Charles Brockden Brown and Revolutionary Philadelphia: An Imagination in Context

Can the harmony and energy of Homer shroud from our view the horrid forms of revenge and cruelty that stalk with rapid and gigantic steps through every page of the *Iliad?* Who does not turn with anguish and aversion from the slaughter and destruction which is continually presented to him?

Charles Brockden Brown to "Henrietta G."

C ULTURAL AND LITERARY HISTORIANS HAVE PLACED Charles Brockden Brown at the beginning of a number of American traditions: the romance novel, the gothic novel, the "highbrow" novel, the Adamic myth. Most recently, David S. Reynolds, in *Beneath the American Renaissance*, has positioned Brown at the beginning of another native line of development: those subversive writers—Reynolds calls them "radical democrats"—who look not to the corrupt practices of the Old World but to the contradictions of New World republican society itself for their "emblems of tyranny."[1] The historical and biographical question here is Why Brown? What about this child of the Enlightenment links him, in ways that set him apart from his late eighteenth-century American contemporaries, to nineteenth-century democratic concerns and aesthetic forms?

Various explanations have been offered for this, ranging from Brown's reading of European sentimental and gothic literature, to his cosmopolitan Quaker heritage, to his status as an American caught

¹ Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (Baltimore, 1957); Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of the American Romance* (Chicago, 1980); Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York, 1960); R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam* (Chicago, 1955); David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* (New York, 1988), 198-200.

between New World wilderness and Old World civilization, to his subjection to the cruel cycles of merchant capitalism.[2] In this essay, I want to open up a new perspective on Brown's place in American cultural and literary history by considering a subject that Brown's interpreters have generally either ignored or taken for granted: the circumstances of his youth.[3] It will be the argument of this essay that those circumstances, which have never been accurately described, supply a key part of the puzzle as to why Brown wrote the way he did. Those circumstances will also suggest that the main reason Charles Brockden Brown came to focus on the tyrannies intrinsic to American republican society was because he was experientially qualified *and* psychologically compelled to do so. Such was the legacy he derived from his childhood as a Quaker boy growing up in Revolutionary Philadelphia.

I begin with the events and emotional contours of that childhood.

Charles Brockden Brown never had to go looking for the meaning of the American Revolution—*it* came to his doorstep. More precisely, on September 5, 1777, *it* arrested his father, Elijah Brown, for possessing a "disposition highly inimical to the cause of America." Six days later, on September 11, *it* then deported his father—first to western Pennsylvania, and then to Virginia—for refusing to affirm "allegiance to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, as a free and independent state." Charles was six years old at the time. He would not see his father again until eight months later, when in April 1778, the so-called "Virginia Exiles"—Elijah Brown among them—were

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[2] On literary influence, see Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition*; Robert D. Hume, "Charles Brockden Brown and the Uses of Gothicism: A Reassessment," *Emerson Society Quarterly* 66 (1972), 10-18. On cosmopolitan Quaker influence, see Warner B. Berthoff, "The Literary Career of Charles Brockden Brown" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1954). On the New World/Old World matrix, see Alan Axelrod, *Charles Brockden Brown: An American Tale* (Austin, 1983). On capitalism, see Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820* (Baltimore, 1987).

[3] The three main Brown biographies are William Dunlap, *The Life of Charles Brockden Brown* (Philadelphia, 1815); Harry R. Warfel, *Charles Brockden Brown: An American Gothic Novelist* (Gainesville, 1949); and David Lee Clark, *Charles Brockden Brown: A Pioneer Voice of America* (Durham, 1952). None is adequate. See in this regard n. 31 below.

finally permitted by Pennsylvania's Revolutionary authorities to return home.[4]

Of course Charles would have understood nothing of this—he would only have registered in his child's mind the irrepressible and traumatic fact of his father's forced disappearance. He would not have understood why his father, and his father's friends, had been arrested. Nor would he have understood the complicated political reasons for the mobs in the streets, for the shouts and clanging and knocking on doors, and for the taunts that were directed at his people, the Quakers. What alone he would have gathered was that there were groups in the city who hated his people, and who were free to terrorize him and his family. He also would have known, on the instructions of his family, that he and they were to take it all *pacifically*. As Quakers, they could not resist; nor were they supposed to resent or rage.[5] They were, according to their faith, to endure.

Equally confusing for Charles would have been the sudden departure from the city, three weeks after his father's disappearance, of the groups responsible for his family's suffering, and then the subsequent arrival on September 26 of a whole new group of people: the British army under General Howe. These new foreign controllers, he would have found, for all their colorful dress, acted not unlike the old domestic controllers who upon their evacuation had taken from the Quakers blankets and clothing and other assorted supplies. For the British too could taunt and on occasion steal—though not with the tones of fratricidal abuse shown by fellow Americans. And they remained in charge of the city until June 1778, when they left and the oppressors of old, the Philadelphia Revolutionaries, returned. As one

[4] On the arrest of Elijah Brown, see Thomas Gilpin, ed., *The Exiles in Virginia* (Philadelphia, 1848), 67, 71-72, 84, 111-12, 133; and 67-280, passim.

[5] In regard to his father's arrest, Charles would doubtless have shared the thoughts and feelings of the young children of another of the Quaker exiles, Henry Drinker, whose wife wrote to him in November 1777: "the long absence of their Father, appears strange to our two little ones, who cannot account, why their dear Daddy should be taken forcibly from them." See Elizabeth to Henry Drinker, Nov. 5, 1777, in "Transcripts of Letters between Henry and Elizabeth Drinker, 1777-1778," Henry S. Drinker Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter, Drinker Papers). On the general Quaker cultural and religious context of the Brown family ordeal, see Sydney V. James, "The Impact of the Revolution on Quakers' Ideas about Their Sect," *William and Mary Quarterly* (hereafter, *WMQ*) 19 (1962), 360-82.

Quaker recorded the events of that changeover day of June 18: "A bellman went about this evening by order of one Col. Morgan, to desire the inhabitants to stay within doors after night, that if any were found on the streets by the patrol, they would be punished. The few [American Revolutionaries] that came in to-day had drawn swords in their hands, galloped about the streets, and frightened many by their appearance." On the next day, June 19, this Quaker diarist recorded: "The English have in reality left us, and the other party took possession again—they have been coming in all day, part of the artillery, some soldiers, and the old inhabitants."[6]

During the terrifying eight-month period of his father's absence, the six-year-old Charles would on some days have heard the sound of distant musket and cannon fire, as British and American forces skirmished in the vicinity. Sometimes, too, he would have heard the artillery booming throughout the night.[7] Furthermore—in the immediate wake of his father's disappearance—he would have shared in the fear that was rampant among Philadelphia's Quaker inhabitants as they anticipated that their city was about to be set on fire by the retreating Revolutionaries. (The Quakers feared this because they had heard that New York City had recently undergone a great conflagration in military and political circumstances analogous to their own.)[8] He also, in all likelihood, would have been awakened before five o'clock on the morning of November 21, as was Mrs. Henry Drinker (whose Quaker husband had been arrested and exiled to Virginia along with Elijah Brown), by a "loud firing of cannon." He then might have seen, as did Mrs. Drinker and her son, that "The Am[er]icans had set their whole Fleet on fire, except one small vessel and some of ye Gondelows which past by ye City in the night." Also to be seen on this occasion were the "8 Vessels on fire at once in sight," one of which, Mrs. Drinker reported in her diary, "lay near ye [New] Jersey

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[6] "Extracts from the Journal of Mrs. Henry Drinker, of Philadelphia, From September 25, 1777, to July 4, 1778," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (hereafter, *PMHB*) 13 (1889), 307-8.

[7] For the *sound* of Revolutionary Philadelphia, see ibid., 299-308; and "The Diary of Robert Morton," *PMHB* 1 (1877), 28-29.

