

THE MIND MADE WHOLE:

A STUDY OF CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

by

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ABSTRACT

Charles Brockden Brown was America's first professional man of letters. His purpose in his fiction and in his journalism was to establish and clarify a distinctly American cultural identity, as well as to provide moral instruction for his readers. His writings reveal that he had a definite philosophy which was based upon a neo-Calvinist interpretation of human psychology. Brown believed that human thought existed on two levels--one being rational and conscious, the other, irrational and unconscious. The unconscious plane of human thought, he felt, was the source of delusion and depravity. A purely rational person could never exist, he asserted, and therefore one must integrate the conscious and the unconscious minds--in other words, one must make the mind whole. Such a view of the human psyche was revisionist: Brown objected to the notion, popular among eighteenth century intellectuals, that the human mind was born free and capable of ultimate perfection. The dreams of social progress which such a view inspired were, in Brown's eyes, impossible to fulfill.

Critical and historical analysts of Brown's social theory have discovered an ambiguity in his thought--many have felt that Brown's early fiction was of a revolutionary nature, and that his later non-fiction was conservative, even reactionary. It is my contention, however, that Brown experienced an identity crisis during his early years as an author. He liked to imagine himself as a romantic artist, but intellectually he was rigid and conservative. Thus he was concerned with his own mental in-

tegration, and his writing reflects his personal search for the "whole mind."

Brown's social philosophy grew out of his belief in man's inevitable depravity. Brown's concept of an ideal citizen was a man attuned to societal traditions and values, who staunchly upheld the status quo. Since he believed men to be only partially rational and therefore incapable of correct judgment on difficult moral questions, he felt that traditional authority should guide men's conduct. Traditional family structure, for instance, determined woman's social role. Social mores created a "conscience" which would control the unruly unconscious.

In a broader sense, Brown's concept of the dual nature of the mind was applicable to the socio-economic structure of the American landscape. In contrast to Jefferson's vision of America as an agrarian utopia, Brown saw a mixed, rural-urban society as most desirable. To him, the city represented higher culture and refinement and thus became a source of instruction for the rational portion of the mind. The rural environment was parallel to the unconscious mind "ordered" by traditional social forms. Both elements, Brown thought, were essential to a healthy society.

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Chapter I: Impressions of the Man and His Work

Brown's personal appearance was remarkable. He was a tall man--with a powerful frame--and little or no flesh. It was impossible to pass him, in the street, without stopping to look at him. John Neal, 1824.¹

In appearance Brown was 'short and dumpy, with light eyes and hair inclining to be sandy, while the expression on his face reflected ill health rather than intellect. The lines on his brow seemed to have been corroded by consumption, not chiseled by midnight meditations. A weak constitution had been his parents' legacy to him. Yet vividly in his countenance glowed the light of benevolence.' Harry R. Warfel, 1949.²

Brown was one of the only three or four professional authors, that America has ever produced. He was the first. . . .He was thought little or nothing of, by his countrymen; rose, gradually, from the newspapers to the magazines, and circulating libraries; lived miserably poor; died, as he lived, miserably poor; and went to his grave with a broken heart. John Neal, 1824.³

The remarkable thing is that he got so much work done. Warner B. Berthoff, 1954.⁴

Charles Brockden Brown sought a self-image, a definition of himself as a new being in a new world. As the first professional man of letters in the United States, he was without predecessors to act as models, and so, although he was self-conscious about creating a unique American literature, he turned for patterns to a romantic, European vision of the artist which was inconsistent with his basic philosophical conservatism. Consequently he sometimes appeared to be what he was not--there is a remarkable incongruity between what Brown's biographers say he was and the man who is revealed in his own writing. He was viewed in the nineteenth century, and after, as a prototype of the poor, struggling author; he was described as a radical thinker and a brood-

ing, secretive intellectual. Significantly, during his brief career as a fiction-writer, Brown encouraged such a view of himself, and believed in it.

Charles was born January 17, 1771, on the eve of the American Revolution. His father, Elijah Brown, was a wealthy Quaker who supported the protest against the Stamp Act⁵, but who is not known to have taken part in any revolutionary action. He was certainly an educated man⁶, providing Charles with an intellectually stimulating home environment. Charles, the youngest of five sons, was frail and sickly, and was petted and pampered by his rather matriarchal grandmother and his dominating mother.⁷ His parents were very anxious about his health, and it may have been this concern that led him to view himself as different from his brothers, and thus to his later self-image as a romantic non-conformist. He was encouraged at an early age to turn his energies into intellectual pursuits:

His parents relate that when but an infant, if they left home, he required nothing but a book to divert him, and on return they would find him musing over the page with all the gravity of a student. On his return from school they would find him at the hour of dinner in the parlour, where, having slipped off his shoes, he was mounted on a table and deeply engaged in the consultation of a map suspended on the side of the wall.⁸

Although this description seems to be an obvious exaggeration of Charles' inclination to bookishness, it is perhaps an accurate indication of the direction his parents wished him to take. His older brothers became successful merchants and world travellers. They were independent of family. Charles became an author and relied upon his parents for funds, lived in their home, and suc-

cumbed to their wishes even into his thirties. It is little wonder that he had problems of identity, when because of ill health he believed he could not participate in the active world, at a time when the new nation was most active and growing, and all worthy men seemed to be participating in it.

Charles lived the major part of his life in Philadelphia, which was during that period the center of the artistic and political life of the young nation. The city had been occupied by the British during the Revolutionary War for less than a year, and with very little repression, due to the quiet nature of the city with its large population of Loyalists and non-violent Quakers.⁹ Thus Charles felt the chaotic effects of war only indirectly. His father's business was ruined, but with peace he recovered his losses and, apparently, did well in real estate.¹⁰ In 1782, Charles began his formal education, under the instruction of one of the foremost teachers of the time, Robert Proud. Proud was a Quaker, had been a Loyalist during the war¹¹, and undoubtedly exerted a powerful conservative influence over the young intellectual. Charles continued to correspond with him long after he had left the school.

While still in his teens, Charles began the study of law, probably at the insistence of his parents, which he found tedious and boring. He joined a debating club in 1787 which discussed imaginary cases; in some cases in which he acted as judge of the debate, his "decisions" still survive. One of them deals with the question of sedition, and provides a clue to the nature of his political thinking. One question the debating society

had proposed was, "Is falsehood necessary to constitute a libel against the chief magistrate of a state?" He concludes that a truthful criticism was a "misdemeanour," for, "the truth or justice of [the critic's] animadversions, or a universal assent to their propriety will not heal the wound, which the peace and good order of society have thereby received."¹² In other words, truth is less important than civil order. Charles was in complete agreement, at least at this time, with a traditionalistic interpretation of the freedom of speech, a tradition which was rapidly losing influence in the United States. This issue would come to the fore with the Sedition Act of 1798--apparently, Charles would have supported and upheld that Act. As Charles was coming of age, he appears to have been conservative in his outlook and practical-minded rather than idealistic.

While he was involved in the debating club, Charles also participated in a group devoted to the improvement of the members' literary styles, the Belles Lettres Society. Similar clubs and societies were being formed throughout the United States, which perhaps indicates a desire among the members to dispense with the chaotic disorganization that had characterized national life during the Revolutionary and Confederation periods. Certainly a passion for organization existed, the Constitution being just one product. Charles gave the opening address to the Belles Lettres Society in 1787, in which he made a comparison between society at large, and a smaller group.

As the laws and constitution of this country will justly claim a principle share of every good citizen's attention, so it is incumbent on us, who are members of a smaller community, to acquaint

ourselves with the nature and reason of that association to which we are united. . . .To give a general idea of the spirit of the laws as they are peculiar to this institution, is a task of no small labour and importance. . . .The idea of a perfect commonwealth is not the same extravagant thing in education as in politics. The settled depravity of mankind, will never yield to the gentle admonitions of the wise, and the stubborn and inveterate prejudices of the vulgar will be always hostile to the kindly influence of good government.

