does not sound like that of one thrilled by the prospect of marriage to his beloved:

My friend! my friend! I feel that you have done me an irreparable injury. I can never more look her in the face. I can never more frequent her society. These new thoughts will beset and torment me. My disquiet will chain up my tongue. That overflowing gratitude; that innocent joy, unconscious of offense, and knowing no restraint, which have hitherto been my titles to her favour, will fly from my features and manners. I shall be anxious, vacant, and unhappy in her presence. I shall dread to look at her, or to open my lips, lest my mad and unhallowed ambition should betray itself (AM, II, p. 219).

Stevens attributes this odd response to posturing--"a necessary part of the drama"--but Mervyn's terror is real and well-founded.

The nameless terror Mervyn experiences immediately after this conversation is given form and name in the nightmare which seizes him as soon as he falls asleep. In his dream Arthur's fantasies are turned against him and he is made the victim of his own aggressions. First, Eliza seems to betray him, for she offers no warning of what is to follow; she simply admits him to Achsa's house and leaves

him in the parlor. Achsa does not join Arthur in the parlor, however, but rather he is confronted and attacked by Achsa's enraged husband who stabs Arthur in the heart. Of course, Arthur awakes physically uninjured, but he is horrified at his inability to distinguish dream from reality. Indeed, his confusion is understandable because Arthur's dream mirrors the reality of the life he has wrought from his Oedipal fantasies. He has rid himself of father and fallen in love with "mamma" and her fortune over and over again, but he has never before come so close to marrying a mother figure. Now in his dream, the father rises up in retaliation and kills him. Arthur dismisses the dream, but Achsa cannot be so blithe about it. She is saddened and terrified by it. When Arthur teases her about confiding in dreams, she replies, "I know not where to place confidence" (AM, II, p. 229). Certainly she does not seem to place much confidence in Mervyn, for she weeps from grief and terror at the prospect of their marriage.

iv

The critics who have seen Brown's work as gothic have based their arguments mostly on Wieland and Edgar Huntly, and on the scenes of Philadelphia during the yellow fever epidemic in Arthur Mervyn and Ormond. Yet I contend that the yellow fever sections of Arthur Mervyn, while they are certainly bone-chilling, do not much affect the novel as a

whole. The gothic center of the novel, as I see it, is Mervyn's own statement that "he whose senses are deluded finds himself still on his natal earth" (AM, I, pp. 54-55). The observation is not particularly frightening in itself, but against the backdrop of Mervyn's life it quickly becomes so. Brown exploits the gothic implications of delusion by showing how difficult it is to know the truth about oneself. Surely no one could be more cautious of his virtue or aware of his superficial motives than Mervyn. No one could have more upright or beneficent intentions. But with all his efforts for self-knowledge, Mervyn remains so deluded that his reason is destroyed and he collapses into insanity. His whole life is governed by an infantile passion for power and security, but at the end of his narration, he remains psychologically subjugated by the father and greedy for mother and money -- in other words, he is still chained to his "natal earth."

Brown is addressing very basic unconscious human urges and fears in Arthur Mervyn, impulses which are not just peculiar to Mervyn, but are shared by all human beings. Addressing hidden archetypal desires, however, makes Brown's novel no different from any other gothic work. What does make Arthur Mervyn different and horrifying is its narrative technique. Brown does not plunge the reader into sudden insanity as James Hogg later does in The Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner, he does not explain away all fears like Ann Radcliffe does, nor does he follow

Godwin's example and conclude with a dramatic realization and repentance of error. Rather, Brown shows the gradual and quiet disintegration of Mervyn's ability to distinguish fantasy from reality. He allows the reader to view Mervyn for three quarters of the narration in various social settings, confronted with doubts and questions. Then he allows Mervyn to conclude his narration in uninterrupted isolation.

By leaving Mervyn engaged in an isolated dialogue with only himself, Brown abandons the optimism of Godwin and Jefferson. To these rationalists, reason and moral sense could assist people in making sense of life, but mutual dialogue was essential if truth were to emerge. For the characters in Arthur Mervyn, however, neither the traditional pieties of conventional morality, nor the Quaker "inner light," nor Jefferson's "moral sense" proves adequate to reveal the truth. Arthur remains immersed in delusion and corrupts his own moral sense until it rationalizes all his actions. Likewise, no moral faculty enables Brown's other characters, Mervyn's victims, to distinguish truth from error or to save themselves. All are duped by Mervyn's pious statements of righteous intent. Thus, the eighteenth-century reader, used to moral certainty, is thrown into the ambiguities of the twentieth-century vision. No moral certainties exist, and the reader remains with no sure moral guide to distinguish truth--either in others, or more shockingly, even within one's self. The dark promptings

of desire may successfully masquerade as disinterested virtue.

Hence, Brown's vision of the human condition in general and the American condition in particular is one of staggering vulnerabilities. Whereas Godwin holds out hope for perfectibility through conscientious self-evaluation and the exercise of reason, Brown despairs even of enough improvement to keep human beings from destroying each other and themselves. He sees no redemption for Mervyn because Mervyn carries his depravity with him. Mervyn is not the pastoral innocent corrupted by urban society that he imagines himself to be, but rather the representative of the underside of the Franklinian ethic. Brown suggests through Mervyn that the new world is not really very new after all--that an America which prides itself on moral superiority and incorruptible virtue may, like Mervyn, find itself back on its "natal earth." For America and for Mervyn, and perhaps for himself and his readers as well, Brown envisions no redemption, and echoes Achsa Fielding in saying, "I know not where to place confidence."

Notes

¹W.B. Berthoff, "'A Lesson on Concealment': Brockden Brown's Method in Fiction," Philological Quarterly, 37 (1958), p. 45.

²Carl Nelson, "A Method for Madness: The Symbolic Patterns in Arthur Mervyn," Philological Papers, 22 (1975), p. 29.

³Nelson, p. 29.

⁴James H. Justus, "Arthur Mervyn, American," American Literature, 42 (1970), p. 304.

⁵Patrick Brancaccio, "Studied Ambiguities: Arthur Mervyn and the Problem of the Unreliable Narrator," American Literature, 42 (1970), p. 18. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁶Nelson, p. 33. While my discussion of Dr. Stevens's function in the novel agrees with Nelson's, my conclusions about Dr. Stevens's final attitude about Mervyn are different.

⁷Kenneth Bernard, "Arthur Mervyn: The Ordeal of Innocence," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 6 (1965), p. 442.

⁸See Brancaccio, pp. 19-20.

⁹Charles Brockden Brown, Arthur Mervyn or Memoirs of the Year 1793, 2 vols., Vols. II and III of Charles Brockden Brown's Novels (1887; rpt. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1963), Vol. I, pp. 6-7. All further references to this work appear in the text.

¹⁰R.W.B. Lewis, The American Adam (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 8.

¹¹For further analysis of Arthur Mervyn's relationships with women, see Leland S. Person, Jr., "'My Good Mamma': Women in Edgar Huntly and Arthur Mervyn," Studies in American Fiction, 9 (1981), pp. 37-45.

Chapter 3

The Projection: Wieland

If in Arthur Mervyn Brown illustrates his belief that delusion may prevent progress toward perfection--may bind humankind to its "natal earth"--in Wieland he demonstrates a growing fear that humankind is doomed to continual regression and debasement. To express his increasing sense of despair and failure, perhaps made more profound by the public's rejection earlier in 1798 of his feminist pamphlet, Alcuin, Brown creates Clara Wieland, a female narrator who, like Brown, lives a life of fear and conflict between the desire for self-awareness and the need to satisfy the demands society imposes on her. Brown's perception of women's lives as gothic and his ability to identify with their fear and repressed anger may even have been strengthened by the public outrage over the views Brown expresses in Alcuin. Brown certainly understands as an author the feelings of frustration and powerlessness inherent in the lives of women, whose very survival, like his own, depends upon the good opinion of society. Thus, in Clara Wieland, a self-effacing narrator with a secret inner life, Brown embodies his hatred and terror of a society which insists upon conformity to prejudice and error, and of individuals like

himself and Clara who betray their own enlightenment to adopt society's delusions.

Brown apparently intends to create in Wieland characters who resemble him as early as the penning of his outline, even before he decides to make Clara the novel's narrator.¹ The characters who eventually become Theodore and Clara are named Charles and Caroline in the outline, giving them a clear connection not only to each other, but to Brown as well. Indeed, the similarity of his fictional characters to himself may have seemed too obvious to Brown, who was always wary of revealing his "fears and anxieties"² to others, and he changed the names. The similarities between Brown's and Clara's characters, obvious despite the name changes Brown makes, are numerous and significant. They are both personalities intimidated and stifled by the demands of society, and share an obsession with the appropriate. Clara's self-suppression and concealment of her true character derive from Brown's. The gap they perceive between their true selves and the socially acceptable roles imposed on them by society gives rise to an overwhelming sense of guilt and self-horror. Brown writes to his friend William W. Wilkins, for example, "of that profound abyss of ignominy and debasement, into which I am sunk by my own reflections."³ The conviction that they deserve the abhorrence of others and the desire to express and legitimize their stifled selves prompt both Clara and Brown to write.

In creating the character of Clara, Brown may well have attempted to give voice not only to his own personal and writerly insecurities, but, equally, to find an explanation for them. By casting his doubt and self-effacement in a female form, Brown rendered them--according to eighteenth century views of femininity--plausible, even acceptable. Yet how does Brown's self-doubting and self-effacing narrator work as the locus of the gothic tale she tells? The stifling sense of propriety common to Clara and Brown fosters a deviousness by which they can communicate their ideas and feelings without violating the expectations of society--ideally, in Clara's case, without being noticed at all. The strategy of self-effacement has been, for Clara, all too successful. She has been virtually ignored by critics although she is the only constant in Wieland and the novel is narrated solely from her point of view. Scholars seem unanimously unwilling or unable to take Clara seriously, mostly because they see the Theodore/Carwin relationship as central and Clara as peripheral. Thus, no scholarship exists which treats Clara as a legitimate character. She has been viewed only in terms of the traditional female stereotypes of nonentity and monster, and dismissed. This interpretation of Clara underestimates the power of Brown's art and Clara's character, for it fails to address the question why Brown would use as the narrator of his most enduring novel a woman who is so self-effacing that she seems irrelevant to her own narration.

In her article, "A Minority Reading of *Wieland*," Nina Baym singles out Brown's use of Clara as the greatest flaw in the novel:

Wieland virtually disappears from the tale at precisely the point when he ought to become its unremitting focus.

.

Simply, Clara is not a character in any traditional sense . . . She has no role with respect to the action except to misreport it. She is, however, a function with respect to the story's telling. She is the screen imposed between *Wieland* and the reader, the result of narrative strategies calling for the greatest degree of inaccuracy.⁴

Although I agree with Baym that Clara is a non-traditional character in Brown's work, I think Baym's evaluation of Brown's narrative focus is completely mistaken. The very fact that Theodore (and Carwin, whom Baym sees as the subsequent "focus" to Theodore) disappears from the novel while Clara is constantly present indicates that Clara, not Theodore, is the "unremitting focus" of *Wieland*. Brown is wholly consistent in his narrative technique, for he employs only Clara's point of view. He molds Clara in such a clever way, however, that she does seem to be, as Baym claims, a "function" divorced from the action of the tale--a hostess for her audience. But Clara's pose as hostess screens a different Clara who struggles to come to terms with the contradictions in her personality.

These contradictions are most evident in Clara's fluctuating and ambivalent attitude toward herself, as especially

revealed by the fluctuating distance she maintains between herself and her readers. As we have seen with the other narrators of gothic fictions, Caleb Williams and Arthur Mervyn, Clara alternately addresses her audience directly and, at other times, virtually disappears from view. Like Caleb, Clara frequently narrates events which, due to her complete isolation, she alone has the authority or perspective to tell. As she is the only person alive who knows her story, she has the opportunity to draw the audience into herself as Caleb does, and to impose her experiences and feelings on her audience. But on the other hand, because Clara does not share Caleb's positive sense of self, she often erects a barrier between herself and her readers at the same time she reaches out to them. Brown uses Clara's "hostess" role in much the same way he uses Dr. Stevens in Arthur Mervyn. Instead of creating a separate character, however, Brown adds complexity to Clara's character and to the reading experience by having one aspect of Clara's divided personality obscure the other. In this way, Brown could create a psychologically authentic female character and still have her appear to have an acceptable feminine function.

While the entire story of Wieland comes to the reader through Clara, Brown does employ the tale-within-a-tale technique common to Caleb Williams and Arthur Mervyn. Clara's long epistolary narration begins with the terrifying story of her father's religious conversion and

mysterious death by spontaneous combustion which she paraphrases from the oral account given by her uncle. The middle section of the novel contains part of the transcript of Theodore's trial and confession, once again made available to Clara by her uncle. The stories of her maternal uncle's suicide, her own "malady" and the Conway/Maxwell affair likewise come to Clara through her uncle. Of the secondary tales, only Carwin's justification of himself is part of Clara's direct experience. Thus, most of the horrors that haunt Clara's life are events in which she has no part and over which she has no control--events, in fact, that she only knows about because she has been told by her uncle. These distant events, however, especially the death of her father and the madness of her brother, along with the restrictions society places on women, shape Clara's narration and her life.

ii

Because Clara is ambivalent about herself, her entire life, including her attitude toward her narration, is in conflict. The tension between her public and private motives for writing, for example, is clear from the very beginning, though she states her public motives more directly:

Yet the tale I am going to tell is not intended as a claim upon your sympathy. In the midst of my despair, I do not disdain to contribute what little I can to the benefit of mankind. I acknowledge your right to be

informed of the events that have lately happened in my family. Make what use of the tale you shall think proper. If it be communicated to the world, it will inculcate the duty of avoiding deceit.⁵

Here Clara, in her hostess role, tries to take an objective journalistic, even Godwinian, stance with regard to the sorrows of her life. She focuses her attention, and her readers', upon the public's right to know and on her magnanimous desire to benefit mankind. Her instructions to use the story "as you shall think proper" (W, p. 5), while they betray a disregard for her own feelings, underscore Clara's commitment to duty and her attempts to force objectivity upon her narrative and herself.

Behind Clara the hostess is a character in pain, a character who, instead of being detached from life, perceives herself as both aggressor and victim. The narrative motives of this private Clara, whom no one save her readers sees, are first, to question her fate, and second, to prove she deserves it. Publicly Clara does not dare to question her fate, trying rather to seem resigned and obedient:

I address no supplication to the Deity. The power that governs the course of human affairs has chosen his path. The decree that ascertained the condition of my life admits of no recall. No doubt it squares with the maxims of eternal equity. That is neither to be questioned nor denied by me (W, p. 5).

Yet although she tries to keep her duty in mind, Clara clearly wonders how her fate "squares" with any system of

justice or equity. Moreover, the narrative act itself is a masculine act⁶ which allows Clara to break out of her feminine role and question who she is and what her life means. Narration engages her in the process of becoming a human being, and necessarily entails challenging the justice of her fate and the socially acceptable role she has been taught to assume in public.

The other part of the private Clara is the mirror image of Caleb Williams and Arthur Mervyn, for her unreliability springs from self-condemnation rather than self-justification. While one part of her private self rebels against her lot in life, the other offers the narrative as proof that she deserves her fate. Her plea to the reader, unlike her male counterparts', is not to "render me a justice," but to "listen to my narrative, and then say what it is that has made me deserve to be placed on this dreadful eminence" (W, p. 6). The choice of words is significant here. Clara is not asking for justice, for she agrees justice has been served; she simply wants to know what her sin has been. She thus denies the possibility that she is truly a victim and she devotes herself to self-punishment. Ironically, in offering the narrative to her audience as proof of her guilt, Clara deepens her guilt still further, for if she has committed a "sin" at all, it is the sin of violating society's notion of femininity by seeking self-knowledge through writing.

The private Clara, the narrator who allows her readers

to see her inner turmoil, defines herself in the same way most Wieland critics do-- according to the female stereotypes of angelic nonentity and monster prescribed for women by a patriarchal society. But while scholars have seen Clara as fulfilling one role or the other, Clara sees herself in both roles, neither of which is always clearly distinguished in her mind from the other. Clara proves to her readers that she is virtuous and, therefore, the victim of an unjust fate by behaving in the ways which she has been taught are appropriate for women--which is to say, she proves her virtue by making herself invisible. Silence is perhaps Clara's most obvious virtue, for it permeates her narrative as it does her relationships with others. The feelings which prompt the silences in the presence of her readers, however, are quite different from, although complimentary to, those which keep her from communicating with the other characters.

In her family circle, which includes Theodore, Catharine and Pleyel, Clara is virtually nonexistent except as the silent invisible female. She maintains a strict silence, not because she lacks feeling or intellect, but because she, like all women, lives in a world where assertiveness of any kind is seen as unfeminine, i.e. as non-virtuous. In the company of her brother, Pleyel, and later, her uncle, her conduct is marked by "silent respect" (W, p. 179). Clara is indeed so obsessed with decorum, so afraid of betraying her secret assertiveness,

that no other character in the novel knows who she really is (except Carwin who reads her journal). Hence, her relationships are all strained and artificial. For example, her concern with the appropriate ruins her relationship with Pleyel, for while Clara has romantic feelings for Pleyel, her notion of virtuous conduct forces her to remain silent and rely on her "feminine wiles":

He suspected that I looked with favourable eyes upon Carwin. Hence arose disquietudes which he struggled in vain to conceal. He loved me, but was hopeless that his love would be compensated. Is it not time, I said, to rectify this error? But by what means is this to be effected? It can only be done by a change of deportment in me; but how much I demean myself for this purpose?

I must not speak. Neither eyes nor lips must impart the information. He must not be assured that my heart is his, previous to the tender of his own; but he must be convinced that it has not been given to another; he must be supplied with space whereon to build a doubt as to the true state of my affections; he must be prompted to avow himself. The line of delicate propriety,--how hard it is not to fall short, and not to overleap it! (W, pp. 78-9).

Of course, because she cannot cross the "line of delicate propriety" to communicate her feelings to Pleyel, Clara truly does "demean" herself, for she invests all her affections in a man who sees her not as a lover or even as a person, but as a model of perfection.

If Clara keeps silent because she fears violating society's standards of decorum, she also remains silent for fear of her life. Her father's sudden mysterious death when

she is six years old spawns in Clara not only feelings of guilt, but the terror of being herself singled out for special punishment by God. This terror, which lurks just below Clara's rationalism, is awakened by the voices she hears plotting her murder in the closet, and unleashed by the voice at the hidden summerhouse:

Mark my bidding, and be safe. Avoid this spot. The snares of death encompass it. Elsewhere danger will be distant; but this spot, shun it as you value your life. Mark me further: profit by this warning, but divulge it not. If a syllable of what has passed escape you, your doom is sealed. Remember your father, and be faithful (W, p. 63).

This threat, with its reference to her father's death, is sufficient to keep Clara, who as a female has been educated to obey, from divulging the incident, but her silence about this voice is ironically one bit of evidence Pleyel uses against her to prove that she is guilty of profligacy. Thus, although Clara's silence keeps her from a violent physical end, it contributes to an even more devastating blow, the death of her virtuous reputation.

Clara's narrative silences, in contrast to those which keep her from communicating with her family, are produced not by fear, but by the failure of language to describe her overwhelming sense of grief and victimization. As a narrator, Clara has the courage to communicate her feelings that she lacks when she is with others. Even when

words fail and the narration itself is suspended temporarily, Clara still makes an effort to understand herself and to explain herself to her audience. She prefaces her introduction of Carwin into the story, for example, with:

I now come to the mention of a person with whose name the most turbulent sensations are connected. It is with a shuddering reluctance that I enter on the province of describing him. . . . Shame upon my cowardly and infirm heart! Hitherto I have proceeded with some degree of composure; but now I must pause. I mean not that dire remembrance shall subdue my courage or baffle my design; but this weakness cannot be immediately conquered. I must desist for a little while (W, p. 49).

And before she tells of discovering Catharine's body she writes:

Alas! my heart droops, and my fingers are enervated; my ideas are vivid, but my language is faint: now know I what it is to entertain incommunicable sentiments. The chain of subsequent incidents is drawn through my mind, and being linked with those which forewent, by turns rouse up agonies and sink me into hopelessness (W, p. 147).

Because these passages are private communications to her readers, Clara allows herself the suggestion that she has been a victim, one whose life has been marked by undue suffering, but her actual physical responses are appropriately feminine and, again, undermine that possibility. Instead of claiming the right to outrage, and thereby giving herself some dignity, Clara envelopes herself in the virtuous female's cowardly and hopeless silence. Thus,

Clara is capable of transcending the role of the virtuous female in her mind, but not in her actions.