[8] See Robert Proud, "Letters of Robert Proud," *PMHB* 34 (1910), 73.

shore, opposite our House." For those like the Browns who lived close to the Delaware River, four of the vessels could be heard exploding.[9]

After his father's return in April 1778, Charles's sense of terror would have been relieved, but only by degree. For with the return of the Revolutionaries in June 1778, the American whigs' persecution of the city's Quakers began afresh. Oaths of allegiance to the new Revolutionary order were again required, as they had been in 1776-1777, of adult Quaker males like Elijah Brown. Among the penalties this time for nonsubscription were double taxes and forfeiture of the rights to sue in courts of law, to receive any legacy, or to make a will. More onerously, nonjurors—if they happened to make a living as merchants or traders or lawyers or apothecaries or teachers or doctors—were forbidden by a state legislative act from practicing their profession. As a result, the Quaker school system was forced to close, and Quaker merchants like Elijah Brown were put out of business. And then in late 1778 matters went from bad to worse for nonjuring Philadelphia Quakers, as two of their number were executed for treasonable relations with the British. The official Quaker body (the Meeting on Sufferings) declared the Revolutionaries' actions in this case to be unwarranted by the evidence. But the Meeting also announced that the two ill-fated Quakers had not by and large lived fully in accord with true Quaker principles. Which was, it seems, the Meeting's way of underscoring the fact that as things stood in late 1770s Philadelphia, it was best for Quakers to lie low and wait for the end of hostilities.[10]

The end of the military side of the Revolution, however, did not bring immediate improvement to the Quakers' situation. Indeed, at first it brought renewed violence. When Pennsylvania's governing Executive Council received confirmation of General Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown, it proclaimed a "general illumination" for the night of October 24 (1781). Patriots thus were to place candles in their

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[9] Elizabeth Drinker Diary (typescript), Nov. 1, 1777, Drinker Papers. As to the question of whether the noise on this occasion actually woke up Charles Brockden Brown, Elizabeth Drinker comments: "All our Family was up but little Molly, and a fire made in ye Parlor, more than an hour before day—all our Neighbors were also up, and I believe most in Town. . . ."

[10] Arthur J. Mekeel, *The Relation of the Quakers to the American Revolution* (Washington, 1979), 173-84, 189-203; Henry J. Young, "The Treatment of the Loyalists in Pennsylvania" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1955), 97-130.

windows to commemorate the final victory of American Revolutionary arms. As part of the celebration, too, cannons were to be fired off in the State House yard and by ships in the harbor. October 24, accordingly, was to be for Philadelphians an unforgettable day.[11]

It was—at least for Philadelphia Quakers. For as masses of celebrating Revolutionaries roamed the streets, *not* to light a candle on this special night was to risk losing one's house to a mob's pickaxes and iron bars. And indeed some "unilluminated" houses were destroyed by overzealous patriots. Many more such households, however, were convinced, with the help of a few rocks and some broken glass, to light up. October 24, 1781, thus proved to be a particularly troubling night for a Quaker's conscience; as it must have been a terrifying night for a ten-year-old Quaker boy. As one Friend summed up the experience: "It seems universally agreed that Philadelphia will no longer be that happy asylum for the Quakers that it once was. Those joyful days when all was prosperity and peace are gone, never to return; and perhaps it is as necessary for our society to ask for terms as it was for Cornwallis."[12]

Whether the Brown household decided to light a candle in salute to the Revolutionary victory is not known. It can be determined, however, that a marauding Revolutionary mob made it to their neighborhood.[13] By all odds, then, Elijah Brown and his wife, along with their six children, were glad to see the Revolution, *in its entirety*, end.

[11] Ibid., 281.

[12] Anna Rawle, "A Loyalist's Account of Certain Occurrences in Philadelphia After Cornwallis's Surrender at Yorktown," *PMHB* 16 (1892), 105-7. Elizabeth Drinker, in her diary, recorded the events of this night: "Gen'l Cornwallace was taken; for which we grievously suffer'd on ye 24'th. by way of rejoyceing—a mobb assembled about 7 o'Clock or before, and continud their insults untill near 10; to those whose Houses were not illuminated scorcely [scarcely] one Friends House escaped[.] we had near 70 panes of Glass broken ye sash lights and two panals of the front parlor broke in pieces—ye Door crack'd and violently burst open, when they threw Stones into ye House for some time but did not enter—some far[e]d better and some worse—some Houses after braking ye door they enter'd, and distroy'd the furniture etc.—many women and Children were fright[]ned into fitts, and 'tis a mercy no lives were lost." Drinker Papers.

[13] I have determined this by way of Anna Rawle's, "A Loyalist's Account," 103, which places a rioting mob around Arch Street between Front and Second streets, just a few blocks away from the Brown family residence at 117 South Second Street. Elizabeth Drinker's diary of October 24 suggests that the rioting was widespread. Almost certainly, therefore, the Brown household was touched.

After all, its heroic events, the stuff of pride and legends for other Americans, had only brought them humiliation and suffering. What must it have brought Charles?

Ultimately, as I will argue below, what these events brought Brown were fundamental aspects of his imagination and art. They were the emotional experience out of which his deepest sensibility and aesthetic flowed, and to which he was psychologically driven to return. They were also the occasion that served to position him, as a cultural witness, at the exact spot in the American Revolutionary vortex where liberty and tyranny ran together and fused. Before I turn to explore the complex impact these events had on Brown's imaginative development, though, I want to set Brown's Revolutionary experience in its broader American context. This is necessary, for not only did the Revolutionary passions and interests of the 1770s and 1780s converge on the home of his youth, but a century-long historical process came to fruition there as well. Indeed, viewed in its fullest context, the world Charles Brockden Brown was born into and which it was his task to make sense of, was not ultimately a world of momentary Revolutionary exaltation and excess but of the evolving American democratic story itself—in all its relentless logic and passion and sometimes cruelty.

Charles's great-great-grandfather, James Browne, seeking to flee from the religious persecution of King Charles II's England, sailed to America in the mid-1670s aboard the *Kent*. In 1677 he was among the first settlers of Burlington, New Jersey, and in 1678 he was among the first settlers of Chichester, Pennsylvania. In 1679 he married Honour Clayton, a fellow *Kent* passenger, and theirs was the first marriage recorded in New Jersey. Eventually James and Honour Browne moved to East Nottingham, Pennsylvania, leaving to their son, William, their Chichester property. Little is known about this William, who was Charles's great-grandfather: only that William Brown's second son was James, who was Charles's grandfather, and that among James's five children, Elijah was the third, born in East Nottingham, in 1740.[14]

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[14] Warfel, *Charles Brockden Brown: American Gothic Novelist*, 14-16.

Elijah Brown grew up in East Nottingham, and around the age of twelve he was sent to Philadelphia to study at the Friends' Grammar School. Upon finishing his studies there, he apprenticed himself to a Quaker merchant in the city, thereby establishing Philadelphia as his new home and the Philadelphia meeting as his new forum of worship. The East Nottingham meeting, in issuing under the circumstances the required "certificate of removal," attested in 1757 that Elijah "has been a dutiful child to his parents, soberly inclined, and of a good repute amongst us according to his age." The East Nottingham meeting thereby, "sincerely desiring his farther growth and Establishment in the Truth in which we remain your Friends and Brethren," recommended Elijah to the "Christian care and particular regard" of the Philadelphia meeting.[15]

Elijah met Mary Armitt in Philadelphia, and in 1761 the two were married in the Arch Street Meeting House. Mary, unlike Elijah, came from some wealth. Her father's family had been among the original followers of William Penn, and they had helped to lay out the town of Philadelphia. Their money came from commerce. Little is known about her father, Joseph Armitt, except that he was a merchant and that he had died before his daughter's wedding. Mary's mother, Elizabeth, was the granddaughter of a wealthy brewer. Elizabeth Armitt was thus a widow with money in 1761, and it was at her residence at 117 South Street that Elijah and Mary Brown settled; and it was here that Charles Brockden, and their other five children, were born.[16]

The first thing to note, then, about Charles Brockden Brown's immediate family is its entirely unremarkable character. Elijah and Mary Brown were solid, conventional, unpretentious Quakers. They lived and aspired to prosper within the faith. Elijah Brown, upon completing his business apprenticeship, set up shop in Philadelphia as a merchant. In this endeavor he could expect few favors from his own side of the family, but from his wife's relatives he could hope to derive considerable financial support. Whether he received such support is not known, but for a time, at least, Elijah Brown's business affairs seem to have prospered. In 1765 he was among eighty Quaker merchants who signed a nonimportation agreement in protest against the

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[15] Clark, *Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America*, 14.
[16] Ibid., 14; Warfel, *Charles Brockden Brown*, 16.