But the manners of youth are fresh and pliant, their deviations from the path of rectitude and duty may more easily be recalled, and it is by no means difficult to accelerate their steps in the pursuit of knowledge.¹³

Charles asserts here that society in general is incapable of perfection--Utopia is impossible because of man's "settled depravity." However, in a small, select group of impressionable young men, there is hope for personal improvement. In a miniature society, ideals of perfection can be attained. Preceding this rather Calvinistic statement, we find a more sanguine passage:

I am sensible that dreams of absolute perfection, can be realized only in another world; that plans of government without defect, and men whose spirits have been rendered perfect, can appear only in a future and unknown stage of being; yet I cannot help thinking but that success in every pursuit will be commensurate to the ideas of perfection which we entertain concerning that pursuit.¹⁴

There is a suggestion in the speech that through universal education, a perfect, or, at least, an improved, society can be created. Certainly such an idea is consistent with the progressive thinkers of the time. But there is a basic contradiction within the speaker's mind, in which at one moment he is capable of the greatest optimism about future society, and at the next, only rigid pessimism. Charles' conservatism was being challenged by contact with progressive idealism.

The ambiguity of the speech is a forewarning of a change that soon followed. On finishing his legal instruction, Charles decided to give up the law and to pursue literature as a full-time occupation. Although not a surprising decision in view of his long interest in poetry and fiction, the gesture was personally radical, as no man in America had undertaken such a career before. In addition this was a radical move because it denied the importance of many values which Brown's parents had taught him, indeed, those values on which they assumed their society functioned. Giving up the law meant giving up the surest avenue to financial success that the United States offered; it meant giving up the opportunity of aiding directly in the creation of a new nation by participating in the government; it meant giving up the possibilities of personal social advancement in status and prestige. In order to justify his action in the eyes of his family and friends, he struck a moral pose, and attacked the law as the basest of all professions:

He professed that he could not reconcile it with his ideas of morality to become indiscriminately the defender of right or wrong; thereby intimating, if not asserting, that a man must, in the practice of law, not only deviate from morality, but become the champion of injustice.¹⁵

On the other hand, he argued, writing would have a moral influence on society if he communicated truth with it. His parents, after long debates and admonitions, agreed to support him while he established himself as an author.

Perhaps the strongest influence that guided Charles to his decision was his friendship with the promising young intellectual, Elihu Hubbard Smith. Smith was a freethinker--that is, he

rejected traditional Christianity and espoused Deism, and he questioned other institutions, from government to marriage. He accepted the ideology of William Godwin, who asserted the need for a social system based on truth and sincerity. Such idealism had a persuasive influence on the young writer, who was despairingly caught in the formalistic morass of legal literature and was suffering from depression and morbid fantasies. Smith wrote later of the condition which had oppressed Brown:

You began to fancy that these fictions were real; that you had indeed suffered, enjoyed, known, and seen, all that you so long pretended to have experienced; every subsequent event became tinctured with this conviction and accompanied with this diseased apprehension; the habit was formed; and you wandered in a world of your own creation. Now and then a ray of truth broke in upon you, but with an influence too feeble to dissipate the phantoms which errors had conjured up around you. Godwin came, and all was light.¹⁶

Godwin provided an inspiration for Charles at a time when he needed strength of purpose to break away from the narrow path he was following, but it is misleading to view him as a freethinker like Smith. In his subsequent writings we see very little of Godwin, and a great deal of the conservatism that characterized his earliest writings. Instead, Charles adopted the pose of the freethinker, as it conveniently fitted his radical action in becoming an author. He had to create an impression consistent with his new identity as "author." His close friend and biographer, William Dunlap, was taken in by the pose, as he wrote, "He saw the wrong and injustice and evil which exist, and instead of attributing them to the ignorance and selfishness of individuals, he assigned as the cause the errors or inefficiency of those codes which are intended to enlighten or restrain."¹⁷ Such a

viewpoint, however, is entirely inconsistent with the substance of Brown's writings, which are concerned with the unavoidable weakness of man and with his inevitable depravity. One must conclude that Charles' biographers simply did not understand him, or that he appeared to be what he was not. There is a good deal of evidence to support the latter conclusion.

It was upon assuming the profession of a writer that Charles began to appear eccentric, as Dunlap writes of him, he "loathed the common pursuits and common topics of men, and appeared in society an eccentric, if not an isolated being."¹⁸ Of course, his parents had encouraged him to be different from his brothers, and had isolated him as a child, but while studying law he had been avid for society, and he had formed close friendships.¹⁹ The lonely, brooding intellectual was not a real man, he was a type, another pose. Charles was pursuing an occupation in which he had no companion, no standard with which to compare himself. He turned to a tradition which viewed the artist as a visionary, an outcast, an eccentric, and he tried to live up to it. He believed in that view of the artist, but such a view of himself was fictional. In an article published in 1803, Brown discussed his profession. He turned for its definition to Europe: "In Europe, Authorship is in some instances a trade."²⁰ He laments the fact that the author by trade is usually despised as poor. "A poor author, is a phrase so often employed, that the two words have almost coalesced into one."²¹ The young Charles strove for the distinction of being a "poor author." In another small piece, "The Life of the Student," Brown portrays the writer

as a lonely, suffering being: "his life is passed in solitude and anxiety, . . . looked up from every eye, and lost even to himself, he is reminded that he lives, only by the necessities of life; he then starts up as from a dream, and regrets that the day has passed unenjoyed, without affording means of happiness to the morrow."²² Brown admits that the world of the author is a dream-world, of which the author is a resident--a fantastic being, a recluse, impoverished and lonely.

When Charles decided to become a writer, he attempted to recreate in himself the romantic character associated with that profession. His letters of this time have a remarkable similarity in mood to those of Goethe's character, Werther. The Sorrows of Werther had captured the imagination of America²³--here was a portrait of a young man so sensitive to the beauties of life and love that he despairs at his inability to possess them forever, and so commits suicide. Although Werther's arguments for suicide in the face of the immensity of life may not have appealed to Brown intellectually or morally, the image of the brooding romantic undoubtedly had the same emotional appeal to him as it had to his contemporaries. He wrote to a close friend:

We are strange, unreasonable creatures; at least such am I. I utterly despise myself. I am the object of my most unbounded pity, the slave of a gloomy and distressful musing. The fair forms of social dignity and happiness still continue to diminish to my sight. I lift up my languid eyes and gaze after them without effect; they still mingle and are lost in dim obscurity and grey confusion, and nothing but a wide vacuity presents itself.²⁴

In another letter he says, "Had I never had friends and relations, I am convinced that before this time I had ceased either

to exist, or to exist as an inhabitant of America."²⁵ Charles continually fails to give any concrete reasons for his unhappiness, but hints that some secret guilt is gnawing at him. Elihu Hubbard Smith, after receiving a letter of this nature from Charles, rebukes him,

Why do you so much delight in mystery? Is it the disease of will? or of habit? Do you, of choice, give to the simplest circumstances the air of fiction or have you been so long accustomed to deal in visionary scenes, to intertwine the real with the imaginary, and to enwrap yourself in the mantle of ambiguous seeming, that your pen involuntarily borrows the phraseology of fancy, and by the spell of magic words still diffuses round you the mist of obscuring uncertainty? The man of Truth, Charles! the pupil of Reason has no mysteries. He knows that former errors do not constitute him guilty now; he has nothing to conceal.²⁶

Smith asks Charles if he is not creating a fiction of himself similar to his other fictions. Significantly, the theme of concealment recurs again and again in his fiction, and always with the same conclusion, that that "which we ought not to disclose it is criminal to harbour."²⁷ There was an overlap between Charles' real life and his imaginary life, and some failure on his part to distinguish between them. Brown described himself as having a dual personality:

I am conscious of a double mental existence. When I am sufficiently excited to write, all my ideas flow naturally and irresistibly through the medium of sympathies which steep them in shade, though the feelings they bring are so pleasing as to prevent my perceiving it. The tone of my works being thus the necessary result of the advancement of those truths or discoveries which lead me to composition, I am made so happy for the time as to be ignorant of its real effect upon my reader. My social one has more of light than darkness upon it, because, unless I could carry into society the excitement which makes me write, I could not fall into its feelings. Perhaps the difference of the two may be thus summed up: in my literary moods I am aiming at making the world something better than I find

it; in my social ones I am content to take it as it is.²⁸

In this suggestive passage, Brown declares that he is a different being when he is writing than when he is leading his normal social life, and the effect of his writing is a catharsis and a consequent end to any anxieties and doubts he was suffering before. He uses the light-darkness metaphor again--his social life is conscious, but he implies that his private life as an author is unconscious, in which his ideas "flow naturally and irresistably." His writing, therefore, worked therapeutically as an acting out of his fantasies, and in order to write he had to assume a special role. In Arthur Mervyn he confesses, "The pen is the pacifier. It checks the mind's career; it circumscribes her wanderings. It traces out and compels us to adhere to one path. It ever was my friend. Often it has blunted my vexations, hushed my stormy passions, turned my peevishness to soothing, my fierce revenge to heart-dissolving pity."²⁹ In "The Rhapsodist" essays of 1789, Charles explored the artist's use of his "fancy," or his imagination. Calling himself a rhapsodist, he says of himself,

A rhapsodist is one who delivers the sentiments suggested by the moment in artless and unpremeditated language. . . .He pours forth the effusions of a sprightly fancy, and describes the devious wanderings of a quick but thoughtful mind; But he is equally remote from the giddy raptures of enthusiasm, and the sober didactic strain of dull philosophy.³⁰

Although his writing is to be spontaneous, it must have certain standards or controls: it must be neither too emotional nor too rational. Even in his earliest writings, therefore, Brown was

seeking a middle course between passion and reason. His basic conservatism was not effaced when he assumed the role of the author, or "rhapsodist;" although his appearance was romantic, his thinking was sober.

Brown's biographers have frequently turned to the characters he created to describe him, as though his fictional creations were autobiographical. For instance, David Lee Clark perceives a similarity between the young author and Alcuin, the hero of an early dialogue on the rights of women. Clark says, "who can doubt that Alcuin was speaking straight from the heart and from the experience of his creator when he drew the vivid picture of the unhappy life of the teacher?"³¹ Alcuin describes himself as an awkward youth:

I looked at my unpowdered locks, my worsted stockings, and my pewter buckles. I bethought me of my embarrassed air, and my uncouth gait. I pondered on the superciliousness of wealth and talents. . .but, though confused and panic-struck, I was not vanquished.³²

Alcuin is like Ichabod Crane, and thus is a stereotype of the awkward schoolmaster absorbed in romantic fantasies. He is, in fact, one of Brown's versions of the young intellectual, as is revealed when Alcuin describes his daily routine:

Eight hours of the twenty-four were consumed in repeating the names and scrawling the forms of the alphabet, or in engraving on infantile memories that twice three makes six; the rest was employed in supplying an exhausted rather than a craving, stomach; in sleep, that never knew, nor desired to know, the luxury of down, and the pomp of tissue; in unravelling the mazes of Dr. Waring; or in amplifying the seducing suppositions of, 'if I were king,' or, 'if I were a lover.' Few, indeed, are as happy as Alcuin.³³

Alcuin's life is tedious, exhausting, impoverished, and yet his

fantasies and his studies provide him with compensations. To confuse Brown with Alcuin is to succumb to the myth that the early American artist was necessarily poor. In this selection Brown is simply using the struggling-student-author stereotype to delineate a character. The author himself was living comfortably in his parents' home in Philadelphia when he wrote Alcuin. Charles was not starving--he took short trips to the country and left Philadelphia to live in New York with friends, where, although they did not live with abundance, "none found it necessary to relinquish season tickets at the theater or skimp expenditures for clothing and meals. Each would, now and again, lament the high cost of living and write regretful letters on the painful subject of borrowing from father, but each maintained the menage proper to young bachelors with well-to-do parents."³⁴ When the British novelist, John Davis, was travelling through Philadelphia in 1799, he stopped to call on his fellow author; "I sought acquaintance with a man who had acquired so much intellectual renown. I found Mr. Brown quite in the costume of an author, embodying virtue in a new novel, and making his pen fly before him." What other costume is to be expected of an author but, "a great coat and shoes down at heel." He continued:

Mr. Brown occupied a dismal room in a dismal street. I asked whether a view of nature would not be more propitious to composition, or whether he should not write with more facility were his window to command the prospect of the Lake of Geneva. 'Sir,' he said, 'good pens, thick paper, and ink well-diluted would facilitate my composition more than the prospect of the broadest expanse of water or mountains rising above the clouds.'³⁵

Davis' description may be essentially a fiction, and as such, merely another example of the wide-spread nature of the romantic image of the author among Brown's contemporaries. But there is some reason to believe that his account was accurate. Dunlap writes, "Brown was without system in everything, . . . was negligent of personal appearance, even to slovenliness, . . . was in mixed company often silent and absent."³⁶ This description seems to support Davis, but, knowing that Brown could have been living in comparative luxury with his family instead of in the "dismal" room, then one must conclude that he chose to appear to be poor, at least at that time. Earlier in that same year, 1799, when he was living at his brother's home, Brown wrote,

The surface of my life would be thought, by most observers, tolerably smooth. I rise at eight, am seated by a comfortable fire, breakfast plenteously and in quiet, and with a companion who is a model of all the social and domestic virtues. All personal and household services are performed for me without the trouble of superintendence and direction. The writing occupation is pursued, with every advantageous circumstance of silence, solitude, pure air, cleanliness and warmth.³⁷

Brown may have willingly given up this luxury, in order to assume the independence and the appearance of an author. The impression that he was poor lasted throughout the nineteenth century, in spite of the fact that his literary efforts were, after the period in which he established his reputation, financially remunerative. Dunlap says of him, "Mr. Brown was so far successful, that he never relinquished his plan, and, if health and life had been continued to him, would have supported in competence and reared to usefulness, a numerous and amiable family."³⁸

Charles' attention shifted away from his pre-occupation with his romantic self-image after he finished his first four novels, which are now generally considered his major works. He radically altered his method of presentation--where his first novels had been narratives told in the first person, his last two are epistolary. The plot was revealed in a series of letters between two or more persons. The result is that Clara Howard and Jane Talbot are dialogues--they are dramatic discussions of principles, and they deal with domestic, everyday situations, rather than the odd or mysterious events which characterized Brown's early narrative fiction. Charles explained the reason for this change in a letter he wrote to his brother, James;

Your remarks upon the gloominess and out-of-nature incidents of Huntley [Edgar Huntley], 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. Book-making, as you observe, is the dullest of all trades, and the utmost that any American can look for, in his native country, is to be re-imbursed his unavoidable expenses.³⁹

Charles clearly does not relish his poverty--he is willing to sacrifice his artistic integrity, he says, in order to please his readers. His goal, in changing his tone and subject, is to increase his novels' marketability. Such an admission is a definite swing back from his original, radical stance when he renounced the legal profession. Law, he had said, is immoral as it is commonly practiced simply for gain--as an author his role would be to dispense truth. Now he admits that financial remun-

neration for his services would be desirable.