So enslaved is Clara by the desire to be viewed as virtuous that she cannot be completely artless even with her readers. In fact, she compounds her silence by withholding from her audience the one thing which would truly reveal her personality--her journal. The omission of the journal is perhaps Clara's most important silence, for it erects an obstacle to understanding her which only Carwin is able to conquer. Her readers are left to surmise as to the nature of the "most secret transactions of [her] life" (W, p. 191) and find themselves in the awkward position of identifying with Pleyel's reproach that "you wrote much more than you permitted your friends to peruse" (W, p. 125). One is faced with the choice of admitting the possibility, with James Russo,⁷ that Clara is not a victim at all or of trusting a character who, because she does not trust herself, is silent in the presence of the other characters and readers alike.

When silence is an inadequate response to a situation, Clara expresses her distress by fainting, another socially approved form of feminine behavior. Clara faints or almost faints seven times in the novel, and each time her "fit" is caused by an encounter with one of the male characters which destroys her conception of that character and of herself. Her "encounter" with Theodore through the

trial manuscript, for example, causes Clara to relapse into nervous shock, for she finds that her brother has committed a crime "worthy of savages trained to murder and exulting in agonies" (W, p. 174). This realization threatens Clara's perception of Theodore as a kind, gentle man, but it also causes her to confront her own capacity for murder:

Now was I stupefied with tenfold wonder in contemplating myself. Was I not likewise transformed from rational and human into a creature of nameless and fearful attributes? Was I not transported to the brink of the same abyss? Ere a new day should come, my hands might be imbrued in blood, and my remaining years to be consigned to a dungeon and chains (W, p. 179-80).

Clara's confrontation with Pleyel likewise shatters her vision of him and herself. Pleyel's sudden accusation of profligacy catches Clara by surprise, so her first reaction is her typical silence. Stung by his harshness, however, Clara pursues him to his house in the city, a very aggressive and unfeminine act, but as if to atone for her show of initiative, Clara faints as soon as she arrives at Pleyel's house. Then, after she realizes how flawed Pleyel's character is (a flaw she attributes to herself) and how little he has understood or valued her as a person, she is overcome by a "painful dizziness" and "faint[s] away" (W, p. 119). She does have the courage to charge Pleyel with being "precipitate and prone to condemn"

(W, p. 118), but her tears and repentant attitude betray the guilt underlying her anger.

Clara's largely unexpected encounters with Carwin are probably the most damaging of all, for Carwin of all the male characters has the most profound effect on Clara. When Clara hears the voices in her closet plotting her murder, she runs from the house in terror and faints on her brother's doorstep. In this situation, Clara's physical reaction is hardly unnatural, but the voices also confirm her view of herself as a proper target for a violent death. Her response is so strong that when she again finds someone is in her closet, she courts death by begging the intruder to come out and struggling to open the door. Much later, when Clara returns after the murders to retrieve her journal, the mere thought of Carwin and his supposed crimes causes Clara to weaken and lose her "self command" (W, p. 193). Carwin's actual appearance and account of himself plunge Clara twice more into a fit, for she finally realizes Carwin is not the villain she imagined him. Unfortunately for Clara, this awareness robs her of a scapegoat, and now confronted with Wieland's death, she takes upon herself all the guilt she had placed upon Carwin's shoulders.

The hysteria Clara experiences after the murders of Catharine and the children, like her silence and fainting, is an appropriate female response to adversity. While

Theodore is violently active in his insanity and his ultimate self-destruction--in a word, masculine--Clara is allowed only a woman's limited and passive release. Confined to bed in her uncle's home, Clara is tormented by horrible gothic visions of destruction:

Carwin was the phantom that pursued my dreams, the giant oppressor under whose arm I was forever on the point of being crushed. Strenuous muscles were required to hinder my flight, and hearts of steel to withstand the eloquence of my fears. In vain I called upon them to look upward, to mark his sparkling rage and scowling contempt. All I sought was to fly from the stroke that was lifted. Then I heaped upon my guards the most vehement reproaches, or betook myself to wailings on the helplessness of my condition (W, pp. 157-8).

Clara's feelings of weakness and vulnerability are clear in this passage, and contrast vividly with Theodore's feelings of triumph and nobility. Clara, restrained by concerned friends from a grief which is too unseemly in its wildness, experiences a suffocating enclosure and debasement, while her brother soars with his god.

✱ For Clara, as for many other women, fulfilling the role of angelic nonentity means, paradoxically, proving that she is virtuous by proving that she is not virtuous. That is to say, the patriarchal society which prescribes silence, fainting, and hysteria as proper female conduct also defines self-effacement and psychological self-torture as feminine virtues which women, because of their education, are driven to cultivate. Clara experiences

overwhelming feelings of guilt for virtually every significant event in her life, although she is directly involved in only a few of them. So consumed is she by guilt and the need to confess that several Brown scholars have concluded that Wieland is really the confession of a madwoman. Norman Grabo believes that "as Clara's initial narrative proceeds, it increasingly implicates her in madness and murder. Full recognition that her simple account has become a very deep confession indeed is what makes her story crack."⁸ James R. Russo, in his article "Chimeras of the Brain: Clara's Narrative in Wieland," takes Grabo's argument a step further by contending that Clara is in fact a sexually profligate woman who orchestrates the murders of her brother's family and then lies to her audience about the entire event. This view of Clara supports rather than refutes Clara's view of herself, because it is based on the underlying patriarchal assumption that women are inherently guilty and evil. Clara is driven by this assumption to confess imaginary sins; Grabo and Russo use her extorted obligatory confession as proof of real crimes.

Clara's guilt feelings manifest themselves in her private life most obviously in the form of nightmares, typical symbols, Karen Horney says, of the self-contempt and condemnation the self-effacing personality feels.⁹ She experiences execution dreams four times in the course of the

narration, but her dreams always overlap reality just enough to tie them to a subsequent ominous waking experience. She is sure that she has heard voices plotting her murder in her closet, for example, but when her family dismisses the incident as a dream, Clara admits that even she is "somewhat incredulous" (W, p. 59). The same voice, however, once again invades her consciousness in the hidden summerhouse where she dreams her brother has lured her to the edge of an abyss. The voice saves her from death, but then threatens her with death if she returns to the summerhouse or speaks of the threat. Clara notes this time that she cannot distinguish "between sleep and wakefulness" (W, p. 62); neither she nor her audience is ever certain how much of this episode is dream, how much reality. These two incidents, despite their air of unreality, bring to Clara's mind the idea that she is being stalked and that a violent death like her father's is somehow the end she merits.

The belief that she is marked for death is not wholly conscious, but it prompts Clara actually to court death in the two later nightmare experiences. The first of these takes place the night Pleyel fails to return home, while Clara is plunged into the darkest imaginings. Once again, she cannot be sure whether she is awake or sleeping when she hears a voice warn her against opening the closet:

When my thoughts were at length permitted to revert to the past, the first idea that occurred was the resemblance between the words of the voice I had just heard and those which had terminated my dream in the summer-house. There are means by which we are able to distinguish a substance from a shadow, a reality from the phantom of a dream. The pit, my brother beckoning me forward, the seizure of my arm, and the voice behind, were surely imaginary. That these incidents were fashioned in my sleep is supported by the same indubitable evidence that compels me to believe myself awake at present; yet the words and the voice were the same (W, p. 86).

The similarity of the words and voice she hears in the two episodes causes Clara to believe the situations are also similar, and that the voice is once again warning her of danger from her brother. She is convinced that Theodore is in her closet and that he plans to kill her, but she attempts to force the door open anyway, begging her supposed murderer to emerge. This nightmare vision almost becomes reality the night Clara returns home for her journal, but although she then provides Theodore with a knife with which to kill her, he uses it on himself instead.

The second incident takes place very near the end of the narration after Clara returns to live in her own home again. The death she sought there twice before has been denied her, but she is confident of her death now that her narration is finished. She dreams one night of her uncle, Theodore, Pleyel and Carwin, of whirlpools, abysses, precipices and fire, while her house is actually burning around her. Clara acknowledges to her readers that she

knows she is asleep and struggles to awaken, but her desire to die, I would suggest, prevents her from breaking "the spell" (W, p. 236) of her hellish dream. Although she is awakened by her uncle, her mind still refuses to allow her to flee. She writes, "Stunned as I was by this hubbub, scorched with heat, and nearly choked by the accumulating vapours, I was unable to think or act for my own preservation; I was incapable, indeed of comprehending my danger" (W, p. 236). Clara literally has to be carried out of the house, for she confuses the burning house with the gothic landscape of her nightmare. Just as she is unwilling and unable to extricate herself from her dream because she subconsciously feels she belongs there, she cannot motivate herself to leave the burning house because it is, in her mind, the place where she should atone for her guilt in death.

The reason Clara tortures herself with guilt and seeks death in her dreaming and waking life is because society has taught her to view herself not primarily as virtuous, but as monstrous. To prove her monstrousness to her audience, Clara cites three damning flaws in her character, one of which is her powerful sexual attraction to Carwin. The original momentary meeting between Clara and Carwin is marked by her "confused sense of impropriety" (W, p. 53) and a mutual embarrassment that prevents conversation. Yet, surprisingly enough, Clara views this meeting as "among the most extraordinary incidents of my life" (W, p. 53); she

spends an entire day and night gazing obsessively at a portrait she draws of Carwin. Clara herself thinks this obsession unusual and clearly expects her readers to think the same, for she allows:

You will perhaps deem this conduct somewhat singular, and ascribe it to certain peculiarities of temper. I am not aware of any such peculiarities. I can account for my devotion to this image no otherwise than by supposing that its properties were rare and prodigious. Perhaps you will suspect that such were the first inroads of a passion incident to every female heart, and which frequently gains a footing by means even more slight and more improbable than these. I shall not controvert the reasonableness of the suspicion, but leave you at liberty to draw from my narrative what conclusions you please (W, p. 54).

Although she can only describe and cannot name her emotions, preferring to believe the power she feels lies in the portrait itself, Clara allows, even encourages, her audience to label as sexual the attraction she has for Carwin.

Clara's original embarrassment and bewilderment over the emotions Carwin stirs in her have given way by the time she writes her account to horror and guilt; she has come to view her chance encounter with Carwin as the "first link" (W, p. 54) in a chain of disasters which could have been averted if she had had more foresight. For one thing, Carwin is introduced into the family circle by a Pleyel "mindful . . . of the footing which this stranger has gained in my heart" (W, p. 67). Perhaps in an effort to make her passionate sexual feelings for Carwin seem more virtuous,

Clara shares her experience with the family. This disclosure prompts Pleyel to invite Carwin into the group and to watch the two with "ceaseless vigilance" (W, p. 123) for signs that Clara's "honour had been forfeited" (W, p. 126). No doubt Clara's feelings surface again in later meetings. In any case, Pleyel sees enough passion in Clara's conduct that when he hears Carwin's mimicked conversation, he believes Clara is ruined. Clara's reaction to Pleyel's charge is revealing, for while she is furious and hurt that he would believe her a fallen woman, she acts guilty and contrite because she has truly felt the passion of which he accuses her. When Pleyel suggests God should strike her dead and rails, "Surely nothing in the shape of man can vie with thee!" (W, p. 118), Clara acquiesces by her silence. She too believes she is evil and worthy of vengeance.

Carwin's entrance into the family circle affects Theodore as well as Clara. Despite the fact that Theodore hears voices before Carwin appears and receives his fatal instructions from within his own distempered imagination, Clara assumes responsibility for the voices which drive her brother to insanity and murder, and thus, for Carwin. James Russo views Clara's guilt as partial proof that she, not Carwin or Wieland's imagination, commands Theodore to murder his wife and children, but she is merely blaming herself for Carwin's intrusion into the group. Although she appears

to hold Carwin responsible for the devastation of her family, Clara associates herself closely with him in her mind; thus, her accusations of Carwin are really self-accusations. She projects part of her guilt onto Carwin so she can continue to view herself as at least partially virtuous.

Another monstrous flaw in Clara's character, as she sees it, is her desire to view herself as a victim. This desire combined with her suicidal tendencies prompts her to go well beyond the implicit questioning of her fate which was discussed earlier. Clara virtually forces herself into a victim role the night she returns to her house for her journal, for she encounters not only Carwin, but Theodore, who has escaped from prison to kill her. Clara's mind, she says, is filled with an "insatiable appetite for [Carwin's] destruction" (W, p. 221) when she is left alone with her brother. Theodore has already made clear his intention to kill Clara, but because she thirsts for Carwin's death (which, as I have said, means her own death), she does not attempt to get away.

Once she is alone with Theodore, however, Clara is seized by a desire to live. While Theodore is waiting for instructions from his inner voice, Clara contemplates killing him with the knife she holds concealed in her skirt. The right to self-defense, though, is something Clara cannot claim for herself. She describes herself and the moment with a violent revulsion heretofore reserved only for Carwin:

Can I bear to think--can I endure to relate the outrage which my heart meditated? Where were my means of safety? Resistance was vain. Not even the energy of despair could set me on a level with that strength which his terrific prompter had bestowed upon Wieland. Terror enables us to perform incredible feats; but terror was not then the state of my mind: where then were my hopes of rescue?

Methinks it is too much. I stand aside, as it were, from myself; I estimate my own deservings; a hatred, immortal and inexorable, is my due. I listen to my own pleas, and find them empty and false: yes, I acknowledge that my guilt surpasses that of mankind; I confess that the curses of a world and the frowns of a Deity are inadequate to my demerits. Is there a thing in the world worthy of infinite abhorrence? It is I (W, pp. 222-3).

The very thought of defending herself against harm, of attempting to control her fate, of refusing to be a victim again, intensifies Clara's guilt to an intolerable level. To suppress her assertive impulses, Clara throws down her knife, and thus, again transforms herself into a potential victim. She finally does raise the knife against her brother as he threatens her, but when Clara again drops the knife, Wieland kills himself with it. Although she has done nothing but defend and try to sacrifice herself on this occasion, Clara sees herself as Theodore's murderer, for she notes, "My hands were sprinkled with his blood as he fell" (W, p. 232).

The flaw in her character which Clara perceives as most monstrous is her desire to write. In fact, because writing is so unfeminine and unnatural, Clara tries to keep herself and her readers from viewing her as a writer. One way she

achieves this goal is by letting her audience know she is writing at the request of a friend, not just because she wishes to tell her story. A second way, as I have mentioned, is by keeping her journal secret, although she does tacitly admit that the contents of the journal are shameful. But the most interesting and subtle way in which Clara disguises her monstrous love of writing and its accompanying self-awareness is by trying to prevent her readers from taking her seriously. No fewer than seven times, for example, Clara strongly suggests that her audience should question or disbelieve what she is saying. She uses phrases like "This description will appear to you trifling or incredible" (W, p. 52); "You will hardly believe that . . ." (W, p. 82); and "What I have related will, no doubt, appear to you a fable" (W, p. 65). She hints several times that "calamity has subverted my reason" (W, p. 65), and even cautions, "My narrative may be invaded by inaccuracy and confusion What but ambiguities, abruptnesses, and dark transitions, can be expected from the historian who is, at the same time, the sufferer of these disasters?" (W, p. 147). These attempts to undermine the accuracy of her story and the legitimacy of her emotions, I believe, are Clara's ways of hiding her "monstrous" urge to write. By suggesting she is either a madwoman or a fabulist, Clara hopes to make herself the object of pity or interest rather than horror.

Clara's internal conflict, which she confines to her private life, produces psychic fragmentation and projection in her external or public life. These two defense mechanisms allow Clara to experience vicariously some aspects of her personality commonly associated with masculine attributes and behavior without necessarily acknowledging or claiming them as hers. But before she can permit herself to identify even subconsciously with the male characters, Clara shows her readers how similar she is to Catharine, a woman who truly seems to be the perfect female nonentity. Catharine is Clara's symbol for her virtuous self and she takes great pains, therefore, to make herself seem a copy of Catharine:

Between her and myself there was every circumstance tending to produce and foster friendship. Our sex and age were the same. We lived within sight of each other's abode. Our tempers were remarkably congenial, and the superintendents of our education not only prescribed to us the same pursuits, but allowed us to cultivate them together (W, p. 21).

Of course, Clara and Catharine also share a devotion for Theodore. But when Clara discovers much later that "Wieland's angel" (W, p. 42) has simply allowed Theodore to strangle her in Clara's room, Clara is overwhelmed by the feeling that Catharine's fate was meant for her instead and begins more actively to seek death by her brother's hand.

Without Catharine's example, moreover, Clara feels "every hope [is] extinguished" (W, p. 151) for her own virtuous self. Indeed, measured against the standard of Catharine's passive and obedient nothingness, Clara is truly monstrous, for, as she guiltily tells her readers, she cannot surrender her life so meekly.

With her brother, Theodore, Clara identifies her intellectual and religious self, that part of her which she eventually sees as "maniacal" (W, p. 196). Clara also projects her complex feelings for her father, whom she associates with religion and intellect, onto Theodore. She maintains, for example, that Theodore's "father's death was always regarded by him as flowing from a direct and supernatural decree. It visited his meditations oftener than it did mine. The traces which it left were more gloomy and permanent" (W, p. 35). Certainly, no one would deny that Theodore is radically affected by his father's death, but as Norman Grabo observes, Clara is extremely adept at eliciting her own thoughts and feelings from others--"Theodore only confirms what Clara herself feels."¹⁰ James Russo is also, I think, quite right in his contention that "numerous details suggest that Clara has been less successful than her brother in breaking away from the Wieland legacy, despite her claim to be the more rational of the two."¹¹

Clara's reverence for her father and brother, however, is also a projection of awe for and an unconscious recognition of her own spiritual and intellectual attributes. For

example, she clearly enjoys and understands the weighty philosophical discussions of Theodore and Pleyel, for while she and Catharine are supposedly "busy at the needle" (W, p. 30) and not participants in the conversations, Clara recalls the course and import of several discussions in great detail. Yet Clara's early experience has taught her that intellect and devotion are not qualities appreciated in women; it has likewise taught her that those qualities in men are punishable by insanity and death. She is afraid on two counts, therefore, to acknowledge these parts of herself, and finds herself in an impossible position. By claiming the "Theodore" in herself she violates the standards of femininity, but by projecting her intellectual and spiritual self onto Theodore, she contributes to their mutual downfall by tempting the vengeance of God: "The frenzy which is charged upon my brother must belong to myself" (W, p. 189).

Clara projects her fantasy/romantic self onto the last member of the family circle, Pleyel. As I mentioned earlier, Clara's sense of decorum will not allow her to acknowledge her feelings for Pleyel publicly, so the only course left to her is to project her feelings so forcefully that Pleyel will act on them himself. Pleyel, however, who is "the champion of intellectual liberty, and reject[s] all guidance but that of his reason" (W, p. 25), is only susceptible to his own irrational projections. He is suspicious and quick to condemn despite his pretensions to reason and skepticism,

and thus, quickly detects Clara's attraction to Carwin, but he is so insensitive and unromantic that he cannot sense how deeply Clara desires his good opinion and love. In fact, Pleyel finally throws Clara's projected love back at her by revealing that he never viewed her as anything more than an object--a model of perfection for another woman to study. Whereas he once functioned as a mirror to reflect back to Clara the virtuous image she tries desperately to maintain, Pleyel now believes that "the image that I once adored existed only in my fantasy" (W, p. 116).

Pleyel's change of attitude exerts a great influence on Clara's vulnerable sense of self. As long as Pleyel "adores" her she is able to view herself as at least partly virtuous; but because Clara can affirm her worth as a person only externally, i.e., according to others' perceptions of her, she is completely devastated when Pleyel reviles her as the "most specious and most profligate of women" (W, p. 104). She, too, begins to view herself as wholly depraved, monstrous and wretched, an image only too well reinforced by Theodore's destruction of Catharine and the children on the evening of Clara's supposed downfall. When Clara is deprived of all the mirrors for her virtuous self--Catharine, Theodore and especially Pleyel--she creates a new mirror appropriate to her monstrous image--Carwin.

Upon Carwin, Clara projects her physical, sexual self and her artistic, creative, energetic self, those aspects of her personality which are, according to society, the

least feminine and of which Clara is the most afraid. That is to say, Carwin mirrors the same characteristics Clara has already identified as monstrous, and repressed in herself. It is significant, for instance, that after Clara first sees Carwin and is moved to tears by his voice, she cannot "resist the inclination of forming a sketch on paper of this memorable visage" (W, p. 53). Her expressions of her relationship with Carwin are all creative, in fact. Pleyel's spying seems to prove that Clara writes about Carwin in her journal, and Carwin more than once appears in Clara's closet, the place where she keeps her journal and her father's manuscript--a place, argues Russo, symbolic of her repressed sexuality.¹² Clara is drawn irresistibly to Carwin although he is not at all attractive, judging from her description of him, which incidentally, is the only physical portrait she gives in the narrative:

His cheeks were pallid and lank, his eyes sunk-en, his forehead overshadowed by coarse, straggling hairs, his teeth large and irregular, though sound and brilliantly white, and his chin dis-coloured by a tetter. His skin was of coarse grain and sallow hue. Every feature was wide of beauty, and the outline of his face reminded you of an inverted cone (W, p. 53).