Stamp Act. Of the Quaker signatories, some, it can be seen in retro-
spect, would go on in Revolutionary America to acquire great wealth,
while others would preserve the wealth they already had. Not a few
would go bankrupt, and some would break from the Quaker fold to
become prominent Revolutionaries. Seven on the list would eventually
be arrested by Pennsylvania's first Revolutionary government and be
exiled to Virginia as Quaker "tories." Elijah Brown would be among
them.[17]

The central fact about the mid-eighteenth-century Philadelphia's
economic and political life was its ethnic and religious base.[18] Thus in
politics Quakers worked together to secure their long-standing inter-
ests, as in business Quakers traded first and foremost with Quakers.
Quakers who were aspiring and active merchants, like Elijah Brown,
however, tended to stay out of politics. That important endeavor was
left to those Quakers—and their allies—who had already made their
fortunes and who thus had the time and the community standing to
watch over matters in the colony's General Assembly. In this cultural
context, Elijah Brown's signing in 1765 of the nonimportation
agreement was the extent of his political involvement in Revolutionary
politics. As an American, of course, he wanted the British government
to treat its colonies fairly, but more than that, as a devout Quaker and
as a businessman, he wanted a peaceful and stable environment in
which to practice his faith and his trade. He was in this, along with
the majority of his fellow coreligionists, a born and bred neutral.[19]

He was also a member of an ethnic-religious group that, for all its
talk of peace and moderation and the Inner Light and for all its

[17] Clark, *Charles Brockden Brown*, 16-17; Mekeel, *The Relation of the Quakers to the American Revolution*, 20, 30, 186; Thomas M. Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia* (New York, 1987), 57-58, 185-89.

[18] See J. Paul Selsam, *The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776: A Study in Revolutionary Ideology* (Philadelphia, 1936), 4-43; Wayne L. Bockelman and Owen S. Ireland, "The Internal Revolution in Pennsylvania: An Ethnic-Religious Interpretation," *Pennsylvania History* 41 (April 1974), 125-59; Owen S. Ireland, "The Ethnic-Religious Dimension of Pennsylvania Politics, 1778-1779," *WMQ* 30 (1973), 423-48, and "The Crux of Politics: Religion and Party in Pennsylvania, 1778-1789," *WMQ* 42 (1985), 453-75.

[19] See Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants and Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763* (New York, 1963), 85-108; Richard Bauman, *For the Reputation of Truth: Politics, Religion, and Conflict Among the Pennsylvania Quakers, 1750-1800* (Baltimore, 1971), 1-46; and Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise*, 58-62.

humble minority status in the colony, dominated Pennsylvania political life. In 1759 the Quakers made up about one-fifth of the population of Pennsylvania and in 1771 about one-tenth; in the interim both Scotch-Irish and Germans had come to outnumber them. Yet the so-called Quaker Party—consisting of Quakers and their various eastern mercantile allies—controlled the province's legislative assembly from the 1730s up until the 1770s.[20]

When Elijah and Mary Brown set up life together, then, in 1760s Philadelphia, they did so as dutiful Quakers who hoped to enjoy the manifold benefits of this special Pennsylvania commonwealth. It would be their fate, however—and thus the fate of their son, Charles—to suffer the historical consequences of this particular world where Scotch-Irish Presbyterians (and various denominations of Germans) proliferated and Quakers, by guile and tradition, ruled.

The first echoes of that fate, and indeed of the political process that would eventually become the Pennsylvania Revolution, can be discerned in 1763-1764 in the actions of the so-called Paxton Boys. This group of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians (and a few Germans) murdered twenty Indians in western Pennsylvania and then planned to march on Philadelphia in search of additional Indians. They also announced their intention to kill any pacifist Friends who stood in their way. In February 1764 their message got through to Pennsylvania's rulers, as rumor had it that at least 1,500, and perhaps as many as 6,500, western frontiersmen were about to invade the city.[21]

In 1764, then, Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, in the guise of the Paxton Boys, challenged and, for a moment at least, terrorized Pennsylvania's eastern Quakers. Yet they were unable to dislodge the Quaker Party from power. The march fizzled long before it reached Philadelphia,

[20] Brooke Hindle, "The March of the Paxton Boys," *WMQ* 4 (1946), 462; Mekeel, *The Relation of the Quakers to the American Revolution*, 333; Robert Proud, *History of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1797-1798), 275-76, 339; Richard Alan Ryerson, *The Revolution Now Begun* (Philadelphia, 1978), 8-24; David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York, 1989), 431-33. On the still dominant place of Quakers and the "Quaker party" in 1760s and early 1770s Pennsylvania political life, see Selsam, *The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776*, 30-34; Bauman, *For the Reputation of Truth*, 26, 103-22, 172; and Thomas McKean's letter to John Adams, dated Sept. 28, 1813, in Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The World of John Adams* (Boston, 1856), 10:74-75.

[21] Hindle, "The March of the Paxton Boys," 461-81.

and whatever promises the frontiersmen were able to exact from the province's ruling authorities proved to be of little effect. The Quaker Party, as of the mid-1760s, still held the reins of Assembly control, and it would continue to do so—albeit with increasing difficulty—for another decade.[22]

What is important for the story of the Elijah Brown family—and thus of Charles Brockden Brown's imagination—is not the immensely complicated details of Pennsylvania politics between 1764 and 1776, but the fact that, suddenly, in the mid-1770s, Pennsylvania political life changed. That is, in the crucible of the imperial conflict, the very terms of Pennsylvania politics were transformed as one religious-ethnic group, the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, came to replace another such group, the Quakers, as the province's dominant political entity. Defeated in their demands of 1763-1764, and their interests underrepresented throughout the late 1760s and early 1770s, Pennsylvania's Scotch-Irish Presbyterians and their various allies in 1776 found their political opportunity, and—as Quakers like Elijah Brown were to discover—their revenge.[23]

Between May and November 1776 Pennsylvania underwent its revolution. In an extra-legal process the Quaker-dominated provincial form of government was scrapped and a new republican constitution put in its place.[24] From the perspective of Philadelphia's nonrevolutionary Quakers, what happened in mid-1776 was that certain groups in the province took it upon themselves to create by fiat, and to impose upon all inhabitants, a new system of government. What the Quakers also saw was that the primary group behind this coup was their classic historical nemesis, the Presbyterians. This was a situation to be dreaded by any Quaker with a memory. It was anticipated by one Pennsylvanian who, in 1764, warned of the Presbyterians: "whenever this righteous People have power in their Hands, they will tolerate no other

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[22] Ibid., 483-86. In fact, no more than a few hundred of the Paxton Boys ever made it to Philadelphia. Ibid., 478.

[23] Ryerson, *The Revolution Is Now Begun*, offers the most detailed account of the complex political developments in this period. Bockelman and Ireland, "The Internal Revolution in Pennsylvania: An Ethnic-Religious Interpretation," underline the ethnic-religious dimension of those developments.

[24] The best accounts of this process are Selsam, *The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776*, and Ryerson, *The Revolution Is Now Begun*.

profession or Opinion but their own, and never cease till they establish themselves in such a Manner, so as to exclude all other sects."[25] Such, according to Quaker experience anyway, had been the case in seventeenth-century England and New England. Whether it would also be the case in Revolutionary Pennsylvania, Philadelphia's Quakers were, as of late 1776, about to discover.

While of course not all of Pennsylvania's Revolutionaries were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, enough of them were so that one contemporary observer (a Hessian) could refer to a "Scotch-Irish Presbyterian Rebellion," and Benjamin Franklin could, in 1784, sum up the Pennsylvania Revolution as a whole by stating that "the Irish emigrants and their children are now in possession of the government of Pennsylvania. . . . " And the fact is that once the Revolutionaries (Presbyterian and non-Presbyterian alike) began to exercise their newly established power, they did indeed act as Quakers feared Presbyterians would act. That is, they were ruthless in excluding from power other sects, particularly the Quakers.[26]

Yet the partisan ruthlessness, as nonjuring Quakers saw it, was couched by the Revolutionaries—and thus justified—in the idealistic and often rationalistic terms of the Age of Enlightenment. One of Pennsylvania's Revolutionaries, for example, wrote in 1776 of the opportunity of

> forming a plan of Government upon the most just, rational, equal principles; not exposed as others have heretofore to caprice or accident or the influence of some mad conqueror or prevailing parties or factions of men but full power to settle our Government from the very foundation "de novo" by deliberate Council directed solely to the publick good, with wisdom impartiality and disinterestedness.

And another, in the same rationalistic spirit, spoke of the need "to clear every part of the old rubbish out of the way and begin upon a clean foundation." In Pennsylvania, this was how both cosmopolitan

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[25] The quotation is from Isaac Hunt, cited in Ireland, "The Ethnic-Religious Dimension of Pennsylvania Politics, 1778-1779," 425.