After Jane Talbot, Brown gave up novel-writing and turned to the more lucrative profession of a magazine editor. He was not only giving up fiction, but also his pose as an author. He wrote in 1801,

Fame! I abjure thee, hate thee; thou hast nought
Worthy calling into life. . . .Come, blest Obscurity!
Thy numberless delights around me shed!
Give me to walk in privacy, to know
The joys that hover in thy friendly shade,
The sweet possession of a name unknown.⁴⁰

Thirty years old, Charles seems to be wearily asking to be ordinary. From this point on, he led the practical life of a typical American. He joined with his brothers in their mercantile ventures, and his magazine was successful. He wrote political pamphlets which were anti-Jeffersonian, reflecting that conservatism which he had exhibited so early in his life. Ironically, it was during this time that Brown achieved the fame he had sought earlier. A pamphlet about foreign policy written in 1802 raised considerable debate throughout the United States.⁴¹ For this conservative, practical-minded American, the novel apparently was finally not a convenient genre. The discursive essay proved to be Brown's forte, and through his magazine articles he achieved his highest level of self-expression. Brown envisioned a new type of role for the writer--no longer a brooding recluse, he sought to reflect the heart of American culture, to define it and encourage its growth. "Through all the stations of his activity as a political and historical journalist he maintained a consistent objective: that cultural progress of the whole people which alone would safeguard the young repub-

lic."⁴² This new self-image sustained Brown until the end of his life. It allowed him to dig deep into the American past for its tradition, and to voice its fundamental conservatism. The novel as a medium had been bold and revolutionary, precisely the elements in American society which Brown now hoped to temper. In an article for his magazine he discussed the question of "National Liberty and Happiness." He asks the question, "Where is a nation free and happy to be found?" His answer, not too surprisingly, is Prussia. The reason for his choice is that Prussia under Frederick II enjoyed "the genuine spirit of just monarchy, which of all governments promises perhaps the greatest share of public happiness."⁴³ Brown was attracted to America's most conservative, now reactionary, political tradition--the constitutional monarchy. He was not so far from Europe as he once had hoped to be.

With the moral support of increased financial security and his new, more accurate, self-image as a journalist, Brown courted the sister of a friend, Elizabeth Linn, and married her in 1804. Their courtship was long and trying for Charles. Elizabeth was apparently singularly un-romantic, as she returned all his love letters after reading them once, and seldom answered them.⁴⁴ But when they were married, Charles was exceedingly happy. The couple found a house in Philadelphia, and Brown sold kitchenware⁴⁵, while he was not occupied with his work as an editor. He wrote at this time:

My business, if I may so call it, is altogether pleasurable, and, such as it is, it occupies not one fourth of my time. My companion is all that an husband can wish for, and, in short, as to my

own personal situation I have nothing to wish but that it may last.⁴⁶

His former brooding unhappiness seems wholly dissipated, and his life seems integrated at last.

He devoted himself to his wife and four children, and corresponded with numerous friends. Perhaps as early as 1806, he developed tuberculosis, gradually worsened, and died, thirty-nine years old, in 1810, "a Christian full of the hope of immortality, at peace with himself and all mankind."⁴⁷

Brown failed to resolve many of the conflicts of ideology which he encountered as an artist. The romantic stereotype of the author which he accepted for himself was incompatible with his intellectual conservatism. He perceived a split within his own mind which he was able to heal only by shedding his romantic self-image and his role as fiction-writer. Mental integration became his personal goal in life, and a search for the whole mind became a dominant theme in his writing. His preoccupation with the structure of the human mind is discussed in the next chapter. The social philosophy which was the logical outcome of his view of human psychology is the subject of chapters three and four. Finally, chapter five shows how Brown drew a comparison between the American economic landscape and the structure of the mind.

Chapter II: The Mind Made Whole

In an advertisement for his first novel, Skywalk, the young novelist, Charles Brockden Brown, defined his purpose:

To the story-telling moralist the United States is a new and untrodden field. He who shall examine objects with his own eyes, who shall employ the European models merely for the improvement of his taste, and adapt his fiction to all that is genuine and peculiar in the scenes before him, will be entitled at least to the praise of originality. . . .

The value of such works lies without doubt in their moral tendency. . . .The world is governed, not by the simpleton, but by the man of soaring passions and intellectual energy. By the display of such only can we hope to enchain the attention and ravish the souls of those who study and reflect.¹ (1794)

This early statement by America's first professional writer has several important implications. First Brown places his experience as an American above European literary tradition as the source of his inspiration. He is asserting American literary independence. Europe serves merely as a standard of taste, or style, while theme and content emanate from what is real and unique in the society of the new country. Equally important is the idea that the novel can be used as an instrument of moral instruction, and therefore as a useful tool for the philosopher. The audience he most wishes to reach, he says, are the intellectuals of America. That these intellectuals were the leaders of the country gave Brown hope that he might, through reaching them, shape the course of the new republic's future. He sent a copy of Wieland, his first published novel, to Thomas Jefferson, which is an indication of the seriousness with which he approached his work. In a letter to Jefferson, he sought to justify his

art in these terms: I am "obliged to hope that an artful display of incidents, the powerful delineations of character and the train of eloquent and judicious reasoning which may be combined in a fictitious work will be regarded by Thomas Jefferson with as much respect as they are regarded by me."² Brown saw himself as an artist-philosopher. His unique definition of what was "genuine and peculiar" in his culture emerges in his works as a definite philosophical structure.

Brown's philosophy, which was never explicitly formulated, but which is implicit in his writings, was based upon his conceptualization of the human mind. In his view, the tenets of Lockean psychology, which had in part inspired the optimism of eighteenth century rationalist thought, did not account for all the elements of the human mind. Lockean psychology was concerned with the conscious, rational, observable mind, and did not take into account the inexplicable and irrational portion of the mind, which is now called the unconscious. Social philosophers of the late eighteenth century who believed that the conscious mind was the controlling factor in human affairs concluded that man and society were ultimately capable of perfection through the correct application of reasonable principles. Brown, however, saw the major force behind human action as the unconscious mind--thus, in his eyes the beautiful vision of the Enlightenment was blasted. His own philosophy relied upon his belief in the "whole mind."

Brown perceived that human thought existed on two planes. The first was a rational, conscious plane, which was subject to

the influence of education and could thus be refined and improved. The second plane was irrational and unconscious and possibly dangerous. Brown saw the unconscious mind as frequently depraved or diseased--in which case the individual may be described as anti-social or insane. He is often portrayed in Brown's novels as a criminal or a revolutionary. The author was basically ambivalent about the unconscious, however. There are indications that he believed it to be the source of his own artistic inspiration, and the basis for an instinctive knowledge of right and wrong. In many ways Brown's conception of the unconscious level of the human mind is like the Calvinist idea of the soul--it is either saved or damned, healthy or diseased. Brown advises no therapy for the diseased mind--only a revelation of truth, the conferring of grace by God, can rescue the depraved.

Brown felt that human action must involve an integration of both planes of thought, of the educated and the intuitive minds. In an article in his literary magazine in 1807, Brown makes the distinction between the aspects of the mind. The article opens with a comment on the pleasures of reading: "What pleasure is so pure, so cheap, so constant, so independent, so worthy a rational being?" But, he says, an anti-intellectual sentiment is common among his acquaintances, "an opinion, expressed or implied, that books are, for the most part, a useless encumbrance upon our time and our faculties. They value nothing which does not increase what they call practical wisdom." This practical wisdom, or, "good common sense," represents for Brown the irra-

tional, non-intellectual mental plane. Common sense, he says, "appears to me to mean nothing more than an uneducated judgment, arising from a plain and coarse understanding, exercised upon common concerns, and rendered effective rather by experience, than by any regular process of the intellectual powers." Those who rely only on their common sense, "have but very superficially estimated the capacities or the purposes of our mental endowments." While most citizens' lives are restricted to a narrow, "selfish" circle in which common sense rules of behavior are an adequate guide, "there are others, to whom higher tasks are assigned; whose lot it is to teach rather than to act; and to contribute to that acuteness, enlargement, and elevation of intellect, by which morals and legislation are improved, and the manners and habits of a people refined and exalted."³ This article illustrates both the division Brown believes to be inherent to the human mind, and his basic distrust of the intuitive mind. Unlike the later Transcendentalists who would view intuitive "Reason" as the connecting link between man and truth, Brown saw unconscious impulses as all too frequently base and selfish. A truly valuable individual, in his view, was a man who consciously united both mental planes.

Brown investigated his psychological theories in his first published novel, Wieland; or, the Transformation. Two of the major characters are representatives of opposite philosophical views. At one extreme is a religious zealot; at the other, a Deist. Both believe that their religious outlooks are rational and that they are essentially reasonable men. Thus, both are

Lockeans. They seem to be unaware of their unconscious drives and motives. Their faith in the infallibility of their reason leads them to disaster.