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this description is its similarity to Victor Frankenstein's description of his monster, for it is with Carwin's "monstrousness" that Clara comes to associate herself most closely.

One reason Clara sees Carwin as a monster is that he

does not reflect virtue back to her. Instead, he reflects and reinforces the sexual feelings and intellectual urges he awakens in her. Carwin views Clara as a person with an intellect, not as a model of feminine perfection. Yet he is clearly aware of the importance she places on her reputation. He remarks of her journal, for example, that:

The intellect which it unveiled was brighter than my limited and feeble organs could bear. I was naturally inquisitive as to your ideas respecting my deportment and the mysteries that had lately occurred.

"You know what you have written. You know that in this volume the key to your inmost soul was contained. If I had been a profound and malignant imposter, what plenteous materials were thus furnished me of stratagems and plots (W, p. 206).

Carwin obviously knows how damaging it is for Clara to reveal her intellect and "inmost soul" in her journal, but he is intrigued and interested rather than horrified at the revelations of the journal. He thus encourages Clara in her wicked unfeminine behavior, a sin for which she brands him "an enemy to God and man" (W, p. 216). Of course, what Clara really fears and resents is Carwin's discovery that she has committed a crime against the dictates of God and society by living a meaningful life through writing.

As important as the art of writing is for Caleb Williams and Arthur Mervyn, it is even more important for Clara Wieland. Whereas Caleb and Arthur view their writing experiences

as opportunities to present their idealized selves to "posterity" after their real selves have gotten them into trouble, Clara views her writing as a vehicle for personal growth and significant action. Writing is an integral, not an incidental, part of her life even before she undertakes the composition of her narration. Indeed, Clara's writing takes on the appearance of a compulsion, for only through writing can she begin to give meaning to her usual silence, to express those parts of her which she feels so strongly but is bound by the rules of feminine decorum to repress. Her journal and later her narrative thus provide her a therapeutic outlet for her censored self and an opportunity to live a more complete existence.

Yet writing cannot be viewed as an entirely positive force in Clara's life, for because it is an essentially masculine act done surreptitiously, she is convinced she will have to pay for her unfeminine behavior. In Clara's mind, writing is a gothic experience, tied as closely to death as it is to life. In fact, one may as appropriately see Clara's compulsion to write in terms of her suicidal tendencies as in terms of her desire to live. She herself makes this connection several times, most clearly perhaps at the beginning of Chapter xxv:

A few more words and I lay aside the pen forever. Yet why should I not relinquish it now? All that I have said is preparatory to this scene, and my fingers, tremulous and cold as my heart, refuse any further exertion. This must not be. Let my last energies support me

in the finishing of this task. Then will I lay down my head in the lap of death. Hushed will be all my murmurs in the sleep of the grave.

Every sentiment has perished in my bosom. Even friendship is extinct. Your love for me has prompted me to this task; but I would not have complied if it had not been a luxury thus to feast upon my woes. I have justly calculated upon my remnant of strength. When I lay down the pen the taper of life will expire; my existence will terminate with my tale (W, p. 221).

Clara believes so strongly that she should and will die when she finishes her narration that she remains in bed waiting for her end, and as I noted earlier, is unable to rouse herself from that belief enough to escape the flames that destroy her house.

Through her writing, Clara seeks to gain some control over her existence, even to determine the moment of her death. Her journal and her narrative, while they increase her vulnerability in some ways, give Clara the courage and decisiveness to act independently. To recover the journal, for example, Clara must conquer her fear of a "disastrous influence" (W, p. 190) hanging over her house and defy the wishes of her uncle; she must, in other words, act on her own determination as a man would do without seeking permission. The narrative allows her to articulate the conflicts that beset her, to begin an integration of her divided personality, and finally to decide when she has lived on society's terms long enough. Unfortunately, Clara comes to the end of her narration before her personality has become completely unified. Without writing as a vehicle for

self-awareness, Clara regresses so entirely into the virtuous female role that she marries Pleyel, who has been reassured of Clara's purity by her uncle. In a sense, then, Clara's life does end with her narration, for her acceptance of a marriage with Pleyel insures that she will remain trapped in the domestic angel role he prescribes for her, and will, therefore, be unable to exert any real control over her own life.

v

Although Wieland is, I believe, a great novel, it may justifiably be considered a failure as a gothic novel because the fear audiences seem to respond to most is caused by Theodore, rather than by Clara and the society with which she finally seeks so desperately to conform. Brown creates in Clara a narrator who seems displaced from her own narration, and, in consequence, creates a gulf between the audience and the events of the narration. The time frame of the novel is completely in the past which prevents any true feeling of immediacy for the audience, a feature which gives great meaning to the outcomes of Caleb Williams and Arthur Mervyn. By allowing Theodore such a prominent place in the novel, Brown achieves complexity and conflict in Clara's character, but he also masks the real gothic thrust of Wieland which resides almost entirely in Clara (and in Brown himself).

Clara Wieland and her situation represent for Brown his

own character and situation, indeed all of human experience, for Clara, like Brown, is a failed Godwinian. Clara is intelligent, introspective and committed to personal growth, if only in secret. In other words, she is "susceptible of improvement" and capable of recognizing truths about herself and others. Yet Clara learns, as does Brown with the publication of Alcuin, that communicating or living by the truths she perceives is a painful and traumatic endeavor. She learns that society expects, even demands, conformity to its standards, especially from women. Though she also learns that, in the gothic world of femininity, even conformity cannot insure acceptance or stability, Clara follows Brown away from idealism toward pragmatic accommodation.

This lapse of faith is the true gothic element of Clara's life and Brown's life, and, I suspect, of everyone's life, for it crushes the spark of Godwinian optimism and the promise of future improvement in humankind. Brown's and Clara's fall from idealism leads them into the evils of a deluded and destructive society; both attend to what society wants instead of what society needs. They become whatever will sell--a writer of conventional domestic fiction, a conventionally virtuous woman--even though they must deny or suppress the personal, societal, or human truths they have discovered. What, Brown seems to ask, will become of us if even those capable of enlightenment and vision sell out for the sake of security and convenience? What will become of the common person who has no resources to withstand

or even comprehend the pressures of a deluded society? But although Brown raises, through Clara, these and other crucial questions of human survival, and addresses them again in Edgar Huntly, he declines to answer them completely in Wieland. The failure of Wieland as a gothic novel, then, springs from Brown's failure to make Clara and the plight of all women the "unremitting focus" of the novel, his failure to show the inhumanity and evil of societal prescriptions for both men and women. Brown reaches deep down to the nerves of society in Wieland, but, in the end, betrays the truth he perceives by revealing it through a narrator whom he makes invisible and easily ignored.

Notes

¹Brown's outline for Wieland is published in Charles Brockden Brown, Wieland or The Transformation; Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist, Vol. I of The Novels and Related Works of Charles Brockden Brown, Bicentennial Ed. (Kent, OH: Kent State Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 423-41.

²Donald A. Ringe, Charles Brockden Brown, Twayne's United States Authors Series, No. 98 (New York: Twayne, 1966), p. 21.

³Ringe, p. 21.

⁴Nina Baym, "A Minority Reading of Wieland," in Bernard Rosenthal, ed., Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981), pp. 92 & 95.

⁵Charles Brockden Brown, Wieland or The Transformation; Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist, Vol. I of The Novels of Charles Brockden Brown, Bicentennial Ed. (Kent, OH: Kent State Univ. Press, 1977), p. 11. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁶For a more complete discussion of the connection between authorship and masculinity, see Chapter 1 of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1979).

⁷James R. Russo, "'Chimeras of the Brain': Clara's Narrative in Wieland," Early American Literature, 16 (1981), pp. 60-88.

⁸Norman Grabo, The Coincidental Art of Charles Brockden Brown (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1981), p. 224.

⁹Karen Horney, Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Toward Self-Realization (New York: W.W. Norton, 1950), p. 224.

¹⁰Grabo, p. 11.

¹¹Russo, p. 61.

¹²Russo, pp. 69-70.

Chapter 4

The Degradation: Edgar Huntly

When Clara Wieland laments, "I am sunk below the beasts,"¹ she is commenting more on her need for self-abasement and her guilt feelings than on the actual state of her character. Brown's estimation of Clara, and the reader's, is almost certainly more positive than Clara's view of herself. But Clara's remark sums up with cold accuracy the character of Edgar Huntly and the nightmare world which surrounds him. Edgar is a silent, brutal and depraved man living in a silent, brutal and depraved world. He is a man who has lost the ability and the will to use spoken language in a meaningful way, who is more successful at imagining human relationships than at establishing them, and who is thoroughly deceived by his own delusions throughout the narration. Edgar Huntly is an unlikeable character, although his circumstances are often pitiable, but he is, nevertheless, Brown's answer to the unanswered question of Wieland--"What will become of us?"

Edgar Huntly thus signals, I believe, the end of Brown's fascination with Godwinian optimism, and reveals in its place a deep despair and disillusionment about the human condition. In response to a letter critical of the depressing tone of Edgar Huntly from his brother James,

Brown writes:

Your remarks upon the gloominess and out-of-nature incidents of Huntley [sic], if they be not just in their full extent, are, doubtless, such as most readers will make, which alone is a sufficient reason for dropping the doleful tone and assuming a cheerful one, or at least substituting moral causes and daily incidents in place of the prodigious or the singular. I shall not fall hereafter into that strain.²

Brown is quick to apologize here for the "doleful tone" of Huntly's narration, but although he promises to be more cheerful in the future, the cheerfulness he vows to adopt seems to be assumed, put on like a mask to disguise the underlying dolefulness. He does not even point out for his brother the lesson of Edgar Huntly--that the moral and routine portions of human lives may become prodigious, singular and gothic in an instant, despite benevolent intentions and reason.

ii

In the novels which precede Edgar Huntly, Brown emphasizes the exceptional nature of his narrators and some of his other main characters; figures such as Arthur Mervyn, Welbeck, Constantia Dudley, Ormond, the Wieland family and Carwin are memorable and interesting because of their singularities. Brown views some of these characters as so singular, in fact, that on occasion he resorts to footnotes to insure that his readers will not dismiss them as incredible. In contrast, Brown's goal in creating Edgar

Huntly seems to be in part to provide his audience with an Everyman, not with a peculiar or "out-of-nature" character. That Brown views Edgar as Everyman and his condition as universal (at least universally American) is evident from Edgar's position in the moral center of the novel, and from the preface. Brown has written the novel, he says, "to exhibit a series of adventures, growing out of the condition of our country, and connected with one of the most common and most wonderful diseases or affections of the human frame."³ Here Brown suggests that Huntly's life is determined by some flaw inherent in American society, and plagued by a common disease arising from that flaw. Yet the narrative itself reveals that society's flaw springs from a natural disease in the moral and intellectual constitution of humankind.

Brown's ironic subtitle, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker, simultaneously discloses the identity of humankind's natural disease and provides the audience with the only authorial caution of the novel. Using sleepwalking as a metaphor for delusion and lack of awareness, qualities he sees as indomitable in human nature, Brown strips from his vision every vestige of Godwinian optimism and plunges himself and his narrator (and, presumably, his readers) into a pit of despair. Edgar Huntly's sleepwalking precludes any pretense to truth or reason, and hence, precludes improvement as well. Moreover, sleepwalking, equated with insanity in Brown's day, by its very nature makes memory

impossible. These "memoirs" warns Brown, are at their very best the warped gothic recollections of an Everyman adrift from himself and from any strong connections in the world.

Brown uses the setting of his novel not only to strengthen the identification of his audience with Edgar, but to enhance the novel's allegorical meaning as well. On the one hand, he provides an air of familiarity for his American audience by placing Huntly in "the Western wilderness" of its own country and avoiding the "gothic castles" of his predecessors.⁴ Huntly is himself no stranger to the region beyond the fringes of civilization, having grown up in the area and explored it from childhood. Brown clearly intends to make the area of Norwalk and Solesbury strike a chord in his readers, for he has Edgar describe the location quite graphically, and often remind the reader that the place in question has been mentioned or described before. On the other hand, Brown designs his novel so that even the most familiar places become nightmarishly strange to Edgar and his audience. Although the events are supposed to take place in America, there is little that is unmistakably American about it. As the narrative progresses, therefore, the reader watches while Edgar wanders in a daze over a landscape which changes from a specific well-known place to a generalized area of hostility, trial, and brutality.

Such a setting is the perfect environment for Brown to test the nature of his Everyman. The progress of the novel

certainly reveals Brown's pessimism, for the course of Edgar's "adventures" is a descent into bestiality, a descent he recovers from only slightly at the novel's close. Indeed, Edgar's solitary and nocturnal existence is quite remarkable, for his animal-like habits of night wandering and stalking do not begin with the narration, but rather seem to date from before Waldegrave's murder. As a further indication for the reader of Edgar's budding savagery and dehumanization, Brown levels all distinctions in the celebrated wilderness passages with Clithero and the Indians between Edgar and the others, between hunter and hunted. The only important distinction Brown makes in this brutal gothic world is that between dead and alive. Edgar Huntly thus illustrates Brown's growing belief that Everyman in his natural state operates according to the dictates of an innate savagery, and not according to reason. For Brown, and for Edgar, Godwin's notion of perfectibility through reason and benevolence is no longer attainable or meaningful, for it is superceded by the code of the wilderness which is governed by the will to survive and the urge to kill, by instinct instead of intellect.

To show most effectively how his Everyman operates, Brown uses a first-person narrative technique which leaves Edgar Huntly to his own devices. In contrast to his treatment of Arthur Mervyn, whom he wished to observe mostly in a social context, Brown removes Edgar from society almost completely and allows him to relate virtually without

qualification his interpretation of his story in letter form to his fiancée, Mary Waldegrave. Brown thus gives Edgar free rein, while at the same time, he places the reader at what ought to be a disadvantage by prohibiting more objective commentary such as Dr. Stevens provides in Arthur Mervyn. The disadvantage is counteracted somewhat by the sheer enormity of Edgar's delusions, which I will discuss later, but the reader is still left with the difficult task of determining the extent of Edgar's reliability.

Although Brown removes Edgar Huntly from society, as I have pointed out, he does not deprive him utterly of human contact. This contact does not come from Mary Waldegrave or the members of Huntly's family, as one might expect, for these people are tied too closely with society, but rather primarily from Clithero Edny, the deranged sleepwalking servant of a neighbor. Clithero performs a vital function in the narrative, and not just because his own story comprises four chapters of it. When Edgar first sees Clithero digging and sobbing under the elm tree where Waldegrave was killed, he finds the man peculiar and pitiful, noting: "The incapacity of sound sleep denotes a mind sorely wounded. It is thus that atrocious criminals denote the possession of some dreadful secret."⁵ The reader has more than one occasion to recall Edgar's words, for it becomes clear to the audience as the narrative progresses that Brown has Edgar assume Clithero's story into the narrative because he also assumes Clithero's life as a pattern for his own. Just as

Caleb Williams relives Falkland's life and Arthur Mervyn relives Welbeck's life, Edgar Huntly relives Clithero Edny's life. Yet while Caleb and Arthur pattern themselves after their supposedly respectable masters and never actually commit any serious crimes, Edgar Huntly becomes the echo of an insane wreck of a man, and carries out murderous acts of aggression Clithero has only attempted. He becomes the "atrocious criminal" incapable of sound sleep that he first sees in Clithero.

Besides Clithero's tale, which comes very near to the beginning of Edgar's narration, Brown includes two other shorter tales, and hence, two other human contacts for Edgar. The first of these tales occurs almost exactly in the middle of the novel, and is the story of Weymouth, a friend of Waldegrave who has recently returned from Europe. Weymouth appears on the evening after Huntly's first sleepwalking episode (during which Huntly has hidden from his waking self all of Waldegrave's correspondence to him), and asks about the disappearance of a sum of money Waldegrave held in trust for him. Critics have sometimes remarked unfavorably on this section of the narrative, but although Weymouth never appears again and the ultimate fate of his fortune remains unclear, the passage is an important one.

The passage not only provides the reader with an objective glimpse of Edgar, it allows Edgar to see himself from a more objective point of view. Huntly records his discomfiture with Weymouth's attitude toward him very early in

the conversation: "While thus speaking, Weymouth fixed his eyes upon my countenance, and seemed anxious to pierce into my inmost soul. I was somewhat surprised at his questions, but much more at the manner in which they were put" (EH, p. 135). Edgar, as it turns out, is not disconcerted only by Weymouth's manner, which he records so as to make his visitor seem unlikeable, but also by Weymouth's claim upon Mary Waldegrave's inheritance, and his failure to believe on faith that Edgar knows nothing about the origin of the money left by Waldegrave. To Huntly's assertion that "neither Mary Waldegrave nor I are capable of designing the truth or committing an injustice" (EH, p. 144), Weymouth replies with dispassionate reason:

You have nothing but my bare assertion, in addition to some probabilities flowing from the conduct of Waldegrave. What facts may exist to corroborate my claim, which you have forgotten, or which you think proper to conceal, I cannot judge. I know not what is passing in the secret of your hearts; I am unacquainted with the character of this lady and with yours. I have nothing on which to build surmises and suspicions of your integrity, and nothing to generate unusual confidence. The frailty of your virtue and the strength of your temptations I know not (EH, p. 145).

Weymouth's wary reaction to Edgar reminds the audience that they too only know what Edgar chooses to tell and that his motives are hidden from them as from Weymouth. What is more, the reader suspects from the events that precede this section of the narrative, as Weymouth cannot, that Huntly suffers from a guilty conscience over something

contained in Walgrave's letters and has hidden the evidence in his sleep. Hence, Weymouth's visit helps to highlight the already-apparent split between the narrating wakeful Edgar and the tormented somnambulistic Edgar.

The other human contact Brown provides Huntly is Sarsefield, Clithero's mistress' lover and Huntly's earlier tutor, whose tale comes very near the end of the novel. Sarsefield's reappearance in his life is almost as great a shock for Edgar as Weymouth's earlier appearance, for Sarsefield had been in Europe for a long time. Still, Brown takes pains to impress upon the reader the intimacy of the friendship which had existed between the two men in order to illustrate the extent of Huntly's degeneration. Sarsefield, on his return to Solesbury, passes by Edgar in one of his sleepwalking dazes and addresses Edgar as his friend, but as he receives no response, Sarsefield assumes he has made a mistake about the person's identity. Later, while participating in a search party for the missing Huntly, Sarsefield mistakes Edgar for a hostile Indian (Edgar has shot at him first) and shoots at him. Still later, when Huntly finally emerges from the wilderness and pauses to rest at a farmhouse, Sarsefield again fails to recognize his dear friend:

His feelings were, indeed, more allied to astonishment and incredulity than mine had been. My person was not instantly recognized. He shrunk from my embrace as if I were an apparition or imposter. He quickly disengaged himself from my arms, and, withdrawing a few paces, gazed upon me as on one whom he had never before seen (EH, p. 231).

Sarsefield cannot recognize Edgar at all until Edgar speaks, but even then he is rendered unsure by the bizarre events of the search for Edgar and Edgar's lunatic appearance and conversation. Through Sarsefield, then, Brown shows the audience how dehumanized Huntly has become during the period of time covered by the major portion of the narrative. He has become an apparition, just as Clithero first appeared to be.