[26] The quotations are cited in ibid., 424, 425. On the actions and policies of Pennsylvania's Revolutionaries, see ibid., 423-48. Ireland, in this regard, describes the main ethnic-religious division as that between the newly empowered "Calvinists" and the newly dispossessed "non-Calvinists."

idealists, like Thomas Paine, and partisan opportunists, like many of the Scotch-Irish, typically expressed themselves. They talked, in short, like American Revolutionaries. They spoke of establishing new foundations and of discarding old rubbish.[27]

It was in the context of this historical situation, then, wherein long-simmering ethnic and religious tensions were bound up with new-found ideological concerns, that Elijah Brown and family suffered their Revolutionary ordeal. Or to put the case differently, the full logic, force, and fury of the American Revolution converged on the childhood home—and the formative imagination—of Charles Brockden Brown.

Elijah Brown was arrested in September 1777 for his refusal to subscribe to a Revolutionary "test oath." This was an oath, embodied in a legislative act of June 1777, that "required all white male inhabitants of eighteen years or older to renounce allegiance to George III, to swear fidelity to Pennsylvania as an independent state, to do nothing prejudicial to its independence, and to make known to the civil magistrates all treasonous activities of which they were aware." This was one of a series of oaths upon which the Pennsylvania Revolution established itself. These oaths were designed to make sure that only those citizens loyal to the American Revolutionary cause participated in American Revolutionary political life. They were viewed as necessary and proper by most Revolutionaries, and thus they raised, for the most part, few Revolutionary scruples about the meaning of "free government." In Elijah Brown's case, the oath asked of him was one supported by most (but not all) Pennsylvania Revolutionaries. It unambiguously asked him to declare his political loyalty. Did he stand with the British crown, or did he stand with the American Revolutionaries? That he, as an observing Quaker, did not in his own mind stand with either—indeed, that as a conscientious Quaker he could not stand with either—the oath was not interested to elicit. What it required was that he, under the threat of dire punishment, do

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[27] The first quotation is from William Shippen, cited in Douglas McNeil Arnold, "Political Ideology and the Internal Revolution in Pennsylvania, 1776-1790" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1976), 57; and the second is from Thomas Smith, cited in Selsam, *The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776*, 205.

what his faith prohibited him from doing: take sides in the Revolution-
ary contest. True to his witness, Elijah Brown refused to.[28]

He thereby brought upon himself, and upon his family, the full
ideological and emotional rigor of the Pennsylvania Revolution. Elijah
Brown was never officially charged with a crime, but his arrest was
nonetheless—at the urging of the Continental Congress—ordered by
the Executive Council of Pennsylvania in September 1777. He was
at that point incarcerated in the city's Free Mason Lodge. When
further attempts by the Revolutionary authorities to get him to sub-
scribe to the terms of the oath proved unavailing, he was ordered
exiled (along with a group of other Quakers) to Staunton, Virginia.
The entire action, as Elijah Brown and his fellow prisoners argued in
a memorial addressed to the Executive Council and the Continental
Congress, was both unjustified (they were not, they said, guilty of
correspondence with the enemy) and illegal. On the legal side, at least,
Thomas McKean, the state's Revolutionary chief justice, supported
the Quakers' claim. He served writs of *habeas corpus* on those who held
the prisoners. But the justice's action was immediately countermanded
by the new state legislature, which acted to suspend the writ of *habeas
corpus* in this particular case. This was, as American whigs knew, an
ex post facto law, but the Pennsylvania Executive Council nevertheless
ordered it implemented. And so Elijah Brown and seventeen other
Quakers—after a three week travail of sudden arrest, imprisonment,
legal chicanery, and forced removal to western Pennsylvania—were
banished to Virginia, where they were to suffer through a winter of
recurrent illness and (for two of them) death. Finally, in the spring
of 1778, the survivors were permitted to return to Philadelphia, only
to be subjected, upon the British army's subsequent retreat from the
city, to a new round of test oaths and punishments, and a continuation
of the old round of taunts and occasional mob violence.[29]

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[28] On these oaths, see Arnold, "Political Ideology and the Internal Revolution in Pennsyl-
vania," 100-119. I have used here Arnold's formulation of the June 1777 "test oath," which
appears in ibid., 106-7.

[29] Mekeel, *The Relation of the Quakers to the American Revolution*, 177-84. The story is also
recounted by Robert F. Oaks, "Philadelphians in Exile: The Problem of Loyalty During the
American Revolution," *PMHB* 96 (1972), 298-325. For an example of post-July 1778 mob
violence, see Robert Levere Brunhouse, *The Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania, 1776-1790*
(Philadelphia, 1942), 73-76; and John K. Alexander, "The Fort Wilson Incident of 1779:
A Case Study of the Revolutionary Crowd," *WMQ* 31 (1974), 589-612.

From the Revolutionaries' point of view, what happened to the Browns was, first, the result of military necessity. With British forces in the vicinity of Philadelphia, potential traitors had to be rounded up. Second, what happened to the Browns was the application of revolutionary ideology. It was, as William Shippen defined the Pennsylvania Revolution above, the exercise of "most just, rational, equal principles," of a plan not given "to caprice or accident or the influence of some mad conqueror or prevailing parties or factions of men."[30] From the Browns' point of view, however, the moral of their experience was much less unambiguous. They were good Americans who, in a political crisis, refused to—and who conscientiously could not— take sides.

But what about Charles Brockden Brown? How was he to view the momentous events of 1770s and early 1780s Philadelphia? Would he understand the American Revolution and its effects, as did America's orthodox whigs, as the glorious expression of patriotic necessity. Or would he take the American tory perspective and see the actions of 1776-1781 as in large part the self-aggrandizing work of American demagogues and rabble-rousers? The answer—which is embodied in his fiction, to which I will turn now—is that the complex particulars of his experience in Philadelphia impelled Brown towards a less typically partisan perspective on the Age of Revolution. For Brown was one late-eighteenth-century American who was eminently qualified, in emotion as well as intellect, to see both sides of the American Revolutionary story *simultaneously*. He had heard and seen the glory, and he had felt the enemy that sometimes lurked behind the ideals and rhetoric.

It has been necessary to dwell on these events from the Philadelphia 1770s and early 1780s because they represent the seedbed of Charles Brockden Brown's imagination. It was, in this sense, the Pennsylvania Revolution that set that imagination on its idiosyncratic arc, and accordingly, it is the Pennsylvania Revolution that constitutes what might be termed the subtext of Brown's imaginative writings. From the emotional and moral complexities of that experience would stem the complexities of his fiction.

[30] See n. 27 above.

Behind Brown's gothic fictions about insanity, about sleepwalkers and ventriloquists, scalping Indians and spontaneous combustions, looms the haunting experience of a childhood that, try as he might, he could not escape. And Brown did try to escape the events of his childhood. First, he tried by keeping mum about them. It is instructive in this regard that in the biography of Brown written by the close friend of his adult years, William Dunlap, no mention at all is made of the special Brown family circumstances in Revolutionary Philadelphia. Thus it would seem that Brown, who befriended Dunlap in the early 1790s and who remained Dunlap's close friend for the rest of his life, never mentioned the matter to his future biographer. (And Dunlap evidently never gleaned it from conversations with Brown's family.)[31] It was a subject, it would thereby seem, not to be spoken of—except, that is, in the most circumspect ways.

On the one hand Brown sought to escape his childhood by a strategy of suppression: he would never talk about it. On the other hand, he sought escape through a strategy of exorcism: *he constantly talked about it*, albeit in disguised, indirect ways. His major fiction, in this regard, constituted the arena where Brown vitally engaged his haunting past. Particularly, in a sequence of fictions he composed in 1798-1799— starting with *Arthur Mervyn* (Part One), running through *Wieland*, "Memoirs of Carwin, the Biloquist," *Ormond*, and culminating in *Edgar Huntly*—Brown confronted the terrors of his world. Moreover, through the process of that confronting, he freed himself from their paralyzing force. He used his art, in effect, to cure himself of his past. The irony here is that the "talking cure" that was his gothic fiction, in its success, exhausted the emotional sources of that fiction, and thereby served to silence the art itself.[32]

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[31] Nor, for that matter, have any of Brown's subsequent biographers noted the fact of Elijah Brown's arrest.

[32] As this paragraph suggests, my psychological perspective on Brown is informed by such general concepts from Freudian ego psychology as "repression," "displacement," and the "talking cure." On the other hand, I am not offering here a psychoanalytic view of Brown. What I am offering is a "psychologically informed" analysis that seeks to make unified sense of three dimensions of Brown's life and work: certain leitmotifs and images in his writings, the timing and pattern of his creative output, and his actual historical experiences. My perceptions in these matters owe as much to *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Remembrance of Things Past* as to Freud. For a sensible appraisal of what psychoanalysis can and cannot (or should not) bring to biography, see Jean Strouse, "Alice James: A Family Romance," in William McKinley Runyan, ed., *Psychology and Historical Interpretation* (New York, 1988), 86-103.