Theodore Wieland, the central figure of *Wieland*, represents the religious fanatic. His father had emigrated to America from Britain in order to preach Albigensianism to the Indians, and had married a woman who belonged to the Moravian church. Wieland inherits their religious zeal. "His deportment was grave, considerate, and thoughtful. . . .The future, either as anterior or subsequent to death, was a scene that required some preparation to be made for it. . . .What distinguished him was a propensity to ruminate on these truths."⁴ Wieland's character is shrouded with darkness.

Wieland's closest friend is his brother-in-law, Henry Pleyel. Pleyel is a rationalist and a Deist. "Pleyel was the champion of intellectual liberty, and rejected all guidance but that of his reason."⁵ In contrast with Wieland, Pleyel's spirit is light: "His discernment was acute; but he was prone to view every object merely as supplying materials for mirth. His conceptions were ardent but ludicrous, and his memory, aided, as he honestly acknowledged, by his invention, was an inexhaustible fund of entertainment."⁶ Clara, Wieland's sister and the narrator of the tale, falls in love with Pleyel, who considers her, "the first of women."⁷ Rather than worshipping God, Pleyel worships Clara, who is for him a goddess of reason. He tells her, "I have marked the transitions of your discourse, the felicities of your expression, your refined argumentation and glowing im-

agery, and been forced to acknowledge that all delights were meagre and contemptible, compared with those connected with the audience and sight of you."⁸ Pleyel is an advocate of the sentimental love religion.⁹

Although Wieland and Pleyel hold opposite views of religion, they are very similar intellectually. Both devote themselves to the study of Cicero and other Latin writers. They share an equal knowledge of metaphysics and the history of religion, but where "one discovered only confirmations of his faith, the other could find nothing but reasons for doubt."¹⁰ They frequently discuss their beliefs, but each is rigid in his convictions--both are equally dogmatic.

Brown throws into their midst an unexpected factor--a meddling ventriloquist by the name of Carwin. Carwin has perfected an ability to throw his voice over great distances, very loudly, and quite frequently he mimics the voices of other people.

Brown devotes a long footnote to the argument that ventriloquism (or "biloquism," as he calls it) is not only possible but is scientific fact.¹¹ It is important to his purpose in Wieland that Carwin's skills are seen as a natural, rather than a supernatural phenomenon, as will be seen.

One night, before Carwin formally appears on the scene, Wieland sets out on an errand to his summer house, which is located on a hill near his mansion. Halfway up the hill, he hears his wife's voice, calling from below him. The voice says, "Stop! go no farther. There is danger in your path."¹² When he returns to the house, he finds his wife, Catherine, as he had left

her, and all are mystified by the voice Wieland claims he heard. Pleyel regards the event "as a deception of the senses."¹³ However, soon the voice is heard again, and all are forced to acknowledge that the sounds, though seemingly coming from nowhere, are real. Actually, Carwin has been using his unusual vocal powers out of a compulsion to interfere with their lives. But Wieland decides that the voice he has heard is the voice of God, and Carwin, who has since been introduced to their company, encourages that belief. Pleyel, however, reacts typically: "He scrupled not to deny faith to any testimony but that of his senses, and allowed the facts which had lately been supported by this testimony not to mould his belief, but merely to give birth to doubts."¹⁴ Both men are rational, relying on their senses, and arriving at logical conclusions--however, their conclusions are different because their preconceptions differ. Thus Brown has outlined an argument against the faith in man's ability to be rational: he has shown that two men supplied with the same empirical evidence may still disagree. Clara sums up the problem: "The will is the tool of the understanding, which must fashion its conclusions on the notices of sense. If the senses be depraved, it is impossible to calculate the evils that may flow from the consequent deductions of the understanding."¹⁵ By "will" Clara is referring to that part of the personality which inspires action or behavior. Clara sees that behavior should be guided by reason, or "the notices of sense," but that in some cases the senses may be misguided. Clara is not speaking in this instance for Brown. She does not recognize that all

men's senses are depraved, and that all men see only what their minds allow them to see. Both Wieland and Pleyel have "depraved" senses, because each perceives only what he is predisposed to believe. In matters of religion Pleyel prefers to see no God at all, and turns adoringly to the "perfect" woman, while Wieland sees an omnipresent and all-powerful deity. Because both men trust their minds and their perceptions, they rush headlong into tragedy. Unaware that they may be expressing unfulfilled unconscious drives, they mistake their delusions for reality.

Wieland has a vision. "I opened my eyes and found all about me luminous and glowing. It was the element of heaven that flowed around. Nothing but a fiery stream was at first visible; but, anon, a shrill voice from behind called upon me to attend."¹⁶ The voice, which identifies itself as angelic, requires him, in order to prove his faith, to kill his wife, his children, his sister, and Pleyel. This voice is not Carwin's; it is a delusion existing solely within Wieland's mind. He manages to perform all the murders except those of Clara and Pleyel. Because he believes in his senses and their infallibility, and because he has faith that God exists, he succumbs absolutely to his madness. At his trial he says, "my deed was enjoined by heaven."¹⁷ Clara understands his mad logic, and admits doubt about the immorality of his deed. She says, "His wife and children were destroyed; they had expired in agony and fear: yet was it indisputably certain that their murderer was criminal?"¹⁸ After all, in Wieland's eyes he had performed a rational act:

he had heard the voice of God and had obeyed it humbly.

Pleyel, in love with Clara, is rushing to her home on the night before the murders when Carwin decides to play a joke on him. Pleyel hears voices coming from a recess. One voice is Clara's, the other is Carwin's own. Carwin has undertaken to test Pleyel's faith in his goddess by mimicing her voice. As Pleyel eavesdrops, he hears the supposed Clara discuss her sexual relations with Carwin, use coarse language, and speak in a manner as opposite to Clara's real character as possible. Pleyel admits later, "I did not reason on the subject."¹⁹ He chooses to believe Carwin's ruse and consequently gives up Clara. Even Carwin is amazed that he was fooled so easily and completely. Carwin says to Clara, "When I think of your character, and of the inferences which this dialogue was intended to suggest, it seems incredible that this delusion should be produced."²⁰ But Pleyel believes in the "perfect" woman more than he believes in Clara--once she is tainted by an imagined alliance with Carwin, she is no longer a fit companion for him, and he feels he is right to revile her.²¹ Both Wieland and Pleyel, while believing themselves to be rational and informed men, are susceptible to delusions. The outcomes of these delusions are socially destructive.

What does Brown see as the source of man's irrationality? Clara Wieland says, after she has allowed her mind to come to conclusions she cannot explain, "Ideas exist in our minds that can be accounted for by no established laws."²² This statement implies the psychological theory which is an alternative to that

of Locke: it proposes the existence of an unconscious mind, and hence of inexplicable and irrational motives. In the case of Wieland, the unconscious force which drives him to murder is incestuous desire. Soon after the mysterious voices have been heard, Clara Wieland has a curious dream:

I at length imagined myself walking, in the evening twilight, to my brother's habitation. A pit, methought, had been dug in the path I had taken, of which I was not aware. As I carelessly pursued my walk, I thought I saw my brother standing at some distance before me, beckoning and calling me to make haste. He stood on the opposite edge of the gulf.²³

Clara dreams that her brother wishes to destroy her, and weeks later has the premonition when awake. She can not explain her feelings, but says, "It was surely no vulgar agency that gave this form to my fears."²⁴ This "agency" is her unconscious mind. Later, when Wieland murders his wife, he places her body upon Clara's bed. When the voice he imagines commands him to kill Clara, although he has already murdered his wife and his five children, he cries, "This is too much! any victim but this and thy will be done. Have I not sufficiently attested my faith and my obedience? She that is gone, they that have perished, were linked with my soul by ties which only thy command would have broken; but here is sanctity and excellence surpassing human. This workmanship is thine, and it cannot be thy will to heap it into ruins."²⁵ The implications of this speech are obvious--Wieland's love for Clara is more than fraternal; his passion for her suggests the suppressed sexual longing of the courtly lover. Clara is, to him, the human embodiment of virtue to which he aspires, and the consummation of their love will be her death.