Edgar's letter to Mary Waldegrave ends abruptly in the second chapter after the conclusion of Sarsefield's tale; thus Brown indicates, I believe, that Edgar is too degenerated and deluded to carry the narration to a smooth conclusion. As if to signal the lack of revelation and resolution in Edgar's life, Brown fashions the end of the novel as a series of hasty and disjointed letters between Huntly and Sarsefield. The general effect of this technique is similar to that at the end of Caleb Williams--with two vital differences. Edgar too moves his account into the very recent past, but unlike Caleb, Edgar never realizes or accepts responsibility for his actions, preferring instead to blame Clithero for every disaster, while he hides behind his benevolent intentions. Therefore, also unlike Caleb, whose moving confession makes any reply superfluous, Edgar leaves himself wide open to Sarsefield's justifiable indignation. The last word of Edgar's story is not reserved for him, but for Sarsefield's accusation that Edgar has caused Mrs. Sarsefield's miscarriage and Clithero's death. Brown

revives the letter technique at the end of the novel to underscore Huntly's animal-like propensity for hasty action rather than reason and responsible human behavior.

iii

Clearly, then, Brown achieves a union of narrative goal and method in Edgar Huntly, the sort of union Huntly is unable to achieve in his own narration to Mary Waldegrave. Like other gothic narrators, Huntly is torn at a subconscious level between self-justification and self-condemnation, and this division permeates his tale as it does his life. On the one hand, for example, Edgar's narrative reveals his self-deception, excuses and designs on his reader's sympathy--all traits he has in common with the likes of Caleb Williams, Arthur Mervyn, and, later, Victor Frankenstein and the monster. On the other hand, however, Edgar reveals his self-conscious and self-scrutinizing capabilities which serve only to prove his guilt and undermine his appeals for sympathy. Yet even at his most introspective moments, Edgar is capable only of self-observation. He records his thoughts and feelings honestly, but never synthesizes his data into a conclusion; so while he is able to provide the audience with invaluable information about himself, he remains unable to derive meaning from it personally.

Huntly in his self-deceiving moments is very much like Caleb Williams, and he uses many of the same methods Caleb does to plant his delusions in the mind of his reader. One

of these methods is generalization of his observations about himself or his experiences to make them seem less singular and reprehensible. After he convinces himself to torture and murder the last of the Indian band ("Fate has reserved him for a bloody and violent death," EH, p. 191), Edgar tries to legitimize his brutal behavior by blaming it on fate:

Such are the deeds which perverse nature compels thousands of rational beings to perform and witness! Such is the spectacle, endlessly prolonged and diversified, which is exhibited in every field of battle; of which habit and example, the temptations of gain, and the illusions of honour, will make us, not reluctant or indifferent, but zealous and delighted actors and beholders! (EH, p. 193).

Here Huntly tries to liken his conduct to that of soldiers in battle and to excuse it by pointing the finger of blame at "perverse nature." The fact remains, however, that Huntly does not simply kill the Indian in self-defense, but deliberately prolongs his agonies by "cruel lenity" (EH, p. 193). Moreover, although he seeks to mask his feelings in generalities, he makes it plain that he has been a "zealous and delighted actor."

Huntly again uses generalization when he writes of his sleepwalking experiences:

Disastrous and humiliating is the state of man!
By his own hands is constructed the mass of
misery and error in which his steps are for-
ever involved.

.

How little cognizance have men over the actions and motives of each other! How total is our blindness with regard to our own performances! (EH, p. 267).

In this passage Huntly seems to have gained a valuable insight into human existence, for this is surely a position with which Brown and even Godwin would agree, a realization upon which improvement could be based. But the apparent insight is no realization at all and, instead, in Huntly's mind, proves applicable only to Clithero and humankind in general. Edgar cannot see how it applies to him, and he still tries to convince his audience, as he has convinced himself, that his actions result from reason and benevolence, not from blindness.

Another psychological and narrative defense method Edgar shares with Caleb Williams is projection, which, like generalization, increases the distance between Edgar and his guilt. As I noted above, Edgar is quick to blame the Indians' deaths on fate, especially that of the last one; despite his feeble qualms and guilt feelings ("His cries struck upon my heart and I wished that his better fortune had cast this evil from him upon me," (EH, p. 185), he feels perfectly justified in taking the Indians' lives. In fact, using his own peculiar logic, Huntly concludes that these Indians deserve to die and that he is merely dispensing justice, an opinion that would no doubt have roused some sympathy in early readers:

Perhaps you will conceive a purpose like this to have argued a sanguinary and murderous disposition. Let it be remembered, however, that I entertained no doubts about the hostile designs of these men. This was sufficiently indicated by their arms, their guise, and the captive who attended them. Let the fate of my parents be, likewise, remembered. I was not certain but that these very men were the assassins of my family, and were those who had reduced me and my sisters to the condition of orphans and dependents. No words can describe the torments of my thirst. Relief to these torments, and safety to my life, were within view. How could I hesitate? (EH, p. 170).

How indeed? Yet no matter how effective an argument this is, no matter how understandable Huntly's feelings are, one ought not lose sight of what he is doing here. Like Caleb and Arthur, Edgar is adept at answering away from the point. His decision to kill the Indians is based on conjecture, revenge and, most of all, the overwhelming creature need for water, not on any civilized system of justice. Edgar Huntly does have a "sanguinary and murderous disposition" which he projects onto the Indians, a projection which, because of society's prejudices, can seem utterly reasonable.

Another instance of Edgar Huntly's projection, easily overlooked because of Huntly's control over the narrative, sheds some light on the nature of his relationship with Mary Waldegrave. After Weymouth's account, Edgar realizes Mary's inheritance will have to be relinquished, and he calls their engagement off because neither of them now has any money. There is every reason to believe, however, that the thirst for money is Edgar's, for he writes on more than

one occasion of the "precariousness of [his] condition" as a dependent of his uncle, and hints that he is unwilling to "labour" in "rustic obscurity" (EH, p. 148). Nevertheless, Huntly projects his own preoccupation with money onto Mary, implying that she, not he, is the obstacle to their marriage:

As long as my exertions are insufficient to maintain us both, it would be unjustifiable to burden you with new cares and duties. Of this you are more thoroughly convinced than I am. The love of independence and ease, and impatience of drudgery, are woven into your constitution. Perhaps they are carried to an erroneous extreme, and derogate from that uncommon excellence by which your character is, in other respects, distinguished; but they cannot be removed (EH, p. 148).

Of course, the audience has no way of evaluating Mary Waldegrave's desire for money, but considering Edgar's own tenuous financial situation, his apparent dislike for work, and his making and breaking of the engagement according to Mary's fortune, it seems much more likely that Edgar is simply pushing responsibility for his greed off onto Mary.

Edgar's best known and most sustained projection involves Clithero Edny, with whom Edgar has the sort of symbiotic relationship so memorably exploited nearly twenty years later by Mary Shelley. With Clithero, Edgar's projection goes beyond the petty finger-pointing accusations of his dealings with the Indians and Mary Waldegrave to complete identification. Kenneth Bernard, in his article "Edgar Huntly: Charles Brockden Brown's Unsolved Murder,"

even goes so far as to suggest that Clithero is only "a projection of Huntly's mind,"⁶ noting: "That Huntly and Clithero are one and the same is clearly indicated."⁷ While the notion that Clithero is entirely a figment of Huntly's imagination seems untenable, it is certainly plain enough that Edgar creates from his own guilt the belief that Clithero is Waldegrave's murderer, and then loses himself in Clithero.

The passage in which Edgar revisits the elm where Waldegrave was murdered is vital to an understanding of the strange unbreakable bonds that hold Clithero and Edgar together. Huntly returns to the elm in the middle of the night hoping to find his friend's killer "hovering near the scene of his offences" (EH, p. 8). He finds Clithero, as yet unidentified, and concludes: "This apparition was human, it was connected with the fate of Waldegrave, it led to a disclosure of the author of that fate" (EH, p. 10). Edgar is hereafter repeatedly, irresistibly drawn by these irrational surmises to the tree to watch Clithero mourn in his sleep, but although Edgar is able to formulate questions and suspicions about Clithero's conduct, he does not connect any of his suspicions to himself. He asks, for example, "What but the murder of Waldegrave could direct his steps hither?" (EH, p. 13), but he cannot see that Clithero's presence under the elm may be coincidental, while his has been "directed" by Waldegrave's murder. He cannot see that he is the one hovering in the dark near the murder scene. To recognize

his guilt consciously would be intolerable, so Huntly merely projects it onto Clithero who is obviously already suffering from guilt.

After Edgar Huntly projects his guilt onto Clithero, he seems better able to view it objectively. He begins to rationalize Clithero's guilt and comes to view him with the compassion and forgiveness he denies himself:

Why should the effects of our misdeeds be inexhaustible? Why should we be debarred from a comforter? An opportunity of repairing our errors may, at least, be demanded from the rulers of our destiny.

.

But what are the conclusions to be drawn by dispassionate observers? Is it possible to regard this person with disdain or enmity? The crime originated in the limitations which nature has imposed upon human faculties. Proofs of a just intention are all that are requisite to exempt us from blame; he is thus, in consequence of a double mistake. The light in which he views this event is erroneous. He judges wrong, and is therefore miserable (EH, pp. 31-2 & 88).

But by projecting his guilt, Edgar has lost control of it altogether. Clithero refuses to be consoled or forgiven, refuses to be swayed by reason, and leads the passive and helpless Huntly through the nightmare desert landscape of Norwalk until, infected by Clithero's mania, Huntly sleepwalks himself into a cavern pit. Huntly is, and remains until the end of the narration, powerless to do anything but follow and try to keep Clithero (and himself) alive. This "strange dance between them, substance dogging shadow,"⁸ as

Kenneth Bernard calls Huntly's pursuit of Clithero, is perhaps Brown's best use of gothic doubling, a direct precursor of the famous chase of Victor Frankenstein and his monster across the Arctic desert.

Still another means by which Huntly tries to justify himself is to present himself as a victim. In some sense, of course, he allows himself, even demands, to be victimized by Clithero; but all of his trials spring from his inability to deal with his guilt feelings, and he is, therefore, truly victimized by himself. Because his self-victimization takes place on a subconscious level, Edgar is still able to appeal to his reader for sympathy. He pauses midway in his account to emphasize how much he has suffered and how little effect reason has on his mind. He then continues:

Now that I am able to hold a pen, I will hasten to terminate that uncertainty with regard to my fate in which my silence has involved thee. I will recall that series of unheard-of and disastrous vicissitudes which has constituted the latest portion of my life (EH, p. 51).

Later he exclaims: "Surely my fate has never been paralleled! Where was this series of hardships and perils to end? No sooner was one calamity eluded, than I was beset by another" (EH, p. 213). These passages express Edgar's belief that he has been unfairly persecuted by an unjust fate, and that he deserves the sympathy and understanding of his audience.

Edgar's sense of victimization is not completely

divorced from his sense of guilt, however. While he lies delirious at the bottom of the pit, he has a nightmare vision which connects his situation with events of the past. Although his account is vague at this point, one might reasonably suppose Huntly imagines in his dream that his falling into the pit is a deserved punishment for something he did in the past:

I existed, as it were, in a wakeful dream. With nothing to correct my erroneous perceptions, the images of the past occurred in capricious combinations and vivid hues. Methought I was the victim of some tyrant who had thrust me into a dungeon of his fortress, and left me no power to determine whether he intended I should perish with famine, or linger out a long life in hopeless imprisonment (EH, p. 154).

The "tyrant" of Edgar's delirium may easily be supposed to be Waldegrave and/or Sarsefield, the two men whose aggressive benevolence prompts such emotions of helplessness and hostility in Edgar that he feels the need to punish himself.⁹

If Edgar subconsciously chafes under the burden of benevolence, consciously he still believes in its efficacy. Like Caleb Williams and Arthur Mervyn, he reminds his reader of his benevolent intentions, particularly with regard to Clithero, and seems to expect admiration and sympathy for his efforts to save Clithero, even though Clithero plainly does not want to be saved. Edgar's benevolence, however, is extraordinarily self-interested because of his kinship with

Clithero, and quickly degenerates into the most self-indulgent form of sentimentalism, an indication of his true inability to help either Clithero or himself:

Could I arrest his footsteps and win his attention, I might be able to insinuate the lessons of fortitude; but if words were impotent, and arguments were nugatory, yet to sit by him in silence, to moisten his hand with tears, to sigh in unison, to offer him the spectacle of sympathy, the solace of believing that his demerits were not estimated by so rigid a standard by others as by himself, that one at least among his fellowmen regarded him with love and pity, could not fail to be of benign influence (EH, pp. 101-2).

Ultimately, of course, the benevolence toward Clithero of which he is so proud causes Huntly and those around him much pain, and he is forced because of his persistent blindness to beg Sarsefield's forgiveness for the results of Clithero's madness: "I shall not escape your censure, but I shall, likewise, gain your compassion. I have erred, not through sinister or malignant intentions, but from the impulse of misguided, indeed, but powerful, benevolence" (EH, p. 277). The reader is left to conclude, for these are the last words Edgar writes, that to give benevolence or sympathy to the seriously misguided is practically to commit a crime. Thus, by admitting that he expects compassion and forgiveness for acts which even he acknowledges deserve censure, i.e. by revealing the depth of his delusion to his audience, Edgar unwittingly subverts his own appeal for sympathy.

The narrative devices Edgar employs to fulfill his desire for self-justification and external (audience) approval are sometimes subtly undermined, as I have suggested, by his antithetical desire for self-condemnation. At other times, he betrays himself more obviously through his habit of self-scrutiny; yet Edgar never seems to realize that he has betrayed himself. He is quite honest and specific, for example, about his unstable mental condition, reminding Mary of the "insanity of vengeance and grief," his "fruitless searches" and "midnight wanderings and reveries" (EH, p. 7) which followed the death of Waldegrave. Like Clara Wieland, Huntly has apparently suffered some months from a mental breakdown, but, he assures Mary, "Time and reason seemed to have dissolved the spell which made me deaf to the dictates of duty and discretion" (EH, p. 8) and he recalls his frenzied behavior with "shame and regret" (EH, p. 8)--until the night he walks home from her house and discovers Clithero. Despite his ability to view his past conduct as aberrant, Edgar is still emotionally committed to it: "In the present state of my mind it assumed the appearance of conformity with prudence, and I felt myself irresistibly prompted to repeat my search [for Waldegrave's killer]" (EH, p. 8). Huntly's sense that prudence dictates both searching for the murderer and abandoning the search, a direct contradiction which he relates but cannot resolve, provides the audience with a clue to his reliability. He shows himself to be, as Donald Ringe says,

a narrator in imminent danger of losing control over his mind and emotions. . . . The reader should be on his guard to question the professed motives and purposes of the narrator. If Huntly slips once again into a mentally disturbed state, he will not be aware of it himself, and the reader will have to perceive it through words and actions which to Huntly seem perfectly reasonable.¹⁰

All the while Huntly is slipping back into mental illness, however, he seems remarkably astute and objective about his conduct. He is able to frame the notions "This action is irrational" and "I am performing this irrational action," but he never concludes "I am irrational." Thus, Edgar judges his obsessive chase of Clithero to be abnormal behavior:

I disdained to be outstripped in this career. All dangers were overlooked and all difficulties defied. I plunged into obscurities, and clambered over obstacles, from which, in a different state of mind, and with a different object of pursuit, I should have recoiled with invincible timidity. When the scene had passed, I could not review the perils I had undergone without shuddering (EH, p. 23).

When he recalls himself into rationality, which he is still able to do at this point, he is terrified by the folly he has committed and which he recognizes as folly, but cannot stop himself from following Clithero further and further into the pit of insanity. Edgar continues to believe his curiosity, rather than his hidden guilt, urges him on in his pursuit of Clithero (EH, p. 16).

Sometimes Edgar's moments of self-scrutiny reveal the

source of his guilt--his buried resentment of Waldegrave and Sarsefield. His aggressive feelings against Waldegrave, perhaps because they cause his bond of guilt with Clithero, seem more obvious. In fact, so frank is Edgar about his feelings when he demands from Clithero an explanation for his sleepwalking appearance under the elm, that one is amazed Edgar does not detect his own hostility. Huntly tells Clithero:

"I once imagined that he who killed Waldegrave inflicted the greatest possible injury on me. That was an error, which reflection has cured. Were futurity laid open to my view, and events, with their consequences, unfolded, I might see reason to embrace the assassin as my best friend" (EH, p. 32).

Imagining Waldegrave's murderer to be his best friend certainly contradicts Huntly's original wish for revenge and makes one question the genuineness of Huntly's friendship, but it makes psychological sense for a character who is unsure of his own part in and attitude toward the murder. Edgar cannot decide whether to seek revenge on or embrace the part of himself that "murdered" Waldegrave in his mind.

Edgar's ambivalent feelings about Waldegrave surface again in the dream he has the night of his first sleepwalking episode. In the dream, Waldegrave seems to Huntly to be not the perfectly benign character he describes at the beginning of the narrative (EH, p. 7), but rather the image of a retributive father:

Methought the sentiment that impelled him to visit me was not affection or complacency, but inquietude and anger. Some service or duty remained to be performed by me, which I had culpably neglected: to inspirit my zeal, to awaken my remembrance, and incite me to the performance of this duty, did this glimmering messenger, this half-indignant apparition, come (EH, p. 124).

Edgar's dream reflects the guilt he feels for breaking his promise to Mary to transcribe her brother's letters, and his earlier promise to Waldegrave to destroy the letters. His unconscious mind solves the dilemma by hiding the letters away safely where the waking Edgar cannot find them. He even admits, "I was not conscious of having taken it [the packet of letters] away, yet no hands but mine could have done it" (EH, p. 128). But as Edgar narrates the dream and its aftermath, he reveals two reasons for his failure to carry out his promise and his ambivalent feelings toward Waldegrave--his dead friend's parental authority and his recantation of the unorthodox religious creed to which he had converted Huntly.

The nature of Waldegrave's early religious beliefs is not nearly as important as the fact that he has converted Edgar, for Huntly's adoption of his friend's ideas shows how much power Waldegrave has over Huntly. Their relationship despite their closeness in age is more that of parent and child than friends. Huntly clearly reveres and makes himself vulnerable to Waldegrave's authority; he even abandons his own religious training to become Waldegrave's

disciple. While his apparent pliability and lack of strong personal conviction do not speak particularly well for Edgar's character, at least his love and respect for Waldegrave appear to have been genuine. But, from Edgar's point of view, Waldegrave betrays Edgar's trust in him by resuming orthodox beliefs and by trying to convince Edgar to destroy all the letters in which "the poison" (EH, p. 126) had been discussed. Huntly finds himself, due to Waldegrave's change of opinion, in the uncomfortable position of having to sacrifice his new faith and his precious correspondence "valued more than life" (EH, p. 128), or his friendship with Waldegrave, simply because he has tried to accommodate himself to his friend's feelings. Although he refuses to name his emotion in the narration, his resentment and conflict toward Waldegrave is clear: "I would not consent to this sacrifice. I did not entirely abjure the creed which had, with great copiousness and eloquence, been defended in these letters" (EH, p. 126). Waldegrave's betrayal has wounded Edgar deeply, so that while he suffers grief and guilt over Waldegrave's death, he honestly means what he says to Clithero--the assassin might be "my best friend." This glimpse of self-awareness provides the audience with a key to understanding Edgar's true feelings, but it undermines his appeals for sympathy and instead reinforces his desire to condemn himself.

Huntly is less introspective about his relationship with Sarsefield than about that with Waldegrave, partly

because he can mingle his feelings about Sarsefield with Clithero's, but the narrative still contains many telling examples of their behavior toward each other. As with Waldegrave, Huntly's bond with Sarsefield is that of father and son, and Huntly gives Sarsefield a great deal of authority over him. Once again, Huntly is disappointed by his friend's failure to play the role in his life that Edgar has imagined for him. Sarsefield is far from perfect, and Edgar's references to him, while they are not angry or judgmental, reflect feelings of betrayal and abandonment. He notes, for example, that Sarsefield had promised to correspond with him from Europe, but "I had heard nothing respecting him" (EH, p. 89). Later when Edgar regains consciousness amid the bodies of the Indians he has killed, he remembers being found and then left by a group of men, one of whom is Sarsefield: "That I should be abandoned in this forlorn state by those men seemed to argue a degree of cowardice or cruelty of which I should have thought them incapable" (EH, p. 189). Edgar does not yet know Sarsefield is in the group, but Sarsefield recognizes him; he tells Edgar later that, despite his expertise as a surgeon, he "hastily inferred" (EH, p. 124) Huntly was dead, and so, left him alone and unburied.

The love and respect which Huntly feels for Sarsefield seems to be completely unreciprocated. The notion that he is truly favored by Sarsefield proves to be little more than Edgar's fondest fantasy. When he finally encounters

Sarsefield at the farmhouse, Edgar identifies himself as "your pupil, your child" (EH, p. 231), but he is greeted only with skepticism and reserve. After Edgar relates the tale of his trial in the wilderness, Sarsefield remarks:

"Your tale, Huntly, is true; yet, did I not see you before me, were I not acquainted with the artlessness and rectitude of your character, and, above all, had not my own experience, during the last three days, confirmed every incident, I should question its truth" (EH, p. 236).