Of the particulars of that past, the adult Brown made a number of semidirect allusions. One came in a sketch Brown published in the Philadelphia *Weekly Magazine* in 1798 as part of a series he called "The Man at Home." In this fiction, a narrator is perusing (with two friends) a "history of intestine [i.e. internecine] commotions, in one of the ancient republics," specifically, in "one of the colonies of Magna Graecia." He recalls for his readers the precise historical setting:

> The nation comprehended a commercial city, peopled by eighty thousand persons, with a small territory annexed. Two factions were for a long time contending for the sovereignty. On one occasion, the party that had hitherto been undermost, obtained the upper place. The maxims by which they intended to deport themselves were, for some time, unknown. That they would revenge themselves upon their adversaries, was, by no means, expected.[33]

And then he provides a narration of subsequent events.

First, the newly empowered faction erected a "secret tribunal, and formed a band of thrice hundred persons, who should execute, implicitly, the decrees of this tribunal." These judges, furthermore, "were charged with the punishment of those who had been guilty of crimes against the state." Against these traitors the judges acted. No effort was made to ground the accusations and sentences on "some evidence real or pretended." Vengeance alone motivated the judges. No warning was ever given to the accused; only "the arrival of the messengers at their door" revealed their fate. The procedure was terrifying. These messengers,

> dressed in peculiar uniform, marched by night to the sound of harsh and lamentable music, through the streets of the mute and affrighted city. They stopped at the appointed door, and admission being gained, peaceably or by violence, they proceeded, in silence, to the performance of their commission. The bow-string was displayed; the victim torn from his bed, from the arms of his wife, from the embraces of his children, was strangled in an instant; and the breathless corpse, left upon the spot where it had fallen.

After the intrusion and assault, the families' terror continued. "It was," for example, "asked in vain, by the sufferers, when the power

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[33] Harry R. Warfel, ed., *The Rhapsodist and Other Uncollected Writings by Charles Brockden Brown* (New York, 1943), 81.

which thus scattered death and dismay was to end. No answer was returned. They were left to form their judgment on the events that arose." For four months this state of affairs persisted, until suddenly, and without warning, "the tribunal was dissolved." In retrospect it appeared that the tyrants had intended "not the indiscriminate massacre, but, merely the decimation of their adversaries."[34]

Upon completing his perusal and synopsis of this historical event, the narrator remarks to his two friends on the destiny that had accorded them, and himself, "a milder system of manners." "Not so fast," one of them, mindful of the recent yellow fever visitation, quickly retorts. "You forget that the very city of which we are inhabitants, no longer ago than 1793, suffered evils, considerably parallel to those that are described here." Indeed, "in some respects," this friend concludes, "the resemblance is manifest and exact."[35]

Charles Brockden Brown thus delivered to his Philadelphia readers in 1798 a richly allusive fiction. For one, his sketch could be read as an allegory of the city's 1793 yellow fever epidemic itself. In this light, the "messengers" who stopped at "appointed" doors, gained admission, and then silently proceeded to the "performance of their commission," leaving in their wake a "breathless corpse" upon the floor, signified the pestilential agents that carried and spread the deadly contagion. Similarly, Brown's sketch could be read, variously, as a contemporary political allegory. The year 1793, after all, was the year when the French agent, Citizen Genêt, appeared in Philadelphia to spread French Revolutionary enthusiasms—what some in America considered the "French contagion"—to American shores. Also, 1793 was the year when the first French refugees from the Santo Domingo slave rebellion arrived in Philadelphia, where they were summarily blamed by some Philadelphians as the source of the yellow fever contagion. And finally, 1793 was the year of the Terror in France, when one faction of Frenchmen worked, like the "messengers" in Brown's story, to exterminate another. Jacobins, too, like the yellow fever, left corpses in their wake.[36]

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[34] Ibid., 82-84.

[35] Ibid., 84-85.

[36] A number of works variously explore the political culture of 1790s Philadelphia and America. Among them are John R. Howe, Jr., "Republican Thought and the Political Violence of the 1790s," *American Quarterly* 19 (1967), 147-65; William L. Hedges, "Benjamin Rush, Charles Brockden Brown, and the American Plague Year," *Early American Literature* 7 (1973), 295-311; Martin S. Pernick, "Politics, Parties, and Pestilence: Epidemic

Brown's sketch, published in March 1798, would have carried for his readers a deep political resonance—and the resonance would only have deepened as the year progressed. For in June-July 1798, with the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts, one of the two main political factions in America, the Federalists, enacted legislation designed to exterminate (politically) the other main faction, the Republicans. In this regard Brown's sketch, so poignantly redolent of the recent American political past, was also portentous of the immediate future. It captured in multivalent ways the spirit of a political culture.[37]

The foregoing discussion provides what might be termed the political text of Brown's sketch, the various allegories that would have been obvious to his attentive readers. Yet there was also a subtext in the story, a political allegory inaccessible to his readers, but irrepressible in the mind of the Quaker son who wrote the tale. In this regard, Brown's fiction about a revolution in ancient Greece, told in a manner to evoke thoughts of the Philadelphia yellow fever epidemic of 1793, and of the French-American Revolutionary context of the 1790s, was also an evocation by Brown of the events and emotions of his youth. The "ancient republic," the "commercial city," of the story, thus, was many things. Most poignantly for Brown, it was the Revolutionary Philadelphia of his childhood.[38]

Of that Revolutionary experience, Brown on another occasion made semi-direct reference. The account comes in a letter from Brown to

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Yellow Fever in Philadelphia and the Rise of the First Party System," *WMQ* 29 (1972), 559-86; Marshall Smelser, "The Federalist Period as an Age of Passion," *WMQ* 10 (1958), 391-419; J.H. Powell, *Bring Out Your Dead: The Great Plague of Yellow Fever in Philadelphia in 1793* (New York, 1965); Harry Ammon, *The Genêt Mission* (New York, 1973).

[37] See John C. Miller, *Crisis in Freedom· The Alien and Sedition Acts* (Boston, 1951); Smelser, "The Federalist Period as an Age of Passion", and Howe, "Republican Thought and the Political Violence of the 1790s," 38.

[38] It is, I think, revealing in this regard to compare Brown's "fictional" sketch of 1798 with the actual remonstrance against their Revolutionary situation drawn up in 1777 by the Quaker exiles. Published as *An Address to the Inhabitants of Pennsylvania, by Those Freedmen of the City of Philadelphia, who are now confined in the Mason's Lodge, by Virtue of a General Warrant Signed in Council by the Vice President of the Council of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1777), this appeal—signed by, among others, Elijah Brown— describes the Quakers' ordeal in 1777 Philadelphia in terms that more than suggest the contours of Charles Brockden Brown's Magna Graecia. In particular, "messengers" played a key and nefarious role in the father's 1777 ordeal—as they play in the son's story. See *An Address*, esp. 4, 17-18, 23, 47, 52.

his Quaker friend, Joseph Bringhurst, whom it appears Brown be-
friended at the Friends' Latin School in the 1780s. The letter is from
the mid-1790s, and in it Brown hints to his friend about some traumatic
episode in his youth. "Suppose . . . I should tell you," Brown writes,

> that when eleven or twelve years of age I spent twelve hours in each
> day, that is, that I passed the night, for 8 months together in *Jail*. In an
> apartment in which my chambers were hourly awoken by the clanking
> of chains and iron doors. Where my ears were continually assailed by
> blasphemies and obscenities. Where there was a continual suspicion of
> Inhabitants, of various and opposite characters, associated by Calamity.
> Wouldst thou place any credit in the narrative! I assure thee, my friend
> itis [*sic*] literally true.[39]

To be sure it sounds like a scene from such gothic classics as Mathew
Lewis's *The Monk* or from Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*,
and indeed literary historians have tended to view Brown's gothic
devices as precisely that: namely, as unfortunate literary borrowings
from the European canon that are somehow extrinsic to the imaginative
core of Brown.[40] Yet are they? Was Brown, in the present case, invok-
ing for his Quaker friend a scene drawn from European gothic novels,
or was he, as he says, telling—as his imagination registers it—the
"literal truth"? Was he, that is, obliquely referring to that night of
October 24, 1781, and its aftermath? He was around eleven years old
at the time when a Revolutionary mob swept through his neighbor-
hood. And might he not be conflating that experience with the "8
months" he suffered through in 1777-1778 while his father was held
captive in Virginia? For a sensitive boy, and especially one with a
"tainted" father, the sounds of rocks and breaking glass, drawing ever
nearer, would have been hard to block out, and impossible to forget.
Equally unforgettable would have been the constant taunts of "cow-
ard" and "traitor" he heard from his Philadelphia neighbors.