Thus he will serve her, by speeding her journey to heaven. The voice tells him, "Deliverance from mortal fetters is awarded to this being, and thou art the minister of this decree."²⁶ Subtly and discreetly, Brown provided Wieland with complex psychological motivations for his crimes.

Similarly, Pleyel's lapse from reason when tricked by Carwin, was due to his predisposition to jealousy. Early in the story, Pleyel suspects his fiance in Europe of infidelity when he fails to receive a letter from her: "He was seized with the torments of jealousy, and suspected nothing less than the infidelity of her to whom he had devoted his heart."²⁷ When he learns she has died, he transfers his affection to Clara, and almost immediately begins to suspect that she is in love with Carwin. Thus, he easily fell into Carwin's trap.

Brown's view of the unconscious mind was reflected in several of his novels in a metaphor of darkness. He proposed the idea that the mind projects what it wishes to see upon an external scene. In a figurative sense, because man is not omniscient, he is always surrounded by at least partial darkness, and only his mind, in many instances, can provide him with "enlightenment." But if one views man's mind as being unpredictable and irrational, as Brown did, then the "light" it offers may be false and misleading. Clara Wieland, for instance, has these reactions to her moonlit room: "Dark is less fertile of images than the feeble lustre of the moon. I was alone, and the walls were checkered by shadowy forms. As the moon passed behind a cloud and emerged, these shadows seemed to be endowed with life,

and to move."²⁸ Clara frightens herself with the notion that she is being haunted by some supernatural being. She peoples her darkness with ghosts and demons.

A similar passage in Arthur Mervyn reveals again how the mind imposes its preconceptions upon a darkened scene. The hero, Arthur, is slipping out of the city at night in a rowboat on the river. A country boy, he has been in the city only five days and has been cheated out of all his money, tricked, used in a fraudulent scheme, and allied with a killer. His response to the scene before him reflects his personal views about the city:

I cast eyes occasionally at the scene which I had left. Its novelty . . . threw me into a state of suspense and wonder which frequently slackened my hand, and left the vessel to be driven by the downward current. Lights were sparingly seen, and these were perpetually fluctuating, as masts, yards, and hulls, were interposed, and passed before them. In proportion as we receded from the shore, the clamours seemed to multiply, and the suggestion that the city was involved in confusion and uproar, did not easily give way to maturer thoughts. Twelve was the hour cried, and this ascended at once from all quarters, and was mingled with the baying of dogs, so as to produce trepidation and alarm.²⁹

In the course of the novel, Brown reveals that Arthur's vision of the city as a seat of chaos is harmful or "immature" in two respects. First, and most immediately, it is leading him off course--the lights of the city are actually benevolent, giving him some sense of his bearings on the river as he is swept out by the tide. Also, his interpretation of city life is erroneous, as he discovers later in the novel and after many adventures that the city is the place where he can be most completely happy and fulfilled.

Edgar Huntly finds the hero similarly engulfed in darkness. Edgar is a romantic--he prefers darkness as it permits him to indulge in his own fanciful version of the world: "The time of night, the glimmering of the stars, the obscurity in which external objects were wrapped, . . . did not draw my attention from the images of fancy."³⁰ A nocturnal journey leads him into the society of a madman, a sleepwalker whom Edgar pursues doggedly until he reaches the brink of madness himself, and similarly becomes a sleepwalker. It is fitting that when he reaches the point of absolute insanity, when his fantasy-world completely takes over and he is in a state of delirium, the darkness surrounding him is total. He has fallen into a pit within a cavern while walking in his sleep, so has no recollection of events leading to his return to consciousness. His interpretation of his situation is very peculiar:

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. . . .

Sometimes I imagined myself buried alive. Methought I had fallen into seeming death, and my friends had consigned me to the tomb, from which a resurrection was impossible. . . . Neither did this supposition overwhelm me with terror or prompt my efforts at deliverance. My state was one of tumult and confusion.³¹

Edgar's tendency to view the world in terms of romance is evident here. What could be further from the reality of his predicament than the possibility of dungeons and premature burials on the American frontier? The wanderings of his imagination are paralyzing Edgar, keeping him from rescuing himself from

the pit he has fallen into as a result of his self-deception.

Brown felt that when a person realized his own fallibility, his inability to be rational, he would naturally turn to a proven external source for advice and guidance. In a figurative sense, Clara Wieland does so when she begins the necessary distrust of her unaided mind. To complete the darkness metaphor, Clara supplies herself with light: "All was lonely, darksome, and waste. . . .I easily found my way to a closet, drew forth a taper, a flint, tinder and steel, and in a moment, as it were, gave myself the guidance and protection of light."³² Similarly, Edgar Huntly, after passing through ordeals in his return to sanity and civilization, has a fearful respect of the power of the darkness within his own mind to overwhelm his reason, and he takes precautions.

Famine, and blindness, and death, and savage enemies never fail to be conjured up by the silence and darkness of the night. I cannot dissipate them by any efforts of reason. My cowardice requires the constant consolation of light. My heart droops when I mark the decline of the sun, and I never sleep but with a candle burning at my pillow.³³

The "light" Brown believed in, his "guide" for conduct, is reflected in his writings.

The unconscious mind had been discovered centuries before Brown lived by poets and philosophers. What is important is the way Brown interpreted his knowledge of the unconscious. To use his own words, Brown saw the human mind as "depraved." He called Wieland's madness, "Mania Mutabilis," referring to Erasmus Darwin's Zoonomia.³⁴ Brown is merely restating in contemporary scientific terms the old contention that man is an innately im-

perfect creature. The language he uses may be that of the eighteenth century philosopher, but his conclusions are more in sympathy with seventeenth century notions of innate depravity. Brown was a Christian: he called himself an "ardent friend and willing champion of the Christian religion."³⁵ What he meant by "Christian religion" is relatively clear. He was a Quaker, and it may be assumed that he believed in moderate or liberal Christianity, but not in zealotry like that of Wieland. Brown asserts in the conclusion of Wieland that Carwin's influence over the lives of the characters would have been negligible if Wieland had "framed juster notions of moral duty and of the divine attributes."³⁶ Thus, one guide for conduct is a reasoning faith --which implies both an intellectual and an emotional commitment.

While Wieland was primarily an exploration of the dual nature of the mind, Brown's last novel, Jane Talbot, deals with the implications of the conclusions he had arrived at in Wieland. Jane Talbot is young, upper-middle class, and, as the novel opens, more a girl than a woman. She admits, in a letter to her lover, Henry Colden, "I am far from being a wise girl."³⁷ She is excessively emotional, and she claims that her temperament "was always fervent and unruly; unacquainted with moderation in its attachments, violent in its indignation, and its enmity, but easily persuaded to pity and forgiveness."³⁸ Brown presents Jane as a being who is not sufficiently rational. Her lover is her opposite. She chides Henry for being "not quite passionate enough."³⁹ He is a skeptic, an agnostic, and a student of revolutionary social doctrine. The mating of Jane and Henry is

impossible as long as each is in touch with only part of his mind. Their maturity is achieved in the course of the novel.

Jane's contact with Henry's skepticism opens her eyes to the world of the intellect. Jane had found in Colden's reasonings and doubts opportunity for self-improvement. Rather than abandoning Henry upon discovering his agnosticism, she resolves that it is her duty to cure him of his misapprehensions. She says,

Of what stuff must that heart be made which can behold, unmoved, genius and worth, destitute of the joys and energies of religion; wandering in a maze of passions and doubts; devoured by fantastic repinings and vague regrets. Drearly conscious of wanting a foundation whereon to repose; a guide in whom to trust. What heart can gaze at such a spectacle without unspeakable compassion.⁴⁰

But when she attempted to convince Henry of what she believed to be the truth, Jane discovered that her religion had been nothing but a "bubble"--she had accepted her faith upon the advice of others, and she equates it with, "the wildest dreams of savage superstition, or the fumes of dervise's fanaticism."⁴¹ She immediately set about establishing her faith on rational grounds. Although she was unable to convert Colden, she admits to him that, "I who am imagined to incur such formidable perils from intercourse with you, am, in truth, indebted to you alone for all my piety; all of it that is permanent and rational."⁴² Jane, naturally pious and virtuous, strengthens her religion by studying it and relating to it intellectually as well as emotionally. Therefore, her mind has become integrated, and she has reached maturity.