This response is no more gratifying to Huntly than Weymouth's on the issue of Waldegrave's estate, for Sarsefield shows he has absolutely no faith in Edgar, only in himself and his own perceptions. Sarsefield also makes it plain that his continued "affection" for Edgar may be withdrawn at any moment if Edgar displeases him. When Huntly mentions Clithero's name, for example, Sarsefield becomes enraged:

"Curses light upon thy lips for having uttered that detested name!" (EH, p. 252). He refuses to listen to Edgar's account of Clithero, and when Clithero is brought wounded to the farmhouse, Sarsefield denies him medical attention. His reaction certainly is not calculated to make Edgar, tied as he is to Clithero, feel very secure of Sarsefield's affection or regard. In fact, Sarsefield subtly attacks and humiliates Edgar's shaky self-esteem and abuses the idealized conception Edgar has framed of him, while he retains an air of benevolence and trust.

Sarsefield is indeed an aggressively benevolent

character who uses his good intentions as an excuse to wield power over others. As his pupil, Edgar comes honestly by his misuse of Clithero in the name of benevolence. Even before he attends to Edgar's wounds and allows him to rest, Sarsefield outlines his reasons for returning to America. Chief among those reasons is regaining his power over Huntly, but as he presents his plan to Edgar, Sarsefield seems to be acting only for Edgar's benefit:

One of the benefits which fortune has lately conferred upon me is the power of snatching you from a life of labour and obscurity, whose goods, scanty as they are, were transient and precarious, and affording you the suitable leisure and means of intellectual gratification and improvement.

.

My motives in coming to America were numerous and mixed. Among these was the parental affection with which you had inspired me. I came with fortune, and a better gift than fortune, in my hand. I intended to bestow both upon you, not only to give you competence, but one who would endear to you that competence, who would enhance, by participating, every gratification (EH, p. 248).

Of course, as Philip Russell Hughes points out in his article "Archetypal Patterns in Edgar Huntly," his fortune and his bride are things every man ought to earn for himself,¹¹ and therefore, Sarsefield is not actually helping Edgar, but instead making him even more dependent than he already is. His benevolence and bounty would emasculate Edgar completely.

Huntly is not self-scrutinizing enough to analyze his

conflict with Sarsefield or even to identify by name the emotions of gratitude, resentment and guilt that Sarsefield evokes in him. Yet Edgar acts on his feelings through Clithero and allows his audience to know the outcome of those actions through his inclusion of the letters at the end which serve his self-incriminating impulses. Through the letters, Edgar retaliates against himself by ruining his relationship with Sarsefield, and against Sarsefield by once again unleashing Clithero's mania. The fact that the narrative ends with the letters at all proves Edgar's need to betray himself, for his audience would certainly have no other way of discovering the disasters contained in them; he could easily have ended the account right after his reintroduction to Sarsefield, where, in fact, the actual narration addressed to Mary does end. But Edgar seems compelled to link together his experiences in the wilderness with Sarsefield's presence, as if the one depended upon the other. I would suggest that the two sequences truly are interdependent--that Huntly's wilderness sleepwalking experiences and obsession with Clithero are neurotic responses to his deep resentment of Waldegrave and Sarsefield, and that those experiences ultimately release, in the form of Clithero, his pent-up violence and brutality against Sarsefield.

When Huntly vows to Clithero that Euphemia Lorimer is still living and is married to Sarsefield, he reactivates in Clithero the same love/hate emotions Sarsefield's

reappearance activates in himself. As Clithero rushes off to discover whether Huntly's assertions are true, Edgar suddenly realizes that Clithero is out of control. His feelings parallel Victor Frankenstein's in Mary Shelley's later novel:

"I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind, and endowed with the will and power to effect purposes of horror . . . nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me."¹²

Just as Frankenstein's monster acts out all his creator's unconscious aggressions, of which more in the next chapter, so Clithero acts out Huntly's aggression against Sarsefield. Ironically, Clithero never actually does anything, for he never reaches New York. It is Huntly's letter, concerned and contrite, which causes Mrs. Sarsefield to miscarry. The captured Clithero, with Sarsefield acting as "his jailer and his tyrant" (EH, p. 280), jumps overboard from a packet boat and drowns himself. Thus, through Clithero's agency and his own letters to Sarsefield, Edgar avenges himself by "killing" Sarsefield's unborn child, and then commits "suicide," all apparently by the merest coincidence.

Edgar's final words, contained in a long letter to Sarsefield, reveal that his inner conflict between self-condemnation and self-justification remains unsolved at the end of the novel. By clinging desperately to his belief that Clithero can be reclaimed by society and restored to

sanity, Huntly subconsciously nurtures hope for himself for a time, but after Clithero rushes off to kill Sarsefield's wife, Huntly acknowledges: "My own embarrassment, confusion, and terror were inexpressible. His last words were incoherent. They denoted the tumult and vehemence of frenzy. . . . Clithero is a maniac. This truth cannot be concealed" (EH, p. 277). In these remarks, Huntly finally admits that Clithero's reason, as Sarsefield has maintained all along, is "utterly subverted"; his embarrassment may well arise from his mistaken opinion regarding Clithero and the trouble he has caused Sarsefield, but surely the confusion and terror spring from the subconscious inkling that perhaps he has been mistaken about his own sanity too. Whereas Caleb Williams eventually comes face to face with his errors and recognizes he has been seeking a vindication he does not deserve, Edgar reacts to the novel's final crisis more like Arthur Mervyn does. Like Mervyn, Huntly retreats from self-knowledge, protesting his innocence even though his subconscious self knows he is guilty. In the letter, Huntly admits he has been the cause of Clithero's new frenzy to attack Mrs. Sarsefield and shows he is still tightly linked to Clithero, while at the same time, he indicates that he deserves and expects Sarsefield's forgiveness and understanding. His judgment remains a slave to his conflicting desires to the last. After a final attempt at self-justification, another excuse about acting on benevolent impulses, he simply stops writing.

Just as Edgar is torn by his warring emotions and contradictory desires, so is his audience torn by belief and disbelief, by sympathy and horror. On the one hand, the audience is drawn toward identity with Edgar because of the manner in which the narrative is fashioned and because of the dreadful experiences he has. He is the only character (save Clithero, his double) for whom one can feel any real attachment at all, for he is the only character Brown makes accessible. Besides, Edgar is so alone and isolated that he awakens pity and empathy. On the other hand, after the first few pages, the audience has received so many warning signals about Edgar that the need for greater objectivity becomes obvious. His irrationality and brutality are poorly concealed, and quickly deplete any desire in his audience to give him sympathy. The discrepancies and contradictions in his account and in his behavior cause suspicion and make the reader a much more vigilant observer than the self-justifying Edgar would wish. As Donald Ringe notes, "The contrast between his thoughts and the reader's opinion of him provides the means through which the character is finally revealed."¹³

The Edgar who is finally revealed is not, overall, a sympathetic character, but rather a self-deluded sleepwalker motivated by hostility against himself and those around him. Although his thoughts and actions sometimes seem benevolent,

e.g. his treatment of Clithero, they are really the violent and destructive products of a diseased imagination. He meets everyone with unallayed aggression. Nonetheless, Edgar's confessional tone and his patent need for self-justification prepare his audience for an experience of moral awakening; but although his guilty conscience proves he has a moral sense, his tale demonstrates his utter inability to satisfy that moral sense with his actions. Instead of a tale of transformation or redemption, then, the reader is confronted with the gothic possibility of "evil being transferred through confession with all the randomness of a plague."¹⁴ Not surprisingly, Edgar's audience does not want to identify with him beyond an early point in the narration and seeks to distance itself from him.

Historically, readers have not liked Edgar Huntly and have, I think, mistakenly blended their contempt for Edgar Huntly with their opinions of the novel as a work of art. James Brown's criticism, for example, as well as other disparaging remarks, seems to spring more from a distaste for the narrator and the resulting unpleasantness of the reading experience than from a failure of Brown's art. In fact, according to Anthony Burgess's criteria for evaluating novels, published in the New York Times Book Review in February, 1984,¹⁵ Edgar Huntly is an excellent novel because Brown is true to Edgar's character. Brown allows Edgar to shape the plot and to reveal himself in his own way, a technique which also subtly reveals Brown's message

for his readers. Yet, for the most part, Brown's message and the novel itself have been ignored. Arthur G. Kimball remarks, "Apparently Brown's ironic suggestions about man's potential for violence and irrational behavior were lost on his contemporaries."¹⁶ Brown's contemporaries are not alone, however, in misunderstanding and underestimating Edgar Huntly. Many recent critics also attack Brown's art, finding his plot line fragmented and illogical, and his characters unbelievable. As Kenneth Bernard notes, "There is uniform agreement that the book is a botch."¹⁷

While I disagree with the widely held opinion that Edgar Huntly is an unqualified botch, for I think it is an immensely powerful book, I must concede that as a gothic novel it is most certainly a botch. While a few critics agree with Donald Ringe that Edgar Huntly surpasses Arthur Mervyn in plot line, consistency of point of view and suspense, and deserves to be ranked second behind Wieland,¹⁸ few scholars have approached the entire novel as a gothic work. Coupling as it does a strictly maintained first-person narration of the central character's adventures and a frightening nightmare atmosphere, it should be remembered as Brown's most effective example of gothic fiction. I would like to suggest, however, that Edgar Huntly is a failure as a gothic novel, not because it is poorly written, but because Brown's profound disillusionment with human-kind's ability to improve itself led him to create a character so degraded as to prevent reader identification with

that character. The fear inspired in the novel's audience is not generally, as with Caleb Williams, fear brought about by recognition of and identification with Edgar; instead it is a fear of Edgar, mingled with disgust, which causes the audience to turn away and distance itself further from this narrator who has "sunk below the beasts." The novel undermines its own gothic power, ironically, by being so overwhelmingly horrifying, so "out of nature," that readers can simply refuse to see anything of themselves in Brown's deluded and brutal sleepwalker.

Notes

¹Charles Brockden Brown, Wieland or The Transformation; Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist, Vol. I of The Novels of Charles Brockden Brown, Bicentennial Ed. (Kent, OH: Kent State Univ. Press, 1977), p. 221.

²Paul Witherington, "'Benevolence and the Utmost Stretch': Charles Brockden Brown's Narrative Dilemma," Criticism, 14 (1972), p. 183.

³Charles Brockden Brown, Preface to Edgar Huntly, in Edgar Huntly or Memoirs of a Sleepwalker, Vol. IV of Charles Brockden Brown's Novels (1887; rpt. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1963), p. 3.

⁴Brown, Preface, p. 4.

⁵Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Huntly or Memoirs of a Sleepwalker, Vol. IV of Charles Brockden Brown's Novels (1887; rpt. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1963), p. 13. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁶Kenneth Bernard, "Edgar Huntly: Charles Brockden Brown's Unsolved Murder," The Library Chronicle, 33 (1967), p. 35.

⁷Bernard, p. 42.

⁸Bernard, p. 35.

⁹See Evan Alderson, "To Reconcile with Common Maxims: Edgar Huntly's Ruses," Pacific Coast Philology, 10 (1975), p. 9.

¹⁰Donald A. Ringe, Charles Brockden Brown, Twayne's United States Authors Series, No. 98 (New York: Twayne, 1966), p. 89.

¹¹Philip Russell Hughes, "Archetypal Patterns in Edgar Huntly," Studies in the Novel, 5 (1973), p. 181.

¹²Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus, ed. by James Rieger (1818; rpt. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), p. 72.

¹³Ringe, pp. 106-7.

¹⁴Paul Witherington, "'Not My Tongue Only': Form and Language in Brown's Edgar Huntly," in Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown, Bernard Rosenthal, ed. (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981), p. 225.

¹⁵Anthony Burgess, "Modern Novels: The 99 Best," New York Times Book Review, 5 Feb. 1984, p. 1, bottom; pp. 36-37.

¹⁶Arthur G. Kimball, "Savages and Savagism: Brockden Brown's Dramatic Irony," Studies in Romanticism, 6 (1967), p. 225.

¹⁷Bernard, p. 30.

¹⁸See Ringe, p. 107.

Chapter 5

The Monstrosity: Frankenstein

While scholarship on the novels of Godwin and Brown largely emphasizes ideas rather than artistic technique, Frankenstein criticism, whatever its primary focus or perspective, almost always includes some discussion of narrative structure. Indeed, next to the monster, its narrative technique is perhaps the novel's most striking feature, and critics seem to find it impossible to address any aspect of the tale without also dealing with the rendering process. In recent years, interest has increased in the way the narratives which make up Frankenstein are told. J. Douglas Perry, for example, in his article "Gothic as Vortex: The Form of Horror in Capote, Faulkner, and Styron" sees Mary Shelley as a structural as well as thematic forebearer of the modern American gothic.¹ And Charles Schug in "The Romantic Form of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein" finds Shelley's novel "congruent in form with contemporary Romantic works,"² especially poetry. But although critics have approached Frankenstein from a great variety of perspectives, they have perceived the narrative structure in essentially the same way--simply as part of a tradition of "Chinese box" or concentric circular narrations which often employ "an initial narrator, himself a nonparticipant in

the central action, who leads the reader by a series of more or less 'natural' steps onto (and across) the outskirts of an unnatural world,"³ or, rather, a natural but gothic world.

I think, however, Mary Shelley clearly reveals in her Introduction to the 1831 edition that she herself experiences in Frankenstein two opposite and conflicting forces which help give her novel its structure. First of all, she sees it as a structured creation over which she has control and with which she can control the feelings of her audience--the way scholars have always viewed the novel. The 1831 Introduction discloses Shelley's desire to master and organize her creative impulses, and consequently, to control, even transform, her audience emotionally and physically by touching the springs of irrational terror. Her goal in writing Frankenstein, she recollects, is to create a story

which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, and awaken thrilling horror--one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart. If I did not accomplish these things, my ghost story would be unworthy of its name.⁴

Shelley seeks to exert control over her audience, therefore, by using a complex narrative structure, similar to that of Caleb Williams and some of Brown's novels "to establish a sense of order, of logic and rationality,"⁵ i.e. familiarity and security. Critics generally overemphasize the logic

of Shelley's narrative structure, however, by describing it in nearly mathematical terms:

As we read Frankenstein we are, in effect, cutting across a series of interrupted and resumed narratives, drawing a straight line through the concentric circles made by her narrators. After Mary Shelley's own preface, voyager Robert Walton writes letters to his sister embodying the narrative of Dr. Frankenstein who in turn supplies the monologue of the monster. Each story teller is interrupted by the other and only allowed to finish when his interrupter has finished. One charts one's progress through the book by the level of hearsay (Perry, p. 155).

Even J. Douglas Perry, apparently the first critic to analyze Frankenstein as a vortical whirlpool, stresses in this passage only the novel's symmetry, which he seems to see as virtually measurable and highly controlled. But interpretations which view Frankenstein as orderly and symmetrical fail to account for such important structural deformities as the monster's appearance to Walton after Victor Frankenstein's death and Walton's virtual disappearance as an independent narrator.

If Mary Shelley views Frankenstein as a deliberate controlled creation designed by her to transform her audience, she also sees it as a monster, a "hideous progeny," (App. A, p. 229) which overwhelms her and robs her of all power. According to the 1831 Introduction, the creative impulse for Frankenstein came not as the result of Shelley's careful thought or conscious intellectual exertion, as its structure first seems to imply, but from a gothic vision,

a vision which, Shelley acknowledges, is completely out of her control:

When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie.

.

I opened [my eyes] in terror. The idea so possessed my mind, that a thrill of fear ran through me, and I wished to exchange the ghastly image of my fancy for the realities around. . . . I could not so easily get rid of my hideous phantom; still it haunted me. . . . I recurred to my ghost story . . . O! if I could only contrive one which would frighten my reader as I myself had been frightened that night! (App. A, pp. 227 & 228).

Just as Shelley's "phantom" spills over from the imaginary world into the real world, so do the inner layers of her novel break out of the boundaries which seem prescribed for them. Unlike Caleb Williams or Arthur Mervyn, for example, in which each inner tale is absorbed, related and controlled completely by the major narrator's history, Frankenstein refuses to conform to any firm convention of symmetry or logic. It has no single major narrator. The narrative structure does not simply follow a straight line or a strict pattern, as critics have suggested, but instead reverses upon itself, thereby allowing the narrators of the inner tales to become major forces in the outer layers of the novel, and fostering a feeling of confusion and conflict in the reader.

By creating a novel which appears at once orderly and chaotic, straightforward and spiraling, Shelley captures the ambiguity and terror of human existence and more specifically of her own gothic vision. She recreates for her audience an atmosphere in which "the realities round" are indistinguishable from "fancy," and truth is rarely verifiable according to known standards or shared perception. Thus, Shelley traps her readers between complete moral confusion--for fair and rational judgment of the narratives is impossible--and the terrible knowledge that the monster dwells within them, not just at the center of the novel. Shelley removes the audience from an environment where experience is accessible to reason. The effect of the novel has perhaps never been better described than by the outraged anonymous reviewer for The British Critic in April, 1818: "We feel ourselves as much harassed, after rising from the perusal of these three spirit-wearing volumes, as if we had been over-dosed with laudanum, or hag-ridden by the nightmare."⁶ Whereas the narrators are often so obsessed as to be oblivious or heedless of their own danger, or so deluded that they imagine themselves in control of their destinies, the reader experiences, as does Mary Shelley in her vision, the double terror of the Frankenstein whirlpool, which "sucks the reader in, only to throw him back out again" (Perry, p. 154).

Because Shelley creates narrators who are deluded about their ability to control their own lives and who, therefore, tell their stories as if they were in command, she is able to mislead the reader into believing the narrators' delusions are true, at least temporarily. She begins this process of reader deception, of loosening the grip of the reader's reason as hers has been loosened by her gothic vision, with the first narrator, Robert Walton. Shelley accomplishes several things by beginning Frankenstein with the letters of Walton to his sister, Margaret Saville. The epistolary technique, a technique familiar to Shelley's original audience, immediately draws the reader into the narration. In contrast to Brown, whose hints that Edgar Huntly and Wieland are long letters are almost completely overshadowed by the events of the narratives, Shelley is careful at the beginning of the novel to maintain the illusion of genuine correspondence. By doing so, she keeps the audience in Margaret Saville's position as the friendly reader of the private details of Walton's life as he prepares for his voyage to discover a northeast passage to the north pole. Then too, beginning the novel with letters indicates that Walton is in control, for no one else could possibly usurp command of his personal notes to his sister. Walton's words also indicate that he is a man with a strong resolve and sense of purpose, with definite goals in mind:

I shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man. These are my enticements, and they are sufficient to conquer all fear of danger or death.⁷

He takes upon himself responsibility not only for his own courage, but vows "to raise the spirits of others . . . when their's [sic] are failing" (F, p. 12). In short, the audience is made to feel confident in Walton and emotionally involved in his narrative even before Victor Frankenstein appears alongside his ship.

Yet for all his apparent power over his own destiny, Walton is ultimately overwhelmed as a character and as a narrator by causes which are evident, but seemingly unimportant, in the early letters to Margaret Saville. His grand discovery and his determination are threatened by a "dreadfully severe" Russian winter and although he insists "my voyage is only now delayed until the weather shall permit my embarkation" (F, p. 15), Walton betrays another more important impediment, a chink in his overreaching character which foreshadows his loss of control: loneliness. Unlike Victor Frankenstein who admits his obsession with creating the monster "swallowed up every habit of my nature" (F, p. 50), rendering companionship impossible and undesirable, Walton confesses to his sister, "I bitterly feel the want of a friend" (F, p. 13). His letters to her, he grants, allow him to record his thoughts, but writing "is a poor medium for the communication of feeling" (F, p. 13). Walton

wants more from his desired friend than communication, however; despite his seeming devotion to his life's goal, he lacks unwavering confidence and wants to be dominated and directed:

I have no one near me, gentle yet courageous, possessed of a cultivated as well as of a capacious mind, whose tastes are like my own, to approve or amend my plans. How would such a friend repair the faults of your poor brother! I am too ardent in execution, and too impatient of difficulties.

.

I greatly need a friend who would have sense enough not to despise me as romantic, and affection enough for me to endeavour to regulate my mind (F, pp. 13 & 14).

With this passage, Shelley partially discloses Walton's weakness and prepares for Frankenstein's appearance on Walton's ship.

The audience is not really prepared, though, for Walton's capitulation to Frankenstein, and finds itself taken off guard by Walton's unchecked enthusiasm and the new claims he makes on the audience's sympathy on Victor's behalf. Very soon after Victor's entrance into Walton's letters, the narrative method changes character completely. The illusion that Walton is writing actual letters to be sent to England, shaken shortly before by his own admission that "it is very probable that you will see me before these papers can come into your hands" (F, p. 17), is destroyed, and his frame narrative is transformed into a journal which

has no immediate external purpose. The rest of the novel, save the last few pages in which Walton records events subsequent to Frankenstein's death, is comprised of this journal of Frankenstein's account as recorded by Walton. Still, convention encourages the reader to believe that Walton retains authority over his own private journal, however dominated by the events of Frankenstein's life it becomes. But Shelley again violates the reader's expectations and beliefs by reducing Walton to a disciple and his journal to Frankenstein's gospel version of the truth. After Walton records Frankenstein's narration, very late in the novel, Walton reveals to the unsuspecting reader that Victor, whom Walton sees as a "celestial spirit" (F, p. 23), has really had final control over the narration Walton presents as his own journal:

Frankenstein discovered that I made notes concerning his history: he asked to see them, and then himself corrected and augmented them in many places; but principally in giving the life and spirit to the conversations he held with his enemy. "Since you have preserved my narration," said he, "I would not that a mutilated one should go down to posterity" (F, p. 207).