But then again, perhaps Brown was not referring in his letter here
to any one or two specific incidents from his childhood. Perhaps he

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[39] C.B. Brown to Joseph Bringhurst, n.d., Edwin Saeger transcript of *The Charles Brockden
Brown Papers*, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine (hereafter, "Brown-Bringhurst
Letters").

[40] For example, W.B. Berthoff, " 'A Lesson on Concealment': Brockden Brown's Method
in Fiction," *Philological Quarterly* 37 (1958), 46; and Perry Miller, ed., *Margaret Fuller:
American Romantic* (Ithaca, 1970), 223.

was referring to his childhood as a unit. After all, between 1776 and 1783, from the time he was six to the time he was twelve, Brown's life in actual fact was a cacophony of clanking chains and knocks on iron doors, of blasphemies and obscenities, of musket and cannon fire. It was a life, that is, spent on the wrong side of Revolutionary mobs, British soldiers, Revolutionary legal processes, and Revolutionary political logic. It was a life, in short, spent in exposed vulnerability to the forces of the age.

On the issue of the relations between biographical experience and aesthetic expression in Brown's fiction, biographers, historians, and literary critics have taken the sensible position that the novels Brown wrote between 1798 and 1801 were "about" 1790s contexts and/or were formalistic developments upon themes within the history of the novel.[41] It is my intention in this essay to deepen the contextual perspective on Brown by highlighting a psychological dynamic at work in his life and imagination that directly links his childhood experiences in Philadelphia with his adult fiction. This approach, I believe, serves to cast the imagination of Brown in a more comprehensive *and* more focused existential light. In particular, it supplies answers to two elusive questions about Brown's life and work: namely, why he used the peculiar (not to say idiosyncratic) themes and imagery he did, and why his remarkable period of creative ferment ended when and as suddenly as it did.[42] For the purposes of addressing these issues, I

[41] See citations in notes 1 and 2. Other relevant works in this regard are William Hedges, "Charles Brockden Brown and the Culture of Contradictions," *Early American Literature* 9 (1974), 107-40; Lawrence J. Friedman, *Inventors of the Promised Land* (New York, 1982); Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge, 1982); Jane Tomkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York, 1985).

[42] A third related question is why Brown began writing his major fiction when he did. Biographers and critics have speculated on this matter. The generally accepted argument is that the yellow fever outbreak of 1798—which killed Brown's good friend E.H. Smith and which seems to have infected Brown himself—somehow served to loose, or liberate, his creative force. See, for example, Berthoff, "Literary Career," 32-33. For an alternative view of this question, see my "Circuit of Truth: American Creative Imagination in the Age of Revolution, 1765-1828" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1988), 248-70. Suffice it to say here that the yellow fever epidemic broke out *after* Brown began his writing binge. In my opinion, it was the general political ferment and violence of the post-1797 period that served in some way to "activate" a chain of associations in Brown's imagination that he then transmuted into his gothic fiction.

want to look at two of Brown's major fictions: *Wieland*, his first
completed gothic novel, and *Edgar Huntly*, his final gothic effort.

Wieland; or the Transformation: An American Tale is Brown's best
known and most analyzed novel. Written and published in 1798, it
is a work, as biographers and historians have often noted, that uses
gothic devices to explore certain problematic aspects of late eighteenth-
century America. Yet *Wieland* has another vital dimension as well. At
its emotional core, it is a recounting—indeed a reliving—of certain
gruesome family circumstances in the life of its author, and its terror,
its *gothicism*, is the aesthetic measure of the intensity of those memories.

Wieland is based on an actual murder that occurred in upstate New
York in 1781, an account of which Brown probably read in the
Philadelphia Minerva in August 1796. As that newspaper recalled the
incident, one James Yates, bidden by a "spirit" to destroy all his idols,
in succession "dashed out the brains" of his two sleeping sons, killed
his baby daughter, and beat his wife to death with a "stake from the
garden fence." He then proceeded to destroy his eldest daughter, after
first making her dance and sing beside her mother's corpse. Finally
he assaulted his sister, though this time without success. Captured by
neighbors, he refused to repent for his acts. Instead he prostrated
himself on the ground and exclaimed: "my father, thou knowest that
it was in obedience to thy commands, and for thy glory, that I have
done this deed. . . . " Taken to jail as a lunatic, he twice escaped,
both times being recaptured.[43]

What Brown no doubt saw in this gruesome tale was an ideal vehicle
to dramatize his own allied concerns about religious enthusiasm and
philosophical rationalism. Sometime after reading the newspaper ac-
count, Brown set down his thoughts for a dramatic treatment of the
subject in an outline. He wrote his novel in the spring and summer
of 1798.[44]

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[43] On Brown and the Yates murder, see Alexander Cowie, "Historical Essay," in Charles
Brockden Brown, *Wieland; or The Transformation: An American Tale* in Sydney J. Krause and
S.W. Reid, eds., *The Novel and Related Works of Charles Brockden Brown* (6 vols., Kent, OH,
1977-1987), 1:319-21 (hereafter, *Wieland*). The quotations are from Carl Van Doren, "Early
American Realism," *The Nation*, Nov. 12, 1914, 577-78.

[44] See C.B. Brown to Bringhurst, "Brown-Bringhurst Letters," Oct. 24, 1795. On the
writing history of *Wieland*, see *Wieland*, 319-23.

Brown's outline is interesting in two respects. First, its three protago-
nists carry the names Charles, *Charlotte*, and *Caroline*. Its author, it
would seem, had in mind a work that revolved around his own various
selves. Second, in tracing out two generations of Wieland family
history, in his outline Brown puts no emphasis on the death of the
elder Wieland. Of the adult life of that family patriarch he merely
notes: "He lived a batchelor and farmer till 1734. Then married a
girl of 18. . . . They died 1749." Instead, Brown's outline places the
dramatic focus where its model, the Yates tragedy, would suggest: on
the family murder committed by the second-generation Wieland son,
Charles.[45]

In writing his novel Brown changed his characters' names. Charles,
Charlotte, and Caroline became Theodore, Catharine, and Clara. This
is a trivial detail. Also, however, in writing his case study of religious
fanaticism, he undertook a fundamental change of focus. Where in the
outline Brown is concerned primarily with plotting out the immediate
events leading up to and surrounding the Yates/Wieland murders,
in the novel his interest shifts to the root cause of the tragedy, which
he locates in the mysterious death of the family patriarch. From that
pivotal event all else in *Wieland* follows.

Wieland provides the elder Wieland with an extensive biography.
Born in Germany, apprenticed to a merchant in England, member of
a stern Protestant sect, missionary to American Indians, the family
patriarch eventually settled down to a farm and family outside of
Philadelphia. He had two children, Theodore and Clara. Subsequently
his religious preoccupations returned, and for a time he disappeared
into the wilderness. When he rejoined his family again, he was a
changed man. Patently, his mental health was in decline. Convinced
that he had failed to carry out a divine command, his own "sense of
wrong" began to overpower him. "He felt as if a certain period of
hesitation and reluctance had been allowed him, but that this period
was passed. He was no longer permitted to obey. The duty assigned
to him was transferred, in consequence of his disobedience, to another,
and all that remained was to endure the penalty." At length, he
"hinted to his wife, that his end was near. His imagination did not

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[45] *Wieland*, 427-39.

prefigure the mode or the time of his decease, but was fraught with an incurable persuasion that his death was at hand."[46]

That death, when it came, proved spectacular. Worshipping alone in his "Temple," his "fancy immediately pictured to itself, a person bearing a lamp." As he turned to view the visitant, "his right arm received a blow from a heavy club. At the same instant, a very bright spark was seen to light upon his clothes. In a moment, the whole was reduced to ashes." Two hours later, the elder Wieland died.[47]

"Such," writes Clara Wieland, the narrator of the novel, "was the end of my father."

> None surely was ever more mysterious. When we recollect his gloomy anticipations and unconquerable anxiety; the security from human malice which his character, the place, and the condition of the times, might be supposed to confer; the purity and cloudlessness of the atmosphere, which rendered it impossible that lightning was the cause; what are the conclusions that we must form?[48]

Clara is writing years after the events. Her stated purpose in supplying her extensive narrative is to relate the story of her brother's decline into murder. Through her tale—which is *Wieland*—she hopes to "exemplify the force of early impressions, and show the immeasurable evils that flow from an erroneous or imperfect discipline."[49] With this in mind Clara's task is to explain her brother Wieland's dementia through her depiction of his transformation into madness and murder.