Henry, however, is without initial faith--he has no intuitive sense of God. He has lost contact with what he should know without doubt, without thinking, and therefore Brown sees Henry's mind as depraved. Henry says of himself, "I cannot work to live. In that respect I have no parallel. . . .My very nature unfits me for any profitable business. My dependence must ever be on others or on fortune."⁴³ A parasite, depending for his existence on his father's generosity, Henry is unable to support Jane as his wife. Henry's will is infected, as he says, "And whence this incurable folly? This rooted incapacity of acting as every motive, generous and selfish, combine to recommend? Constitution; habit; insanity; the dominion of some evil spirit, who insinuates his baneful power between the will and the act."⁴⁴ There is an emptiness in Henry's soul. Adverse circumstances estrange the couple, and Henry leaves America on a long sea voyage from which he expects never to return. Jane waits for him for four years, and he finally reappears to claim her as his bride. The stigma of his diseased will has been lifted. He tells her,

The incidents of a long voyage, the vicissitudes through which I have passed, have given strength to my frame, while the opportunities and occasions for wisdom, which these have afforded me, have made my mind whole. I have awakened from my dreams of doubt and misery, not to the cold and vague belief, but to the living and delightful consciousness of every tie that can bind man to his divine parent and judge.⁴⁵

Henry has been granted grace, and the couple is free to wed at last, both in possession of "whole" minds.

Wieland and Jane Talbot are thus investigations of a single

idea: the structure of the human mind and how its nature influences social behavior. Brown expected that his view of the mind would not be readily accepted by the reading public. In the advertisement of Wieland, he does not apologize for his use of the devices of bilquism or spontaneous combustion, but does find it necessary to include a defense of his ideas about the diseased mind: "Some readers may think the conduct of the younger Wieland impossible. In support of this possibility the Writer must appeal to Physicians and to men conversant with the latent springs and occasional perversions of the human mind. It will not be objected that the instances of similar delusion are rare, because it is the business of moral painters to exhibit their subjects in its most instructive and memorable forms."⁴⁶ Brown's conceptualization of the mind was in many ways antithetical to the philosophies of America's "reigning" thinkers--hence the defensive tone. Recall the audience to whom Brown directed his fiction: he hoped to "ravish the souls of those who study and reflect," America's intellectuals. He then sent a copy of Wieland to Thomas Jefferson--an intellectual who was actually quite similar to Brown's characterizations of rationalists, such as Pleyel and Henry Colden. In one of his clearest statements of his hostility towards the ideas of then-President Thomas Jefferson, Brown said,

If any gentleman assume as a principle that mankind can be governed by reason; and insist, notwithstanding the evidence of all history, ancient and modern, sacred and profane, that we may prudently rely on reason for the defence of nations, we would advise him to commence a course of experiments in his own family, and see how far reason would go there.⁴⁷

Brown's ideas about the roots of human behavior were directly applicable to the world around him. He applied them in this case to a question of foreign policy. His ideas were not simply abstract--they were a structure upon which an entire philosophical system could develop. Just as Thomas Jefferson envisaged a future utopia in America which was based upon his belief in human perfectibility, so Brown foresaw a utopia, less glowing perhaps, which was based upon the knowledge of human weakness and depravity. The general nature of his social theory will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter III: A Social Ideal

In Main Currents of American Thought, Vernon L. Parrington says of Brown that he "welcomed the romantic philosophies then being formulated by radical thinkers in France and England. . . By William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft he was influenced."¹ Parrington observes that Godwin's novel, Caleb Williams, and Brown's Arthur Mervyn are "patently" alike. He sees Arthur Mervyn as "a Godwinian figure drawn to captivate the imagination with the social ideal."² Parrington's statement represents the consensus of critics and historians who have written about Brown.³ However, this opinion is inaccurate on every point. Brown wrote in 1805, "I am sorry to find that sensible and well-meaning persons of both sexes have been influenced by the arguments or the authority of Mr. Godwin,"⁴ and this anti-Godwinian stand is apparent throughout his writings. Perhaps this error among historians arose from trying to place Brown's thought within a "main current" of ideas, as though all outstanding intellectuals necessarily align themselves with a school of thought. On the other hand, perhaps Brown's "mantle of ambiguous seeming," described in the first chapter, has enabled scholars to mistakenly call him a radical when in fact he was a conservative thinker. Whatever the reason, the error needs to be refuted, and Brown's social philosophy presented for what it was.

Godwin's idealism rested upon the optimistic assumptions of rationalist psychology. "The crying evils of civilization, when analyzed, are traceable to vicious environment, to social

and political maladjustments; not to human nature. The mind of the infant is plastic."⁵ The human mind is born pure and capable of perfection, but an imperfect society creates imperfect human beings. Godwin said, "May it not happen that the grand moral evils that exist in the world, the calamities by which we are so grievously oppressed, are to be traced to political institutions as their source, and that their removal is only to be expected from its correction?"⁶ The purpose of Godwin's long philosophical work, An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793), is to encourage revolutionary change of the social institutions of Europe, particularly of Great Britain. For Godwin, the responsible individual's social role was radical, undermining unjust institutions when they are encountered.

Brown's social philosophy was based upon his view of men as innately depraved, imperfect beings, subject to unconscious desires and urgings. However, Brown shared in the moral tradition which produced Godwin's philosophy. Godwin had belonged to various dissenting sects in England before he became, at last, a Deist. Brown was a Quaker, and Quakerism had, in the seventeenth century, served as a vehicle for the expression of liberal social doctrines. The Quakers in England in the seventeenth century were the radicals of the day, and the Deists acted a similar role in the eighteenth century. A persecuted sect in England, the Quakers had established themselves as a church in Pennsylvania, and Brown inherited the doctrines of reformist liberalism that had been bred in Europe. But the persecution and unjust institutions which Godwin complained of were not

transferred to the New World. It is possible that Brown and Godwin had similar conceptions of what constituted a "just" society, but Brown was a conservative because he believed such institutions already existed within his country, while Godwin was a revolutionary within the context of English society. Therefore, although Brown and Godwin may sometimes use similar moral terms and thus sound alike, the aims of their arguments are significantly different. Brown said in 1805, "I observe a turbulent and factious spirit is just beginning to manifest itself, in some parts of this still unsettled country, which would tear up the ancient land marks of government, and eradicate every principle of a really free constitution. Innovations are always dangerous, and innovators have always been feared."⁷ The term "ancient land marks" is confusing when applied to America in 1805, but I would guess that Brown is referring to English common law, Christian morality as it was then understood, traditional family structure, and social class stratification. Brown considered the revolutionary as a criminal. The criminal individual, the man depraved by some weakness within his mind or will, became Brown's moral target in his novels. His ideal citizen is a conservative, staunchly upholding American societal traditions. Tradition, however, was not as apparent in America as it was elsewhere. Brown wanted to illustrate the search for true values, for what constituted the roots of American society, and this search involved characters in the use of the whole mind, in both its rational and irrational aspects. The rational aspect might be called the "educated" or refined faculty, which

worked in conjunction with an irrational, or intuitive, "con-science."