Shelley undermines Walton's role as a trusted observer for the reader by this revelation. At this point, Walton can only be viewed as a vehicle for perpetuating Victor Frankenstein's delusions.

Shortly, however, the extent of Walton's weakness is fully revealed: he is so pliable, one discovers, that he

can be made to conform to anyone's will or respond sympathetically to any well-told story. Despite Frankenstein's dying remonstrances to Walton's crew and his support of Walton's plans, for example, the crew is able to force Walton to abandon his purpose by merely demanding to return home. Although he insists "I had rather die, than return shamefully, --my purpose unfulfilled" (F, p. 213), he is forced by his underlings to give up his dreams of "utility and glory" (F, p. 213). The monster, too, who appears to Walton only after Frankenstein's death and after Walton has embraced Victor's story as the truth, is able to overpower all Walton's hostile feelings and command his sympathy. Walton describes how he stands at first in frozen silence in the face of the monster's passionate self-accusations:

My first impulses, which had suggested to me the duty of obeying the dying request of my friend, in destroying his enemy, were now suspended by a mixture of curiosity and compassion. I approached this tremendous being; I dared not again raise my looks upon his face, there was something so scaring and unearthly in his ugliness. I attempted to speak, but the words died away on my lips (F, p. 217).

Already sympathizing with the monster, Walton makes only a feeble attempt to accuse the monster for Victor's sake, but apparently finds the monster's reply unanswerable. Walton never speaks or offers an opinion again, but instead lets the monster close the novel without interference or judgment.

Shelley's handling of this outermost layer of Frankenstein is masterful. By setting Walton up to look like a guide similar to Dr. Stevens in Arthur Mervyn, she first lures the reader into the same kind of nightmare world she experiences in her vision. Then by gradually defusing Walton's authority so that the audience finally finds itself alone, face to face first with Victor and then with the monster, Shelley recreates for her audience the sensation of her vision, of control being wrested away and of being possessed by the "hideous phantom" (App. II, p. 228) of imagination. Moreover, she thus deepens the moral complexity of the novel by leaving the reader, like Walton, in a position to participate almost equally in the monster's agony of remorse and justification, and in Victor's "horror and disgust" (F, p. 53) at the very sight and thought of the monster.

iii

My discussion of the first layer of Shelley's "ghost story" seems to suggest that Victor Frankenstein, through his domination of Walton and the power of his delusion, controls the narration. While he lives, Shelley positions Victor between Walton (and the audience) on the one hand and the monster on the other, to usurp the account of the former and to tell according to his memory the story of the latter. Frankenstein indeed appears to be the master of the narration and, therefore, of his audience's sense of

reality, for the monster is never allowed to speak for himself until after Victor's death. Yet the narration reveals instead that Frankenstein feels compelled to act at every moment of his life by forces which he cannot control.

The deeds of Victor Frankenstein's early years, for instance, are dictated by the conflicting senses of duty and unguided, indiscriminate curiosity. Although Frankenstein tells Walton "no youth could have passed more happily than mine" (F, p. 31), he intimates that the dictates of filial duty weigh heavily upon him. Shelley has Victor remark in an 1831 revision that "there was a sense of justice in my father's upright mind, which rendered it necessary that he should approve highly to love strongly,"⁸ but Victor is clearly unable--and at bottom unwilling--to live up to his father's conception of his duties, and therefore, he thinks, shuts himself off from his father's approval and love. The passionate curiosity of Victor's early youth for the writings of the alchemists provides the first real conflict in his life between his desire for his father's approval and his desire for knowledge, for when Victor attempts to share his enthusiasm for alchemy with his father, the elder Frankenstein dismisses it as "sad trash" (F, p. 32), a reaction on which Victor blames all his miseries:

If, instead of this remark, my father had taken the pains to explain to me, that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded, and that a modern system of science had been introduced, which possessed much greater powers than the ancient, because the powers of the latter were chimerical, while those of the former were real

and practical; under such circumstances, I should certainly have thrown Agrippa aside, and, with my imagination warmed as it was, should probably have applied myself to the more rational theory of chemistry which has resulted from modern discoveries. It is even possible, that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin (F, p. 33).

While Frankenstein does not accuse his mother of ruining his life as he accuses his father in this passage, he is perhaps shaped and stifled even more by her influence. Caroline Frankenstein insures Victor's exaggerated devotion to her, and Elizabeth's destruction, when Victor is four years old by bringing Elizabeth into the family to be Victor's wife. Frankenstein loves Elizabeth "as I should . . . a favourite animal" (F, p. 30), as a possession (a point Shelley makes more strongly in the 1831 edition),⁹ but thinks of her as a sister and associates her with his mother. Caroline Frankenstein strengthens this connection in Victor's mind on her deathbed by joining Victor and Elizabeth with her blessing and injunction: "'My children,' she said, 'my firmest hopes of future happiness were placed on the prospect of your union. This expectation will now be the consolation of your father. Elizabeth, my love, you must supply my place to your younger cousins'" (F, p. 38). Though he cannot admit as much to himself or to his family, the idea of a sexual relationship with Elizabeth, the woman who has acted the roles of both sister and mother in the family, is repugnant and terrifying to Victor, and he unconsciously links the monster, his mother and

Elizabeth together in his post-creation nightmare.

Victor's nightmare illustrates how profoundly affected he is by his mother's dying words, which unfortunately come at the time of his sexual awakening. He notes immediately after Caroline's death a new appreciation of Elizabeth's sexual appeal--"I never beheld her so enchanting as at this time" (F, p. 39)--but his attraction is a source of guilt and anger rather than joy, for Elizabeth now equals "mother" in Victor's mind. Victor cannot come to terms with his sense of duty to his mother and father or his desire for his "mother/sister," so he tries to divorce himself from those feelings altogether by carrying out the sexual process of creation alone. But after he gives birth to the monster and attempts to flee from it, Victor's unrealized and distorted passions surface in his nightmare:

I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb convulsed; when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window-shutters, I beheld the wretch--the miserable monster whom I had created (F, p. 53).

This passage makes obvious not only Victor's subconscious equation of sex and death, Elizabeth and Caroline, but also Victor's ambivalence and uncertainty about the nature of his

role in a male/female relationship. The dream shows him to be a victim of the two women, lured unwittingly into an incestuous embrace and robbed of both maternal and sexual love. But the nightmare also bears the equally strong implication, which Victor and the critics overlook, that he is the agent of death, for his kiss instantly transforms Elizabeth from a healthy woman into a corpse. Viewed thus, the nightmare identifies Victor with the monster--the destroyer--whom Victor has made the repository for all his own repressed emotions.

Victor's latent conflict between duty and curiosity, which ultimately expresses itself in his creation of the monster and his nightmare, first possesses Victor while he is at school in Ingolstadt. Despite his distance from his family, Victor is conscious of his duties to them, more especially because the words of his father ring in his ears: "'I know that while you are pleased with yourself, you will think of us with affection, and we shall hear regularly from you. You must pardon me, if I regard any interruption in your correspondence as a proof that your other duties are equally neglected'" (F, p. 50). Victor knows, then, that his silence will be taken as a sign of rebellion and guilt, but he is powerless to correspond, powerless to do anything but attempt to satiate the ardent curiosity which drives him to create the monster. Even so, at Ingolstadt his feelings of duty are displaced or at least overshadowed, and he is dominated instead by his desire for knowledge. Here too

Victor feels robbed of conscious self-determination as he does at home, for he acknowledges that "natural philosophy is the genius that has regulated my fate" (F, p. 32), as if the discipline had chosen him rather than the opposite. In the course of his narration to Walton, Victor's language suggests that he is motivated by deliberate goals during his studies, goals to benefit humankind and himself:

Wealth was an inferior object; but what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!

.

A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve their's [sic] (F, pp. 34 & 49).

Significant here in addition to Frankenstein's obvious Promethean ambitions is his wish to be worshipped as a creator just as his parents worshipped him as a creation (App. B, p. 234), i.e., he wishes to have power over his and others' lives.

But whatever Frankenstein's narration seems to reveal about his motivations for creating the monster, it also communicates Victor's sense, like Walton's and Mary Shelley's, that he is compelled to act by a power he cannot control. In a section of his account remarkable for its deterministic sense of passivity, Frankenstein tells Walton of the "sudden light" that "broke in upon me" (F, p. 47) as he discovers the principle of life:

Then a resistless, and almost frantic impulse urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit. It was indeed but a passing trance, that only made me feel with renewed acuteness so soon as, the unnatural stimulus ceasing to operate, I had returned to my old habits (F, pp. 49-50).

Frankenstein here presents himself to his audience much as Shelley presents herself in her 1831 Introduction, as a victim of an external power which robs him of control and prevents him from assuming any responsibility for his actions.

Victor's sense that he is the puppet of a force beyond his control intensifies with the monster's animation, that is, as Victor's need for delusion and justification increases. Confronted by the now-living reality of his trespass into the forbidden "hiding places" (F, p. 42) of nature, Victor compounds his blame by abandoning the infant monster practically at the moment of his birth. In his own mind, however, Victor is exonerated from all responsibility because "now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (F, pp. 52-3), and because the monster, whom Frankenstein ostensibly intends to be "beautiful," once living becomes to him "a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived" (F, p. 53). Hence, Victor instantly projects onto the monster all the hellish promptings of his own heart and imagination, deserts the monster and retreats into the clutches of a "nervous fever" from which he does not "recover [his] senses for a long, long time" (F, p. 57).

Such periods of mental prostration become Victor's refuge over and over again, his narration reveals, for while he remains completely in the grip of delirium (similar to Edgar Huntly's bouts of sleepwalking) and the monster roams about alone, Victor cannot be held responsible for the monster.

Shortly after his recovery from his first bout of nervous fever, Victor begins to refer to the monster, rather than a nameless external force, as the being who controls his life. On his way home for William's funeral and Justine's murder trial, in his one true flash of insight, Victor recognizes the monster as his agent, the executor of his unconscious desires:

"I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind, and endowed with the will and power to effect purposes of horror, such as the deed which he had now done, nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me" (F, p. 72).

Despite his admission here of responsibility for the monster's powers and inclinations as well as his actions, Frankenstein immediately reverts to acting the role of victim and accusing the monster. That he takes upon himself the monster's responsibility for Justine's execution may be taken as so much posturing, for Frankenstein emphasizes above all his own sufferings--"the tortures of the accused did not equal mine" (F, p. 80). Once again, Victor feels powerless and victimized, for he convinces himself he cannot

publicly acknowledge a truth he scarcely admits to himself, but this time he has someone against whom he can retaliate. The moment he determines to destroy "the fiend," however, Victor has truly and forever forfeited control over his life. The rest of his existence is determined and dictated by the monster, who has by now learned the extent of Frankenstein's unfulfilled obligations to him and seeks recompense.

By the time Victor encounters the monster in the Mer de Glace, Victor has become wholly self-absorbed; he regrets creating the monster, not because he has violated nature or neglected his duties toward the monster, but because he has failed to win the worshipful respect he has hoped for, and has instead been made miserable by the monster's evil deeds. The monster, nevertheless, in narrating his story, is able to gain control over Victor by exciting his compassion, his guilt and his fear. The monster has his own delusions to foster and is, therefore, anxious to destroy his creator's defenses and rouse his sense of responsibility. The monster vows "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend" (F, p. 95), and reminds Victor that they are

bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. . . . Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind. If you will comply with my conditions, I will leave them and you at peace; but if you refuse, I will glut the maw of death, until it be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends (F, p. 94).

The "condition" the monster imposes upon Victor is the creation of a female "as hideous as myself" (F, p. 142) to appease the monster's loneliness, a demand Victor feels obliged to meet out of a fleeting sense of compassion and justice, as well as out of fear. He promises to comply with the monster's demand, but immediately afterwards, realizing he has placed himself in the monster's control and has increased his duty toward the monster, succumbs to "a kind of insanity" (F, p. 145).

Despite Victor's attempt to flee from his promise by becoming insane, Shelley signals Victor's obligation by inextricably linking him for the rest of his days with the monster. She begins in slow motion the famous flight and pursuit of Victor and the monster not, as is commonly supposed, when Victor destroys the incomplete female, but immediately after Victor contracts to make the monster a mate. Without Victor's knowledge at first, the monster dogs his creator's steps, watching anxiously for signs that Frankenstein intends to fulfill his promise. Although Frankenstein is not always sure of the monster's presence, he is oppressed by the sense that "I was the slave of my creature" (F, p. 151), and feels that he is being stalked. Once again he presents himself to his audience in the role of the victim compelled to "wickedness" (F, p. 163) by his "persecutor" (F, p. 162). He holds the monster's happiness in his grasp, but still Victor is threatened by the shadow which follows him. After Victor destroys the monster's

mate in a moment of temporary "madness" (F, p. 164), the monster orders Victor to obey his demands, but finding Victor unmovable, retreats to stalk his creator's family members, not, as Victor's egoism induces him to believe, Victor himself. Because Frankenstein is locked into a fierce selfishness, he imagines only himself to be the object of the monster's enraged pursuit. Even in the light of the past murders, Victor does not understand the monster's threat to "be with you on your wedding night" (F, p. 166).

The monster's murder of Clerval, which once again robs Frankenstein of control over his life (as he is arrested for the crime), Elizabeth's murder on their wedding night, and his father's death of grief drive Frankenstein to another fit of insanity. Upon his release from an asylum, in an effort to regain power and respect, and to avenge his friends' deaths, Victor relates his story to a magistrate, who understandably sees him as mad. Thus rebuffed by authority and determined to escape from the monster's grasp, Frankenstein resolves to chase the monster and kill him. Yet his very effort to command his life and end the monster's is out of his control, for he admits to Walton, "My present situation was one in which all voluntary thought was swallowed up and lost" (F, p. 198). Even more infuriatingly, his desire for revenge seems to be directed by the monster, for just as his vow of retribution against the monster is choked off by rage, Victor hears a "loud and

fiendish laugh" (F, p. 200):

It rung in my ears long and heavily; the mountains reechoed it, and I felt as if all hell surrounded me with mockery and laughter. Surely in that moment I should have been possessed by phrenzy, and have destroyed my miserable existence, but that my vow was heard, and that I was reserved for vengeance. The laughter died away; when a well-known and abhorred voice, apparently close to my ear, addressed me in an audible whisper--"I am satisfied: miserable wretch! you have determined to live, and I am satisfied" (F, p. 200).

Although Victor wants to be governed by his own resolve and revenge, he senses, as does the reader, that the monster is actually directing the chase.

Shelley provides the reader with many indications that the monster controls Victor's life every bit as much as Victor controls the monster's--that, in fact, their identities are intermingled, even interchangeable. Critics have long recognized Shelley's reliance on the Doppelgänger figure common in the gothic tradition, for as George Levine explains, Shelley's characters

can be seen, indeed, as fragments of a mind in conflict with itself, extremes unreconciled, striving to make themselves whole. Ambition and passivity, hate and love, the need to procreate and the need to destroy are seen, in Frankenstein, as symbiotic: the destruction of the one is, through various narrative strategies, the destruction of the other.¹⁰

Shelley mostly uses doubling to indicate opposition between Victor and the monster--each views the other with impassioned hatred, each chooses revenge as his life's purpose,

each addresses the other with epithets such as "miserable wretch"; but during the chase she also employs doubling to reveal the strange sense of community and dependence the two share. Frankenstein, who, in his passivity, sees his destruction of the monster "more as a task enjoined by heaven, as the mechanical impulse of some power of which I was unconscious, than as the ardent desire of my soul" (F, p. 202), depends for his very existence upon the monster's solicitude. Victor tells Walton that the monster (who values his own life only to the extent he is able to command his creator's attention) leaves messages and provisions to guide Victor in the right path. Victor sees these encouragements left by the monster as triumphant insults, for they point out all too clearly Victor's inability to provide for himself, but they also highlight in a touching way the monster's simultaneous hatred and love for Frankenstein. Indeed, on those occasions when the monster leaves provisions but no message, Frankenstein insists, never considering the monster could be his benefactor, that "a spirit of good followed and directed my steps, and, when I most murmured, would suddenly extricate me from seemingly insurmountable difficulties" (F, p. 201). Thus does Victor cross the icy Arctic, controlled, in his mind, on the one hand, by a good spirit dedicated to the memories of his murdered friends, and, on the other, by the evil spirit of the monster.

Frankenstein's narration, like his journey across the Arctic, is torn by conflicting motives and voices which he

cannot overcome. For instance, his original purpose for telling his story to Walton seems to be educational in the 1818 edition: "I do not know that the relation of my misfortunes will be useful to you, yet, if you are inclined, listen to my tale. I believe that the strange incidents connected with it will afford a view of nature, which may enlarge your faculties and understanding" (F, p. 24). With this rather professorial declaration, Frankenstein takes over the train of the narration from Walton, placing himself in the position of master and assigning Walton to that of pupil. In the 1831 edition, though, Shelley robs Victor of his air of arrogant authority; his narrative thus becomes a lesson for Walton in the grievous consequences of seeking knowledge:

At first I perceived that he tried to suppress his emotion; he placed his hands before his eyes; and my voice quivered and failed me, as I beheld tears trickle fast from between his fingers,-- a groan burst from his heaving breast. I paused;-- at length he spoke, in broken accents:-- "Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drank also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me,-- let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips!" (App. B, p. 232).

Here Frankenstein is still "teaching" Walton, but his lesson manifests itself as much in his manner as in his relation of events. He appears, in any case, prompted to tell his story by much the same spirit as prompts him to pursue the monster, as a moral responsibility "enjoined by heaven" (F, p. 202).

But Victor Frankenstein is able to sustain for Walton and himself neither an informative nor a cautionary tone throughout his narration. He quickly becomes the self-absorbed teller of a self-justifying tale, who often offers his audience only his own authority that he relates the truth. For example, despite the bizarre nature of the events he relates and his own admission of repeated bouts of insanity, Frankenstein warns Walton to take his word seriously: "Remember, I am not recording the visions of a madman. The sun does not more certainly shine in the heavens, than that which I now affirm is true: (F, p. 47). Several times, however, Victor shows that he cannot tell reality from fantasy; Walton even notes that his guest believes the products of his delirium to be real (F, p. 208). Frankenstein's conflicting desires for self-justification and self-condemnation eventually become so intermingled that he is unable to distinguish them:

During these last days I have been occupied in examining my past conduct; nor do I find it blameable. In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature, and was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty; but there was another still paramount to that. My duties towards my fellow-creatures had greater claim to my attention . . . When actuated by selfish and vicious motives, I asked you to undertake my unfinished work; and I renew this request now, when I am only induced by reason and virtue.

But the consideration of these points, and the well-balancing of what you may esteem your duties, I leave to you; my judgment and ideas are already disturbed by the near approach of death. I dare not ask you to do what I think right, for I may still be misled by passion (F, pp. 214-15).

I have quoted this speech so extensively because it illustrates vividly how confused Victor is, how unable to perceive the grossest contradictions. He acknowledges his duties to others as if he had fulfilled them; he claims in one breath to be reasonable and controlled and in the next blinded by passion; and he humbly presents his desire to destroy the monster as the moral and virtuous course of action. Most importantly, however, this passage shows Victor fleeing from the responsibilities necessarily implied by authorship. Shelley allows Victor to push his moral dilemma onto Walton (and the reader) and die, a tactic which brings the crisis closer to the audience without resolving it. Victor's last warning words to Walton, in fact, frame a defiant question which, because it is never directly answered, keeps Frankenstein's inner conflict and confusion alive after his death: "Seek happiness in tranquillity, and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed" (F, p. 215).