For her brother as for herself, Clara recalls, the years after their father's death were "tranquil and happy." Money was no problem, and their education was looked after by an indulgent aunt. In terms of religion, brother and sister were nurtured and came of age under the influences of an easy sort of Deism, grounded in a deep feeling for the goodness and grandeur of nature. Clara felt this sensibility profoundly, as did her best friend—and Wieland's future wife—Catharine. Something in Wieland, though, seemed to rebel against this benevolent and graceful environment.[50]

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[46] Ibid., 11-13.
[47] Ibid., 18.
[48] Ibid., 19.
[49] Ibid., 5.
[50] Ibid., 20-22.

Eventually in her purposely disjointed narrative Clara gets to the gruesome murders that are at the heart of the gothic tale and of her brother's demise. She tells how Theodore Wieland, like James Yates, in obedience to what he takes to be a divine voice, kills his wife and children and attempts to kill his sister. Thereby Charles Brockden Brown arrives at what can be described as the epistemological moral of his story. *This*, he is saying, is what can occur in a world where too much faith is put in the dictates of each individual's reason and judgment (or personal revelation), and not enough regard is paid to the lessons of history and experience. This, moreover, is the aspect of *Wieland* that literary critics and historians have been drawn to. From this perspective, *Wieland* is "about" the potential dark implications of late eighteenth-century American and European optimistic rationalism.[51]

But why the idiosyncratic gothic imagery, and whence the sense of terror? The most compelling answer to this critical question lies not in arguments about Brown's borrowing from European literary models, or in offering broad abstractions about the "private anguishes of consolidating capitalist culture,"[52] but rather in recognition of the fact that in its emotional essence *Wieland* is not fiction. It is Charles Brockden Brown's imaginative account of—and psychological return to—the experience and consequences of his childhood in the Pennsylvania Revolution.

When Clara, in her role as narrator, recounts the episode of her father's death, she relies primarily on details she has secondhand from her uncle. Her own actual memory of the event, she admits, is far less authoritative. "I was at this time a child of six years of age," she reports.

> The impressions that were then made upon me can never be effaced. I was ill qualified to judge respecting what was then passing; but as I advanced in age, and became more fully acquainted with these facts,

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[51] For example, Berthoff, "Literary Career"; Larzer Ziff, "A Reading of *Wieland*," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 77 (1962), 51-57; Arthur Kimball, *Rational Fictions: A Study of Charles Brockden Brown* (McMinnville, OR, 1968); Hedges, "Charles Brockden Brown and the Culture of Contradictions"; Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*.

[52] Such as in Hume, "Charles Brockden Brown and the Uses of Gothicism," or Watts, *The Republic Reborn*. The quotation is from Watts, 181.

they oftener became the subject of my thoughts. Their resemblance to recent events revived then with new force in my memory, and made me more anxious to explain them. Was this the penalty of disobedience? this the stroke of a vindictive and invisible hand? . . . Or was it merely the irregular expansion of the fluid that imparts warmth to our heart and blood, caused by the fatigue of the preceding day, or flowing, by established laws, from the condition of his thoughts.[53]

This is to evoke, I suggest, the personal circumstances of Brown's own childhood experience of a father's fateful disappearance. Clara furthermore, when she describes the events of *her* father's demise— as she does recurrently throughout the book—uses language that recalls the actual environmental circumstances that surrounded Brown's father's arrest. Or in other words, the memories that Clara retains of the time of her father's death would have been the same general impression of late 1770s Philadelphia retained by her creator:

A light proceeding from the edifice, made every part of the scene visible. A gleam diffused itself over the intermediate space, and instantly a loud report, like the explosion of a mine, followed.

The first visitings of this light called up a train of horrors in my mind; destruction impended over this spot; the voice which I had lately heard had warned me to retire, and had menaced me with the fate of my father if I refused. I was desirous, but unable, to obey; these gleams were such as precluded the stroke by which he fell; the hour, perhaps, was the same—I shuddered as if I had beheld, suspended over me, the exterminating sword.

Now, for the first time, suspicions were suggested as to the nature of the light which I had seen. Was it possible to have been the companion of that supernatural visage; a meteorous refulgence producible at the will of him to whom that visage belonged, and partaking of the nature of that which accompanied my father's death?[54]

To summarize: At the heart of the *terror* that haunts Clara and Theodore and thus that animates *Wieland*, are the fears and apparitions that are the consequence of the elder Wieland's death. Indeed, it is the pre-existing presence of those fears and apparitions in the psychology of the second-generation Wielands that makes it possible for the ventrilo-

[53] *Wieland*, 19.
[54] Ibid., 16, 64, 149.

quist, Carwin, to wreak his havoc in the story. Carwin, as the reader learns at the novel's end, is not a malevolent being; he is a prankster. However, because both Clara and Theodore are predisposed, for clear biographical reasons, to "unconquerable apprehensions,"[55] Carwin's pranks have unexpectedly profound effects. It is in this sense that the tragedy that befalls the lives of Clara and Theodore Wieland came as the consequence of their father's fate.

And what, precisely, was it that Clara, in the years of her father's demise, feared? At one point she describes her anxiety this way:

> It would be difficult to depict, in words, the ingredients and hues of that phantom which haunted me. An hand invisible and of preternatural strength, lifted by human passions, and selecting my life for its aim, were parts of this terrific image. All places were alike accessible to this foe, or if his empire were restricted by local bounds, those bounds were utterly inscrutable by me.

At another point she writes:

> I had been assured that a design had been formed against my life. The ruffians had leagued to murder me. Whom had I offended? Who was there with whom I had ever maintained intercourse, who was capable of harbouring such atrocious purposes? . . . what had I done to deserve to be made the victim of malignant passions?[56]

This, then, is where Brown's thoughts wandered and finally focused in the spring and summer of 1798 while Federalists and Republicans rioted around him in their quest for a virtuous republic.[57] He imagined Clara, a child who was six years old when her father met a mysterious demise—as Brown himself was six at the time of his father's "demise." Clara remembers and describes that catastrophe in her life in terms that recall the context of Elijah Brown's arrest. In Clara's terror-ridden childhood world, there were "explosions," "loud reports," "bursting illuminations," "ruffians leagued to murder." So were there in Brown's 1777 Philadelphia. For Clara, these images and memories

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[55] Ibid., 84.

[56] Ibid., 84-85, 65-66.

[57] Among works dealing with the cultural context of 1798 are Smelser, "The Federalist Period as an Age of Passion"; and David Sisson, *The American Revolution of 1800* (New York, 1974). For Brown's place in that context, see Kafer, "Circuit of Truth," 255-56, 269-70.

linger for a lifetime. Indeed, when she is faced with the mystery and
tragedy surrounding her brother's demise, she automatically thinks of
the circumstances of her father's end. Brown even has her explicitly
state the point: "Their resemblance to recent events revived them
with new force in my memory, and made me more anxious to explain
them."[58]

Brown wrote all of *Wieland* and the first twelve chapters of *Arthur
Mervyn* in early-to-mid 1798. After completing *Wieland* he went on
to write, in rapid succession, "Memoirs of Stephen Calvert," "Mem-
oirs of Carwin, the Biloquist," *Ormond*, and then *Edgar Huntly*. What
all these works or fragments share is Brown's tell-tale nervous, not to
say murderous, *gothic* energy. They also either end unhappily or with
ambiguous effect. After completing *Edgar Huntly*, Brown wrote three
more novels. These final efforts are sentimental exercises devoid of
gothic terror and, significantly, they all end conventionally and hap-
pily.[59] In the biography of Brown, then, *Edgar Huntly* stands as a
watershed event. Something intrinsic to its composition seems to have
brought about a transformation of Brown's imagination, and indeed
in his whole emotional make-up. What was it?

Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker's first nine chapters serve
as prologue for the moment when Edgar, the book's narrator, enters
a wilderness cave in search of the fugitive, Clithero Edny. With this
action, a multi-layered drama commences, with the pursuit of Clithero
serving as a narrative vehicle for a journey of broader—and, I want
to suggest, narrower—proportions. For the cave, while a concrete
entity of rocks and crevices, is also a metaphoric world of "intense
dark," wherein "impending injuries cannot . . . be descried, nor
shunned, nor repelled."[60] It is thus the intrinsic gothic world of Brown,

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[58] *Wieland*, 19.