In the second layer of Frankenstein, then, Shelley confronts the reader with a whole series of questions and dilemmas. Victor Frankenstein engages the reader's sympathy, awe and identification and thus succeeds in getting the reader to participate in his delusions, but he is also intermittently mad and out of control. He cannot distinguish substance from shadow; his notions of right and wrong

seem strange and confused. How is the audience to know which portions of Victor's story are true and which are not? How to separate the delusion from the reality? How is one to weigh and judge Victor's virtue or accountability? How should one feel toward this pitiable bizarre overreacher? How should one feel about one's own ambitions and rationalizations, not so different from Frankenstein's? Shelley, of course, answers none of these questions, but instead draws the reader on into the whirlpool, into the third layer of the narrative to seek answers. But there are no answers--only more questions, and the monster.

iv

If readers conclude from my discussion of the first layer of the narration that Frankenstein is in control, they are likely to be convinced from my examination of the second layer that the monster is really in command. In many ways, the monster truly has an advantage over Victor, for while Victor may inspire sympathy and respect in his audience, Shelley endows the monster with such affecting eloquence as to inspire yet more powerful emotions--empathy, guilt and horror. She allows the monster, in fact, during the narration of his history, to penetrate and immobilize Victor's hostility, and to use his terrifying appearance and linguistic ability to change Victor, as Walton is changed earlier, from a narrator into a listener. In this way, Shelley creates the illusion that the monster is addressing

the reader, now identified with the silent Frankenstein, directly and not through the faulty medium of Frankenstein's memory. Although Frankenstein regains his position as narrator when the monster's history is complete, he cannot fully recover the audience's undivided sympathy or his faith that denying the monster's existence is the best course.

Moreover, due to his continual feelings of powerlessness and guilt, Victor fails to use the monster's tale to his advantage. The monster's narration, in effect, functions as Victor's testimony against himself, for Victor discloses in it not only the monster's intelligence, ability to reason and capacity for goodness, but his own cruelty and selfishness. Victor shows himself, through the monster's eyes, in the worst possible light, while the monster appears to be a noble, gentle creature driven to violence by rejection. In addition, as I indicated previously, Shelley gives the last spoken word of the novel to the monster which, I believe, seriously undermines Frankenstein's hold on the audience's sympathy and attention. The monster's final remarks to Walton, filled as they are with outraged innocence and crushing self-accusation, are so powerful that it is difficult to imagine reading them without being moved--moved away from compassion for Victor Frankenstein.

Yet despite the monster's apparent advantages in the novel, his entire narration is, in fact, motivated by the

need for companionship and inability to secure it for himself. He believes his life is completely controlled by decisions made long before his "birth" by Victor Frankenstein. Victor's first decision, to create a living creature, is preceded by no very careful consideration of the consequences. He revels, as I have pointed out, in the idea of commanding the gratitude of a new race and entertains a hazy notion that he is acting for the good of humankind, but he fails to consider what his duties are as a father--or more appropriately, as a mother--and what sort of life his new being will have. Had he simply created a being of human size but "invulnerable to any but a violent death" (F, p. 34) as he originally intended, Victor might have been able to fulfill his responsibilities to his creature. But, he explains, "as the minuteness of the parts formed a hinderance to my speed, I resolved, contrary to my first intention, to make the being of a gigantic stature; that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionally large" (F, p. 49).

Not only is the monster huge, he is hideous, a fact which Victor does not heed until after the monster's animation. By the time the monster comes to Victor in the Mer de Glade, the monster has become "fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am" (F, p. 109), and has had his sorrow and bitterness deepened by the reactions of the few human beings he has approached. He sees himself as the loneliest and most powerless creature in the history of

the world, and he blames Victor, who gave him life and condemned him to misery. In one of the most touching passages in the novel, the monster recounts his reading of the journal Victor keeps during the monster's creation, and demands of his audience some explanation of his plight:

The minutest description of my odious and loathsome person is given, in language which painted your own horrors, and rendered mine ineffaceable. I sickened as I read. "Hateful day when I received life!" I exclaimed in agony. "Cursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of your's [sic], more horrid from its very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him but I am solitary and detested!" (F, p. 126).

The reader, who is now sharing the listener's role with Victor Frankenstein, may well be ashamed and embarrassed by the monster's plea to his audience, for the reader is as incapable of giving a satisfactory explanation of Victor's conduct as Victor.

As the monster continues to reveal in his narration, however, even the disclosures of Frankenstein's journal, harsh treatment and loneliness cannot discourage the monster completely, for he is, as Victor's son, obsessed by Frankenstein's repressed and projected desire to be loved and accepted. Unlike Victor, who seeks to gain love and respect by creating a being who will accept him as he is, the monster tries to accommodate himself to others. He endeavors to make himself acceptable for human companionship

through education and kindness. He knows, from his earliest days before he is aware of his deformity, that his appearance provokes fear and hatred, but his sense of his own goodness and benevolence keeps alive his belief that he is not "utterly unworthy" of kindness and sympathy (F, p. 128). During his residence in the hovel adjacent to the De Lacey cottage, therefore, he determines to become proficient enough in the "god-like science" (F, p. 107) of language, which he views as a way of making people "overlook the deformity of my figure" (F, p. 109), to approach the De Laceys. The monster becomes consumed with desire "to see their sweet looks turned towards me with affection" (F, p. 127). Like Walton, he desires friendship and love, but even more he craves direction, and the cottagers change in his mind from prospective friends to "my protectors (for so I loved, in an innocent, half painful self-deceit, to call them)" (F, p. 117).

At the same time the monster tries to take control of his life by becoming knowledgeable in the practices of speaking, reading and reasoning, then, he also becomes more abjectly dependent upon the De Laceys for emotional sustenance. He sees the De Laceys' kindness toward each other and imagines that he will eventually be included as part of their family if he can speak and act acceptably. He even begins to participate actively, but anonymously, in the family's love by chopping wood and clearing snow for them during the night, and is pleased with his ability to

evoke their gratitude. He occupies his waking and sleeping hours with fantasies which, because he desires them so strongly, he dares to think real:

I looked upon them as superior beings, who would be the arbiters of my future destiny. I formed in my imagination a thousand pictures of presenting myself to them, and their reception of me. I imagined that they would be disgusted, until, by my gentle demeanour and conciliating words, I should first win their favour, and afterwards their love (F, p. 110).

So strong is the monster's belief in his fantasies that he does not wholly despair even after the terrified De Lacey children drive him away from their blind father. Anxious as he is to please, he assumes that he is to blame for their reaction, that he has been hasty and imprudent (F, p. 133), and vows to return to make things right.

Until the very moment when he returns to win the De Laceys' acceptance, the monster continues to be motivated by benevolence and an obsessive desire for loving interaction with human beings, but when he finds "my protectors had departed, and had broken the only link that held me to this world" (F, p. 134), his desire for affection is transformed into a desire for vengeance. The loss of all his dreams produces in the monster "a kind of insanity in my spirits, that burst all bounds of reason and reflection" (F, p. 135), and unleashes in him those same emotions of anger and grief Frankenstein experiences, but represses, after the loss of his mother which bring about the creation of the monster. The son confesses to the father the details

of his orgy of rage and destruction, but insists as Frankenstein does earlier, that his acts are produced by a force outside himself:

For the first time the feelings of revenge and hatred filled my bosom, and I did not strive to controul them; but allowing myself to be borne away by the stream, I bent my mind towards injury and death.

.

If I have no ties and no affection, hatred and vice must be my portion; the love of another will destroy the cause of my crimes . . . My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor (F, pp. 134 & 143).

The monster's sense that he is the victim of urges he can neither control nor satisfy and his desire to be master of his own life motivate him first to destroy, then to narrate his history to Frankenstein, for "from you only could I hope for succour, although towards you I felt no sentiment but that of hatred" (F, p. 136).

The monster, then, intends his narration to be a show of force, as does Caleb Williams, for with it he hopes to vanquish Frankenstein's power over him forever. He plans finally to use his knowledge of language to overcome his audience's prejudices against him. But at the beginning of his encounter with Frankenstein, although he intimidates his creator physically and threatens with mysterious demands, the monster gives power right back to Victor. He is able to force Victor to listen to him only because of his superior size and strength, and his language betrays

his sense of inferiority:

But I will not be tempted to set myself in opposition to thee. I am thy creature, and I will be mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part, the which thou owest me.

.

Listen to my tale: when you have heard that, abandon or commiserate me, as you shall judge that I deserve. But hear me. The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they may be, to speak in their own defence before they are condemned. Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder; and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man! Yet I ask you not to spare me: listen to me; and then, if you can, and if you will, destroy the work of your hands (F, pp. 95 & 96).

Here the monster seems resigned to abide by whatever decision Victor makes regarding him, even if it means his own death. He shows at once his compassion and his sense of unworthiness as he places his pain and indignation below Victor's comforts, shielding his creator's eyes from his disgusting face and providing for Victor shelter from the cold.

The monster proves to be a formidable opponent for Frankenstein, though, for despite his poor self-esteem and apparent willingness to sacrifice himself to his creator's wishes, he uses all his rhetorical powers to convince Frankenstein that he has been wronged and deserves to live. He tries to manipulate Victor (and thus, the reader) by appealing to his emotions and playing on his

guilt, and as Victor remarks to Walton, the monster is successful: "For the first time, also, I felt what the duties of a creator towards his creature were, and that I ought to render him happy before I complained of his wickedness" (F, p. 97). The monster explains to Victor that his wicked acts, which are limited to this point to the half-accidental murder of William and the planting of damning evidence on Justine, are really Frankenstein's fault; the monster would not have killed William if the child had not rejected him as a "hideous monster," nor would he have framed Justine if he had had any hope that any woman would ever look on him with affection. All of the great evils of the monster's life (and Victor's too) happen because the monster is hideous, he says.

As the monster works on his audience's emotions, however, he struggles valiantly to keep his own passions under control. He intends to sway his creator not with threats and physical force, but with a weapon of civilization--reason. Indeed, even though the monster's narration is full of emotion, he confines himself to the emotions befitting a virtuous victim--a gothic heroine--and makes his rage subservient to his reason. He seems to demand of his meeting with Victor a victory of intelligence and self-control, for when Frankenstein promptly rejects the monster's demand for a mate, the monster calmly replies, "You are in the wrong . . . and, instead of threatening, I am content to reason with you," and a moment later when his

rage almost overwhelms him, "I intended to reason. This passion is detrimental to me; for you do not reflect that you are the cause of its excess" (F, p. 141). But the monster is not simply reasoning with Victor here. He is placing the total responsibility for his actions and passions on Frankenstein in order to justify himself, and to protect his delusion that he is inherently virtuous while Frankenstein alone is wicked. That is, he repeats the errors of Frankenstein, Caleb Williams, Falkland, Arthur Mervyn and Edgar Huntly.

Finally, however, the monster's appeals to Victor's guilt and reason are not enough to sway Victor to action. The monster has to resort to threats and intimidation before Frankenstein will consent to make a female monster:

Yet mine shall not be the submission of abject slavery. I will revenge my injuries: if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear; and chiefly towards you my arch-enemy, because my creator, do I swear inextinguishable hatred. Have a care: I will work at your destruction, nor finish until I desolate your heart, so that you curse the hour of your birth (F, p. 141).

The monster is no longer as docile as he seemed to be at the start of his narration, nor is he as willing to die if Frankenstein desires. Yet once again, the monster puts himself in Victor's power by asking a favor--a mate to ease his loneliness. The monster always feels his happiness, even verification of his existence, depends upon others; he is never a free actor. So although he appears ominous,

the monster is utterly a slave to Frankenstein's whim. Even after Frankenstein has grudgingly agreed to make him a mate, the monster is not free. He must dog Victor's every step to make sure Frankenstein is not breaking his promise.

After Frankenstein dies, Shelley has the monster appear on Walton's ship to provide in his final words his perspective of the events following Victor's destruction of the female monster. The monster tells Walton that "I was the slave, not the master of an impulse, which I detested, yet could not disobey" (F, p. 218), yet while he still emphasizes his powerlessness to control his passions, he does acknowledge that the source of his irresistible impulse to destroy Clerval and Elizabeth and ultimately Victor is internal. As he describes Clerval's death, a passage which calls to mind Victor's self-absorbed description of Justine's execution, the monster confesses both his suffering and his responsibility:

"Do you think that I was then dead to agony and remorse? -- He," he continued, pointing to the corpse, "he suffered not more in the consummation of the deed, -- oh! not the ten-thousandth portion of the anguish that was mine during the lingering detail of its execution. A frightful selfishness hurried me on, while my heart was poisoned with remorse. Think ye that the groans of Clerval were music to my ears? My heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy; and, when wrenched by misery to vice and hatred, it did not endure the violence of the change without torture, such as you cannot even imagine" (F, p. 217, emphasis mine).

Here and throughout his words to Walton the monster is torn between his pain at the injustice of his treatment, and his growing recognition of his own guilt. Whereas Frankenstein examines his conscience and finds himself blameless, the monster finally shares the shock of recognition that devastates Caleb Williams and drives Arthur Mervyn into insanity, the realization that instead of being completely virtuous, he is hideous spiritually as well as physically. Like Caleb, he has no character to vindicate:

Once my fancy was soothed with dreams of virtue, of fame, and of enjoyment. Once I falsely hoped to meet with beings, who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of bringing forth. I was nourished with high thoughts of honour and devotion. But now vice has degraded me beneath the meanest animal. No crime, no mischief, no misery, can be found comparable to mine (F, p. 219).

Once the monster's and Victor's gothic dance ends in Victor's death, the monster gives up his claims to affection and virtue; he cannot sustain life for his own sake, so he leaves Walton's ship to seek peace in self-immolation.

v

The monster learns, as Victor Frankenstein never does, that different individuals perceive different truths. Mary Shelley, too, understands and exploits the possibilities of alternative perspective that Godwin and Brown only suggest, and, consequently, draws her reader into a moral

dilemma for which there appears to be no solution. In Caleb Williams and the three Brown novels I have discussed, readers are asked to believe only one person who swears he or she tells the truth. Godwin's narrative structure implies an alternate truth, but prevents Falkland's point of view from reaching the audience, indeed, from reaching Caleb until the last pages of the novel. In Arthur Mervyn, Brown insinuates opposing opinions into Mervyn's narration but they are either related by a minor unsympathetic character (Mrs. Althorpe) or explained away during the course of Mervyn's tale (as with Wortley's and Mrs. Wentworth's suspicions). In both Wieland and Edgar Huntly, which Mary Shelley read before writing Frankenstein, Brown begins to experiment with multiple narrators, but he still does not provide the audience with fully developed opposing perspectives. Shelley, in contrast, develops a narrative structure which sets before the reader two truths, the monster's and Victor's, and invites the reader to choose between them based on the narration.

Shelley complicates the reader's decision to believe Victor Frankenstein or the monster by placing them both outside the range of social acceptability. Victor, for example, appeals to the reader's natural sympathy and admiration for overreaching characters whose grand schemes to benefit humankind are doomed to failure. Even his blindness to his own faults is understandable, if not excusable. But Frankenstein is also unattractive because of his delusions

of superior virtue, and becomes criminal with his deliberate abuse of the monster. The monster is a much more sympathetic character than Victor. He is an abused and abandoned child, an innocent cruelly treated by everyone he meets. Yet the monster is a creature out of everyone's nightmare, and, more importantly, he is a repeated murderer dedicated to the destruction of humankind, which includes the audience. He gives Victor and the audience plenty of reason to doubt his alleged benevolence. Shelley leaves the reader to judge whose crimes are greater.

In the end, though, Shelley intends the reader to judge Victor and the monster less upon facts, upon whose crimes are greater in a legal or rational sense, than upon narrative ability. To that end, she structures the novel so that it appeals to the audience's irrationality and emotion rather than to reason. By undermining Walton's narrative role, she positions the reader close to Frankenstein to understand Victor's desires and unhappiness; by making Walton Victor's partisan, she even encourages the reader to favor Victor. But then after the audience has begun to ally itself with Frankenstein, Shelley makes Victor repeat the monster's history, and the audience's allegiance waivers. Victor cannot undo the effect of the monster's history before he dies, so when Shelley brings the reader face to face with the monster over Frankenstein's corpse, the advantage clearly belongs to the monster. The monster's speech to Walton is perhaps the most moving of the entire

novel and insures, I believe, that Walton and the reader will judge the monster innocent and worthy of the love denied him by Victor. This judgment itself is as gothic for the reader as the reading experience or as Mary Shelley's vision is for her; for linking oneself with the monster means, as Frankenstein intuits but never accepts, recognizing one's own destructive power and capability for murder if one is provoked as the monster has been. A choice for the monster means recognizing the fragility and illusiveness of truth and benevolence, the triumph of omnipotent error over reason, the impossibility of human improvement. A choice for the monster means Godwin, in his optimism, is wrong.

Notes

¹J. Douglas Perry, "Gothic as Vortex: The Form of Horror in Capote, Faulkner, and Styron," Modern Fiction Studies, 19 (1973), pp. 153-67. All further references to this work appear in the text.

²Charles Schug, "The Romantic Form of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein," Studies in English Literature, 17 (1977), p. 607.

³William A. Walling. Mary Shelley, Twayne's English Authors Series, No. 128 (New York: Twayne, 1972), p. 35.

⁴Mary Shelley, "Mary Shelley's Introduction to the Third Edition (1818)," in Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus, ed. by James Rieger (1818; rpt. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), Appendix A, p. 226. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁵Schug, p. 609.

⁶Rev. of Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus, The British Critic, n.s., 9 (April 1818), p. 432. Additional reviews of the first edition of Frankenstein which are readily available are in Belle Assemblée, 2nd ser., 18 (March 1818), pp. 139-42; [Walter Scott], Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 2 (March 1818), pp. 611-20; Edinburgh [Scots] Magazine, 2nd ser., 2 (March 1818), pp. 249-53; Monthly Review, n.s., 85 (April 1818), p. 439; Quarterly Review, 18 (January 1818), pp. 379-85.

⁷Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus, ed. by James Rieger (1818; rpt. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), p. 10. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁸"Collation of the Texts of 1818 and 1831," in Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus, ed. by James Rieger (1818; rpt. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), Appendix B, p. 233. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁹See Frankenstein, Appendix B, pp. 235-6.

¹⁰George Levine, "The Ambiguous Heritage of Frankenstein," in The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary

Shelley's Novel, ed. George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher
(Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979), p. 16.

Afterword

Early horror literature, like its sibling terror literature, springs from the spirit of discovery and experimentation which marks the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In literature, as in politics, science and technology, one can detect fundamental changes in the ways people define themselves--in their governments, in their work. Despite the excesses of the Reign of Terror and apprehension about "the mob," the period of the American and French revolutions is generally one of great optimism and faith in the nobility of the individual and in the power of reason. This optimism about humankind's ability to discover universal principles of truth and govern itself according to them, together with a growing antipathy towards society's institutions, blooms into the more passionate, irrational romanticism of the nineteenth century, typified by the fiercely isolated but virtuous heroes of such writers as Byron and Cooper. Against the backdrop of eighteenth-century rationalism and optimism, however, stand Godwin and Brown, disillusioned rationalists whose vision of the human condition presages, if anything, the starkness of the twentieth century. Shelley, who reached maturity late enough to be disappointed by both rationalism

and romanticism, could well be considered a nihilist. At any rate, the view of humankind these three authors share, which seemed so unnatural and bizarre in their own time, has become standard in the twentieth-century vision, and in its banality, perhaps even more horrible.

These three authors' disillusionment with rationalism and optimism was perhaps deepened by their unusual self-consciousness and introspection, and further aggravated by the horrifying medium of first-person narration in which they all worked. By working their novels exclusively in the first person to uncover "the involutions of motive,"¹ Godwin, Brown and Shelley prove for themselves and their readers the omnipotence of delusion and the horrible futility of human striving. Their narrations show the workings of minds engaged in isolated dialogue with themselves, and the relentless repetition of events and reappearance of actors which is characteristic of the gothic reinforces the notion that all lives are the same--that each individual spends a lifetime in isolation justifying the self to the self. Furthermore, as the first-person narrative structure shows all too clearly, the process of self-justification only allows individuals to see others' errors, never their own, thus condemning humankind to a neverending cycle of misperception and error from which death is the only release. In four of the novels examined in the previous chapters, for example, the narrators, confident of their own moral and intellectual superiority, succumb to their delusions

and blindly reenact the self-destructive lives of those they seek to help. The fifth novel, Wieland, is no less horrifying, for while Brown turns convention on its head by creating Clara without confidence or self-esteem, he ultimately returns to tradition by forcing her to give up the private struggle for mental health she wages in her journal and to relive her own public pattern of appropriate feminine self-denial.