[59] The writing history of *Arthur Mervyn* is a little foggy. What is certain is that Brown
wrote the bulk of part one (that is, chapters 1-12) before mid-1798 and the remainder in late
1798 and early 1799. As for his other pre-*Huntly* works, he wrote *Ormond* in late 1798 and
early 1799; he wrote "Memoirs of Carwin, the Biloquist" (then unpublished) in late 1798.
All these works or fragments contain unhappy or (in the case of *Ormond*) equivocal endings.
After writing *Huntly*, Brown wrote *Arthur Mervyn*, part two, in 1800, and *Clara Howard* and
Jane Talbot in 1800-1801. These three works contain unalloyed happy endings. On this writing
history, see Kafer, "Circuit of Truth," 264-72, 285, 289, 305-7, and notes thereto.

[60] Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* in Krause and
Reid, eds., *The Novels and Related Works of Charles Brockden Brown*, 4:100.

within which rage the terrors of nature's, of society's, and ultimately of the mind's, devising. For Edgar to enter and confront those terrors, is to seek control over them. The same applies for Edgar's creator. And to survive the ordeal, for both Edgar and his creator, is to quiet those terrors—along with the potent energies they generate.

Edgar Huntly has a close friend who suffered a "bloody and myste- rious catastrophe." Indeed, Waldegrave has been murdered, and Ed- gar announces himself "zeal[ous] in pursuit of his assassin." The man Edgar suspects is Clithero Edny, "an emigrant from Ireland."[61]

Edgar Huntly is set in the 1780s. It contains many complicated subplots, the longest of which involves Clithero's own story of his Irish background. But the pivotal action takes place in a wilderness region of Pennsylvania called "Norwalk." It is here where Edgar—and Brown—come face to face with their ultimate demons.

For my purposes, the key episode and sequence in the novel is the following: one day Edgar falls asleep in his cottage on the outskirts of Norwalk and awakes, incredibly, in the blackness of a cave. He is alone, half-dressed, and a tomahawk lies at his side. He thinks himself in the midst of a "wakeful dream."

> Surely my senses were fettered or depraved by some spell. I was still asleep, and this was merely a tormenting vision, or madness had seized me, and the darkness that environed and the hunger that afflicted me, existed only in my own distempered imagination.

Haunted by fear and thirst and hunger, and despairing of escape, he contemplates suicide. But then the glaring eyes of a panther intrude. His life instinct takes over, and with preternatural strength he hurls the tomahawk at his adversary. The panther falls, and Edgar, in his abject hunger, hurries to devour the "yet warm blood and reeking fibres of a brute." His regression into instinct, into his animal nature, is complete.[62]

Edgar at this point does not know how or why he is in his predica- ment. Later he will deduce that he was the victim of a sleepwalking incident—of that enigmatic phenomenon that betokens "a mind sorely wounded." But for the present his main concern is to find his way out

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[61] Ibid., 6, 8, 13-14.
[62] Ibid., 103, 128, 161, 164, 167.

of the cave. To this end he wanders in the darkness. Eventually he advances upon the sounds of running water, and then within the glow of a campfire. And here the unbelievable once again intrudes. The death struggle with the panther had been disorienting enough; now he confronts—in 1780s eastern Pennsylvania—a band of savage Indians, complete with a female captive. His "wakeful dream," as he terms it, continues to unfold. There he had been, at one moment, settling down to rest in his cozy room, lapsing occasionally "into fits of incoherent fancies, the harbingers of sleep"; and in the next he lay battered and starved on the floor of a cave infested with wild animals and Indians.[63]

Edgar, in the course of his pursuit of the supposed murderer Clithero, has entered, jarringly and without forewarning, a gothic netherworld. What, specifically, does he find there?

"Most men are haunted by some species of terror or antipathy, which they are, for the most part, able to trace to some incident which befell them in their early years." The thought is Edgar's, and as he undergoes his trial in the cave, which forces him to wonder, "Had some mysterious power snatched me from the earth, and cast me, in a moment, into the heart of the wilderness," he reveals the kernel of his own secret "species" of history: *He was orphaned in the American Revolution.* That late event he has painful "reason to remember":

> My father's house was placed on the verge of this solitude. Eight of these assassins assailed it at the dead of night. My parents and an infant child were murdered in their beds; the house was pillaged, and then burnt to the ground.

Now, years later, immersed in the cave's shadows and observing in secret the savage agents of his family's demise, Edgar contemplates revenge.[64]

"Let the fate of my parents be . . . remembered," Edgar intones as he confronts his savage adversaries. "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 dependants."[65] And so Edgar begins his massacre. He desires to kill the

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[63] Ibid., 13, 159.
[64] Ibid., 173, 171, 173.
[65] Ibid., 178.

whole number, and succeeds in killing many, of his family's oppressors. Vengeance, and justice, finally, is his.

As, by the evidence of Edgar's creator's subsequent literary career, vengeance finally was Charles Brockden Brown's as well. For Brown too, after a fashion, had been "orphaned" in "the last war." *His* assailants, though, had not been Indians but American Revolutionaries. It was they who had forced the young Brown to pass his nights "for 8 months together in *Jail*," to live in the midst of those "associated by calamity" as the object of "blasphemies and obscenities." In this, Brown's last gothic effort, his protagonist, alluding to the family history of the Huntlys, admits that he "never looked upon or called up the image of a savage without shuddering." The same could well have been the case with America's first gothic novelist.[66]

My argument here is that in Edgar's retribution against those who assaulted his family, Brown confronted and resolved that which had haunted *him* since the 1770s. In "The Man at Home" sketch and then in *Wieland*, he had initially articulated what it was that had happened to him back in Revolutionary Philadelphia; in *Edgar Huntly*, which he wrote in 1799, he acted out his aggression and exacted his revenge. In the process, he also unburdened himself of the demons that had made him feel throughout his early manhood like an alien in early national America. The most compelling proof of this is the fact that after writing *Huntly*, he never again wrote gothic fiction. In his literary career he became a full-fledged sentimentalist, and in politics he came out as a committed and partisan Federalist.[67]

Brown, in sum, as a consequence of his particular Revolutionary experience, was a post-Revolutionary who possessed an unusual and complex understanding of what it was Americans had committed themselves to. His special perspective is nowhere clearer than in the final plot twist in *Edgar Huntly*. Edgar discovers that Clithero is not the murderer they both think he is; he is instead an unjustly maligned innocent. Edgar now tries to "cure" Clithero with this good news. But his efforts are to no avail. Regardless of the fact that Clithero is guiltless

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[66] See n. 39 above; *Edgar Huntly*, 173-74.

[67] On the period of Brown's early manhood, see Kafer, "Circuit of Truth," 224-70; and for the final phase of his life, see ibid., 305-12.

in deed, he has become deranged in fact; and that derangement, whatever its unfortunate cause, cannot be cured. On this harsh note *Edgar Huntly* ends. Against the dictates of justice and sympathy, Clithero must be locked up: perhaps for his own good but certainly, and most importantly, for everybody else's good.

Thereby Brown, in this last of his gothic efforts, raised for his compatriots the daunting question: Might not heart-felt benevolence, in the world of men and women, at times prove neither a clear nor even a moral guide? Might there be cases, situations, wherein a party like Clithero must be approached not in terms of his ultimate culpability, his innocence, but rather according to the immediate danger he poses to others? Clithero's creator, at least, had glimpsed the possibility that to act for the good of all, for the *res publica*, might mean the necessity of acting against the basic dictates of the human heart, and perhaps even against the just claims of the innocent. Of course there were others in Brown's America who were prepared to take such actions in the interests of what they deemed the higher good—Alexander Hamilton and George Washington prominently among them. But how many Americans, like Brown, were prepared *simultaneously* to emphathize and indeed identify with Clithero *and* condemn him in that higher cause?

The early-to-mid-nineteenth century would witness a host of writers and artists—David S. Reynolds's "radical democrats" among them— whose own personal experiences provided special perspectives on the contradictions and "tyrannies" intrinsic to the nevertheless glorious American republican experiment. Charles Brockden Brown stands as an important precursor because his special historical and biographical circumstances anticipated theirs in meaningful ways. Or, to put the case otherwise, the Revolutionary ambiguities that a later American fictional character, Captain Vere, would have foisted upon him in Melville's novella about the 1790s, *Billy Budd*, came to the son of Elijah and Mary Brown as his 1770s Philadelphia birthright.

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