Another horrifying aspect of first-person narration, as I have indicated in my discussions of the novels, is its ability to engage the author and the audience in the same process of benevolent "truth seeking" that motivates the narrators in their self-destruction. Viewed objectively, the aims of the narrators, authors and readers are ostensibly identical--to discover and communicate "things as they are." But the doubts Godwin, Brown and Shelley betray about their narrators' capacity to perceive and use truth properly (assuming that a universal truth does exist) implicitly extend to themselves and their readers as well. Logically, the authors and readers are, like the narrators, deluded and self-justifying, for they too repeat the narrators' errors. It is a very small step indeed from Godwin's acknowledgement that he revels in "the analysis of the private and internal operations of the human mind" which he reveals with his "metaphysical dissecting knife,"² to Victor Frankenstein's resolution to "[pursue] nature to her hiding places"³ with his scalpel. The authors who

imagine themselves worthy teachers and critics are, like Godwin's deficient reader, inwardly depraved. The depravity they create in their narrators in fact emanates from themselves, and also speaks to the dark underside of the reader's character. Of course, the audience must sort through three sets of delusions to seek the truth--the narrator's, the author's and its own.

The confessional but self-justifying tenor of early gothic horror fiction achieved by the use of first-person narration plainly demonstrates, however, that truth is neither self-evident nor immutable. As Godwin, Brown and Shelley show in their novels, although Godwin continued to cling doggedly to his belief in a universal truth, truth is very personal and illusive, determined by each individual's delusions and fantasies. Reason, benevolence and knowledge provide poor antidotes to the more basic human impulses of uncontrolled passion and delusion. In a gothic world where appearance and desire equal truth, as in the narrators' worlds, success is measured by one's ability to transform personal truth into universal truth, i.e. upon the narrators' capacity to make the reader share the pretense of the narrators' lives. For the audience, the horror of the reading experience comes with the recognition that it has shared too much, has pretended too well with the narrator, for as Kurt Vonnegut warns much later in the Introduction to Mother Night, "we are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be."⁴

Notes

¹William Godwin, "Godwin's Account of the Composition of Caleb Williams," originally published as the Preface to Fleetwood (1832), in Caleb Williams, ed. David McCracken (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), Appendix II, p. 339.

²Godwin, "Godwin's Account of the Composition of Caleb Williams," p. 339.

³Mary Shelley, Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus, ed. James Rieger (1818; rpt. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), p. 49.

⁴Kurt Vonnegut, Introduction to Mother Night, in Mother Night (New York: Delacorte Press, 1966), p. v.

Select Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Brown, Charles Brockden. Arthur Mervyn, or Memoirs of the Year 1793. 2 vols. Vols. II and III of Charles Brockden Brown's Novels. 1887; rpt. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1963.
- . Edgar Huntly, or Memoirs of a Sleepwalker. Vol. IV of Charles Brockden Brown's Novels. 1887; rpt. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1963.
- . Wieland, or The Transformation; Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist. Vol. I of The Novels and Related Works of Charles Brockden Brown. Bicentennial Edition. Kent, OH: Kent State Univ. Press, 1977.
- Godwin, William. Caleb Williams. Ed. David McCracken. New York: W.W. Norton, 1977.
- . The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature. 1797; rpt. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1965.
- . Enquiry Concerning Political Justice. Abr. and ed. K. Codell Carter. Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press/Clarendon, 1971.
- . Reply to anonymous letter regarding Things As They Are. The British Critic and Theological Review, 6 (July 1795), 94-5.
- . "Of Choice in Reading." In The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature. 1797; rpt. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1965, pp. 129-46.
- . "Of an Early Taste for Reading." In The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature. 1797; rpt. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1965, pp. 29-35.
- . Preface to Mandeville. In Mandeville, A Tale of the Seventeenth Century in England. 3 vols. Edinburgh: Archibald Constable; London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1817, pp. vii-xii.

Jones, Frederick L. Mary Shelley's Journal. Norman, OK: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1947.

Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus. Ed. James Rieger. 1818; rpt. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974.

Secondary Sources

Alderson, Evan. "To Reconcile with Common Maxims: Edgar Huntly's Ruses." Pacific Coast Philology, 10 (1975), 5-9.

Allen, Paul. The Life of Charles Brockden Brown. Intro. Charles E. Bennett. New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1975.

Anonymous correspondent's reply to Godwin's letter regarding Things As They Are. The British Critic and Theological Review, 6 (Aug. 1795), 213-15.

Anonymous letter regarding legal inaccuracies in William Godwin's Things As They Are. The British Critic and Theological Review, 5 (April 1795), 444-47.

Axelrod, Alan. Charles Brockden Brown: An American Tale. Austin, TX: Univ. of Texas Press, 1983.

Baym, Nina. "A Minority Reading of Wieland." In Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown. Ed. Bernard Rosenthal. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981, pp. 87-103.

Bell, Michael Davitt. "'The Double-Tongued Deceiver': Sincerity and Duplicity in the Novels of Charles Brockden Brown." Early American Literature, 9 (1974), 143-63.

Bernard, Kenneth. "Arthur Mervyn: The Ordeal of Innocence." Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 6 (1965), 441-59.

------. "Edgar Huntly: Charles Brockden Brown's Unsolved Murder." The Library Chronicle, 33 (1967), 30-53.

Berthoff, W.B. "'A Lesson on Concealment': Brockden Brown's Method in Fiction." Philological Quarterly, 37 (1958), 45-57.

Boulton, James T. The Language of Politics in the Age of Wilkes and Burke. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1963.

- Bowerbank, Sylvia. "The Social Order vs The Wretch: Mary Shelley's Contradictory-Mindedness in Frankenstein." English Literary History, 46 (1979), 418-31.
- Brancaccio, Patrick. "Studied Ambiguities: Arthur Mervyn and the Problem of the Unreliable Narrator." American Literature, 9 (1974), 18-27.
- Bredahl, A. Carl, Jr. "Transformation in Wieland." Early American Literature, 12 (1977), 177-92.
- Burgess, Anthony. "Modern Novels: The 99 Best." New York Times Book Review, 5 Feb. 1984, p. 1, bottom; pp. 36-7.
- Butler, Marilyn. Romantics, Rebels & Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background, 1760-1830. New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981.
- Chase, Richard. The American Novel and Its Tradition. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1957.
- Clark, David Lee. "Brockden Brown and the Rights of Women." Comparative Literature Series, No. 2. Univ. of Texas Bulletin, No. 2212, 1922.
- Cleman, John. "Ambiguous Evil: A Study of Villains and Heroes in Charles Brockden Brown's Major Novels." Early American Literature, 10 (1975), 190-219.
- Clifford, Gay. "Caleb Williams and Frankenstein: First-Person Narratives and 'Things as They Are.'" Genre, 10 (1977), 601-17.
- Davis, David Brion. Homicide in American Fiction, 1798-1860: A Study in Social Values. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1957, pp. 88-100.
- Day, William Patrick. In the Circle of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Dumas, D. Gilbert. "Things As They Were: The Original Ending of Caleb Williams." Studies in English Literature, 6 (1966), 575-97.
- Dunn, Richard J. "Narrative Distance in Frankenstein." Studies in the Novel, 6 (1974), 408-17.
- Durant, David. "Ann Radcliffe and the Conservative Gothic." Studies in English Literature, 22 (1982), 519-30.
- Dussinger, John A. "Kinship and Guilt in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein." Studies in the Novel, 8 (1976), 38-55.

- Elliott, George P. "The Person of the Maker." In Experience in the Novel. Ed. Roy Harvey Pearce. Selected Papers from the English Institute. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1968, pp. 1-19.
- Fiedler, Leslie A. Love and Death in the American Novel. New York: Stein and Day, 1960.
- Rev. of Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus, by Mary Shelley. Belle Assemblée, 2nd ser., 17 (March 1818), 139-42.
- Rev. of Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus, by Mary Shelley. The British Critic, n.s., 9 (April 1818), 432-38.
- Rev. of Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus, by Mary Shelley. Edinburgh [Scots] Magazine, 2nd ser., 2 (March 1818), 149-53.
- Rev. of Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus, by Mary Shelley. Monthly Review, n.s., 85 (April 1818), 439.
- Rev. of Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus, by Mary Shelley. Quarterly Review, 18 (Jan. 1818), 379-85.
- Furbank, P.N. "Godwin's Novels." Essays in Criticism, 5 (1955), 217-28.
- Garber, Frederick. "Meaning and Mode in Gothic Fiction." In Racism in the Eighteenth Century. Ed. Harold E. Pagliaro. Cleveland, OH: Press of Case Western Reserve Univ., 1973, pp. 155-69.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979.
- Gilmore, Michael T. "Calvinism and Gothicism: The Example of Brown's Wieland." Studies in the Novel, 9 (1977), 107-18.
- Gold, Alex, Jr. "It's Only Love: The Politics of Passion in Godwin's Caleb Williams." Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 19 (1978), 135-60.
- Goldberg, M.A. "Moral and Myth in Mrs. Shelley's Frankenstein." Keats-Shelley Journal, 8 (1959), 27-38.
- Grabo, Norman S. The Coincidental Art of Charles Brockden Brown. Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1981.

- Greiner, Donald J. "Brown's Use of the Narrator in Wieland: An Indirect Plea for the Acceptance of Fiction." College Language Association Journal, 13 (1969), 131-36.
- Gross, Harvey. "The Pursuer and the Pursued: A Study of Caleb Williams." Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 1 (1959), 401-11.
- Grylls, R. Glynn. Mary Shelley: A Biography. New York and London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1938.
- Hart, Francis Russell. "The Experience of Character in the English Gothic Novel." In Experience in the Novel. Ed. Roy Harvey Pearce. Selected Papers from the English Institute. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1968, pp. 83-105.
- Harvey, A.D. "Frankenstein and Caleb Williams." Keats-Shelley Journal, 29 (1980), 21-27.
- Hazlitt, William. "William Godwin." In Lectures on the English Poets. The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits. Everyman's Library. London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1967, pp. 182-94.
- Hesford, Walter. "'Do you know the author?': The Question of Authorship in Wieland." Early American Literature, 17 (1983), 239-48.
- Hirsch, Gordon D. "The Monster Was a Lady: On the Psychology of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein." Hartford Studies in Literature, 8 (1976), 116-53.
- Hogle, Jerrold E. "The Texture of the Self in Godwin's Things as They Are." Boundary, 7 (1978), 261-81.
- Horney, Karen. Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Toward Self-Realization. New York: W.W. Norton, 1950.
- Hughes, Philip Russell. "Archetypal Patterns in Edgar Huntly." Studies in the Novel, 5 (1973), 176-90.
- Hume, Robert D. "Charles Brockden Brown and the Use of Gothicism: A Reassessment." Emerson Society Quarterly, 66 (1972), 10-18.
- . "Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel." PMLA, 84 (1969), 282-90.
- Inchbald, Elizabeth. Letters to William Godwin. In William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries. By C. Kegan Paul. 2 vols. 1876; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1970, pp. 138-40.

- Jordan, Cynthia S. "On Rereading Wieland: 'The Folly of Precipitate Conclusions.'" Early American Literature, 16 (1981), 154-74.
- Justus, James H. "Arthur Mervyn, American." American Literature, 17 (1970), 304-24.
- Kelly, G.D. "Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and Rousseau." Women & Literature, 3 (1974), 21-26.
- Kelly, Gary. The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805. New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press/Clarendon, 1976.
- Ketterer, David. Frankenstein's Creation: The Book, The Monster, and Human Reality. ELS Monograph Series, No. 16. Victoria, Canada: English Literary Studies, 1979.
- . New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction and American Literature. Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1974.
- Kiely, Robert. The Romantic Novel in England. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972.
- Kimball, Arthur G. "Savages and Savagism: Brockden Brown's Dramatic Irony." Studies in Romanticism, 6 (1967), 214-25.
- Krause, Sydney J. "Romanticism in Wieland: Brown and the Reconciliation of Opposites." In Artful Thunder: Versions of the Romantic Tradition in American Literature. Ed. Robert J. DeMott and Sanford E. Marovitz. Kent, OH: Kent State Univ. Press, 1975.
- Kropf, C.R. "Caleb Williams and the Attack on Romance." Studies in the Novel, 8 (1975), 81-87.
- Lessenich, Rolf P. "Godwin and Shelley: Rhetoric versus Revolution." Studia Neophilologica, 47 (1975), 40-52.
- Levine, George. "The Ambiguous Heritage of Frankenstein." In The Endurance of "Frankenstein": Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel. Ed. George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher. Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1979, pp. 3-30.
- . "Frankenstein and the Tradition of Realism." Novel, 7 (1973), 14-30.
- Levine, George and U.C. Knoepfelmacher, eds. The Endurance of "Frankenstein": Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel. Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1979.

- Lewis, Paul. "Fearful Lessons: The Didacticism of the Early Gothic Novel." College Language Association Journal, 23 (1980), 470-84.
- Lewis, R.W.B. The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1955.
- Lyles, W.H. Mary Shelley: An Annotated Bibliography. New York: Garland, 1975.
- Manly, William M. "The Importance of Point of View in Brockden Brown's Wieland." American Literature, 35 (1963), 311-21.
- Marshall, Peter H. William Godwin. New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1984.
- McCracken, David. "Godwin's Literary Theory: The Alliance Between Fiction and Political Philosophy." Philological Quarterly, 49 (1970), 113-33.
- McInerney, Peter. "Frankenstein and the Godlike Science of Letters." Genre, 13 (1980), 455-75.
- Miller, Jacqueline T. "The Imperfect Tale: Articulation, Rhetoric, and Self in Caleb Williams." Criticism, 20 (1977), 366-82.
- Miyoshi, Masao. The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians. New York: New York Univ. Press, 1969.
- Moers, Ellen. Literary Women. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976.
- Myers, Mitzi. "Godwin's Changing Conception of Caleb Williams." Studies in English Literature, 12 (1972), 591-628.
- Nelson, Carl. "A Method for Madness: The Symbolic Patterns in Arthur Mervyn." West Virginia Univ. Philological Papers, 22 (1975), 29-50.
- Nelson, Lowry, Jr. "Night Thoughts on the Gothic Novel." Yale Review, 52 (1963), 236-57.
- Pascal, Roy. Design and Truth in Autobiography. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960.
- Paul, C. Kegan. William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries. 2 vols. 1876; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1970.

- Paulson, Ronald. "Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution." English Literary History, 48 (1981), 532-54.
- Perry, J. Douglas, Jr. "Gothic as Vortex: The Form of Horror in Capote, Faulkner, and Styron." Modern Fiction Studies, 19 (1973), 153-67.
- Person, Leland S., Jr. "'My Good Mamma': Women in Edgar Huntly and Arthur Mervyn." Studies in American Fiction, 9 (1981), 33-46.
- Pesta, John. "Caleb Williams: A Tragedy of Wasted Love." Tennessee Studies in Literature, 16 (1970), 67-76.
- Pollin, Burton R. "Philosophical and Literary Sources of Frankenstein." Comparative Literature, 17 (1965), 97-108.
- Praz, Mario. The Romantic Agony. Trans. Angus Davidson. Forward by Frank Kermode. Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970.
- Preston, John. The Created Self: The Reader's Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction. London: Heinemann, 1970.
- Ridgely, J.V. "The Empty World of Wieland." In Individual and Community: Variations on a Theme in American Fiction. Ed. Kenneth H. Baldwin and David K. Kirby. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1975, pp. 3-16.
- Rieger, James. The Mutiny Within: The Heresies of Percy Bysshe Shelley. New York: George Braziller, 1967.
- Ringe, Donald A. Charles Brockden Brown. Twayne's United States Authors Series, No. 98, New York: Twayne, 1966.
- Rodway, A.E. Godwin and the Age of Transition. London: George G. Harrap; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1952.
- Rosenthal, Bernard, ed. Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981.
- Rubenstein, Marc A. "'My Accursed Origin': The Search for the Mother in Frankenstein." Studies in Romanticism, 15 (1976), 165-94.
- Russo, James R. "The Chameleon of Convenient Vice: A Study of the Narrative of Arthur Mervyn." Studies in the Novel, 11 (1979), 381-405.

- . "'The Chimeras of the Brain': Clara's Narrative in Wieland." Early American Literature, 16 (1981), 60-88.
- Scheuermann, Mona. "From Mind to Society: Caleb Williams as a Psychological Novel." Dutch Quarterly Review, 7 (1976), 115-27.
- Schopf, Sue Weaver. "'Of what a strange nature is knowledge!': Hartleian Psychology and the Creature's Arrested Moral Sense in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein." Romanticism Past and Present, 5 (1981), 33-52.
- Schug, Charles. "The Romantic Form of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein." Studies in English Literature, 17 (1977), 607-19.
- [Scott, Walter]. Rev. of Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus, by Mary Shelley. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 12 (March 1818), 611-20.
- Seltzer, Mark. "Saying Makes It So: Language and Event in Brown's Wieland." Early American Literature, 13 (1978), 81-91.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "On Frankenstein." In The Shelley Papers. Memoris of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Ed. Thomas Medwin. London: Whittaker, Treacher, 1833, 165-70.
- Slotkin, Richard. Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1973.
- Small, Christopher. Ariel Like a Harpy: Shelley, Mary and "Frankenstein". London: Victor Gollancz, 1972.
- Smith, Elton Edward and Esther Greenwell Smith. William Godwin. Twayne's English Author Series, No. 27. New York: Twayne, 1965.
- Smith, Susan Harris. "Frankenstein: Mary Shelley's Psychic Divisiveness." Women & Literature, 5 (1977), 42-53.
- Soldati, Joseph A. "The Americanization of Faust: A Study of Charles Brockden Brown's Wieland." Emerson Society Quarterly, 74 (1974), 1-14.
- Spacks, Patricia Meyer. Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976.

- Spangler, George M. "C.B. Brown's Arthur Mervyn: A Portrait of the Young American Artist." American Literature, 52 (1981), 578-92.
- Stamper, Rexford. "Caleb Williams: The Bondage of Truth." Southern Quarterly, 12 (1973), 39-50.
- Storch, Rudolf F. "Metaphors of Private Guilt and Social Rebellion in Godwin's Caleb Williams." English Literary History, 34 (1967), 188-207.
- Swingle, L.J. "Frankenstein's Monster and Its Romantic Relatives: Problems of Knowledge in English Romanticism." Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 15 (1973), 51-65.
- Summers, Montague. The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel. New York: Russell & Russell, 1964.
- Tannenbaum, Leslie. "From Filthy Type to Truth: Miltonic Myth in Frankenstein." Keats-Shelley Journal, 26 (1977), 101-13.
- Rev. of Things As They Are, or The Adventures of Caleb Williams, by William Godwin. Analytical Review, 21 (Feb. 1795), 166-75.
- Rev. of Things As They Are, or The Adventures of Caleb Williams, by William Godwin. The British Critic and Theological Review, 4 (July 1794), pp. 70-71.
- Rev. of Things As They Are, or The Adventures of Caleb Williams, by William Godwin. The Critical Review, 2nd ser., 11 (July 1794), 290-96.
- Rev. of Things As They Are, or The Adventures of Caleb Williams, by William Godwin. Monthly Review, 2nd ser., 15 (Oct. 1794), 145-49.
- Thompson, G.R., ed. The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism. Pullman, WA: Washington State Univ. Press, 1974.
- Tillotson, Marcia. "'A Forced Solitude': Mary Shelley and the Creation of Frankenstein's Monster." In The Female Gothic. Ed. Juliann E. Fleenor. Montreal, Canada; London: Eden Press, 1983, pp. 167-75.
- Tompkins, Jane. Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860. New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985.
- Tropp, Martin. Mary Shelley's Monster. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976.

- Varma, Devendra P. The Gothic Flame. London: Arthur Baker, 1957.
- Vonnegut, Kurt. Introduction to Mother Night. In Mother Night. New York: Delacorte Press, 1966, pp. v-vii.
- Walling, William A. Mary Shelley. Twayne's English Authors Series, No. 128. New York: Twayne, 1972.
- Walton, James. "'Mad Feary Father': Caleb Williams and the Novel Form." Salzburg Studies in English Literature: Romantic Reassessment Series, 47 (1975), 1-61.
- Warfel, Harry R. Charles Brockden Brown: American Gothic Novelist. Gainesville, FL: Univ. of Florida Press, 1949.
- Whittier, John Greenleaf. "Fanaticism." In Anti-Slavery, Political and Religious Papers. Vol. III of The Prose Works of John Greenleaf Whittier. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin/Riverside, 1889, pp. 391-95.
- Wilson, James D. "Incest and American Romantic Fiction." Studies in the Literary Imagination, 7 (1974), 31-50.
- Witherington, Paul. "Benevolence and the 'Utmost Stretch': Charles Brockden Brown's Narrative Dilemma." Criticism, 14 (1972), 175-91.
- , "'Not My Tongue Only': Form and Language in Brown's Edgar Huntly." In Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown. Ed. Bernard Rosenthal. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981, pp. 164-83.
- Yarbrough, Stephen R. "The Tragedy of Isolation: Fictional Technique and Environmentalism in Wieland." Studies in American Fiction, 8 (1980), 98-105.