In the preface to Caleb Williams in 1794, Godwin wrote:

What is now presented to the public, is no refined and abstract speculation; it is a study and delineation of things passing in the moral world. It is but of late that the inestimable importance of political principles has been adequately apprehended. It is now known to philosophers, that the spirit and character of the government intrudes itself into every rank of society. But this is a truth, highly worthy to be communicated, to persons, whom books of philosophy and science are never likely to reach. Accordingly it was proposed, in the invention of the following work, to comprehend, as far as the progressive nature of a single story would allow, a general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism, by which man becomes the destroyer of man.⁸

His purpose, he openly admits, is propagandistic, to disseminate a political philosophy to the masses. The resemblance of Caleb Williams and later social realism is not accidental. Brown read Caleb Williams and sought, he said, to write a work equal to it.⁹ Some writers have taken Brown's admiration of Godwin's novel to be an avowal of Godwinian social philosophy.¹⁰ I believe, however, that Brown saw Godwin's work as a revelation in terms of technique--that is, the concept of using the novel for philosophical instruction suited Brown's self-image as an artist-philosopher. In the essay, "Walstein's School of History," Brown analyzed the public function of the novelist. "There are two ways in which genius and virtue may labour for the public good: first, by assailing popular errors and vices, argumentatively and through the medium of books; secondly, by employing legal or ministerial authority to this end."¹¹ Probably written shortly after Brown had given up the law, the essay restates

his resolution to write in order to reveal moral truths to the public. Like Godwin, Brown turns to the romance to render philosophical ideas more accessible and understandable. "Abstract systems, and theoretical reasonings were not without their use, but they claimed more attention than many were willing to bestow. Their influence, therefore, was limited to a narrow sphere. A mode by which truth could be conveyed to a great number, was much to be preferred."¹² That mode, Brown asserts, is the novel. He continues, the influence of philosophy or moral fiction upon "monarchs and ministers" is probably negligible because power is so irresistably corrupting. Instead, the novel aims at the common man: "It may seem best to purify the fountain, rather than to filter the stream; but the latter is, to a certain degree within our power, whereas, the former is impracticable. Governments and general education, cannot be rectified, but individuals may be somewhat fortified against their influence."¹³ Brown's purpose was to inspire the personal moral regeneration of his readers, not to inspire institutional reform. All he can hope to do is to "fortify" the individual against inevitable evil influences.

Parrington's comparison of Caleb Williams and Arthur Mervyn is appropriate--the novels are actually very similar in plot structure, which is probably due to Brown's emulation of Godwin's work. But the themes of the two works are essentially different. Godwin's hero, Caleb Williams, is a young man born into a peasant family. He becomes the servant of a wealthy gentleman, Ferdinando Falkland, who is renowned throughout England

for his fine sense of honor. In spite of this fame, Falkland acts like a man oppressed by some secret guilt. Guided by his uncontrollable curiosity, Caleb pries into his master's past and discovers that his benefactor is in fact a murderer, and that Falkland not only has allowed an innocent man and his son to hang for the crime he committed, but is more horrified by the prospect that his good reputation may be lost than he is by the nature of his crime. Falkland "believed nothing was so well calculated to make men delicate, gallant, and humane, as a temper perpetually alive to the sentiments of birth and honour."¹⁴ His preoccupation with honor is encouraged and supported by his aristocratic nation. Godwin sees Falkland's crimes as a product of the erroneous values of English society. Basically Falkland was a good man, corrupted by an evil society. Caleb says, "But of what use are talents and sentiments in the corrupt wilderness of human society? It is a rank and rotten soil, from which every finer shrub draws poison as it grows. All that in a happier field and a purer air, would expand into virtue and germinate into usefulness is thus converted into henbane and deadly nightshade."¹⁵ Falkland, fearing Caleb's knowledge of his criminal past, frames him and has him jailed. When Caleb goes before his aristocratic judges and tells them the truth as he knows it, his story only serves to confirm his guilt in their eyes. All of Caleb's acquaintances, although aware of his simple honest nature, suddenly see him as a depraved monster because he has attacked the "honorable" Falkland. Caleb is ruthlessly imprisoned without trial. He manages to escape and is

doggedly pursued by an agent of Falkland. Although the criminal charges against Caleb are dropped, the story that Caleb has accused his master of heinous crimes follows him and renders him an outcast from respectable society. In spite of Caleb's obvious sincerity and virtue, his society reviles him. The injustice of the legal and penal system, which accepted the word of the rich man over that of his servant, and which supported Falkland's persecution of Caleb, is one of Godwin's major targets. Even more essential is his attack upon the general public for its active complicity with Falkland and the courts, in the face of Caleb's obvious honesty and innocence. Caleb is only saved from an exile's life when he inspires Falkland to make a public confession. Only then do Caleb's neighbors and friends recognize his heroism, but too late, for Caleb is broken in spirit at the end of his ordeal. Godwin's aim in his novel is to bring his readers, gentry and common man alike, to re-evaluate the rule of aristocracy, of which both Falkland and Caleb were victims.

In Brown's Arthur Mervyn, the hero is also a country boy who becomes the servant of a seemingly wealthy and respectable man. Arthur leaves his country home to seek a livelihood in Philadelphia, and is taken into the household of Welbeck, called by his business associates, the "Nabob." Although Welbeck attempts to maintain the appearance of an honest businessman, Arthur soon learns that he has stolen his fortune. Welbeck's life story is a long tale of treachery and deceit. Brown carefully points out that Welbeck's immorality was not a product of

evil societal influences. As the son of a bankrupt trader in Liverpool, he had no means of support except his own labor. Welbeck himself admits that his background had prepared him for an honest life: "Whatever could generate pride, and the love of independence, was my portion. Whatever can incite to diligence was the growth of my condition; yet my indolence was a cureless disease; and there were no arts too sordid for me to practice."¹⁶ Although Welbeck is conscious of the rectitude of a moral code, he is unable to live a virtuous life. "My virtuous theories and comprehensive erudition would not have saved me from the basest of crimes."¹⁷ Welbeck's inability to do what he believes is most rational and good is caused by a disease of "will," a corruption of the soul, rather than by evil social institutions. Welbeck is devoid of the grace of God which would enable him to do good. He is like Henry Colden of Jane Talbot before his conversion. Welbeck dies in debtor's prison. In contrast to Welbeck, Brown juxtaposes the character of Arthur Mervyn. He declares that Arthur is meant to demonstrate the virtues of "fortitude and magnanimity"¹⁸ and so his character remains static throughout the novel. Arthur rises from rags to riches--but he is rewarded not for hard work and diligence but for virtue and honesty. Arthur's good fortune arises when he marries a beautiful and wealthy Jewess, who has fallen in love with his goodness. Unlike Welbeck, Arthur's soul appears to be redeemed, although not in a strictly religious sense, as he appears to hold no specific religious beliefs. Rather, Arthur is redeemed in a social sense--he is rewarded for his social virtues, as Welbeck

is punished for his social vices. Brown's system of carrot and stick contrasts sharply with Godwin's sympathy for the underdog. A comparison of their passages describing prisons shows this difference clearly.

Godwin felt that the English prison system was flagrantly unjust, and in Caleb Williams he demonstrated a need for a change of that system. When Caleb is in jail, a friend visits him, and is appalled by what he sees, "Why I thought this was a Christian country; but this usage is too bad for a dog. . . .Why, you ha'n't been tried, ha'you?"¹⁹ Several of Caleb's inmates are innocent of any crime, and yet they are condemned by the court's inefficiency or bias to waste their lives away in an inhumane environment. In Arthur Mervyn, Brown also describes a prison scene, when Welbeck at last is confined in a debtor's prison. Unlike Godwin's sympathetic picture of the inmates as victims of social evils, Brown's view is harsh and self-righteous:

The marks of negligence and poverty were visible in all; but few betrayed, in their features or gestures, any symptoms of concern on account of their condition. Ferocious gaiety, or stupid indifference, seemed to sit upon every brow. The vapour from an heated stove, mingled with the fumes of beer and tallow that were spilled upon it, and with the tainted breath of so promiscuous a crowd, loaded the stagnant atmosphere.²⁰

Only a hard-working, middle-class boy who was victimized by a cruel creditor is rescued from this squalor. Brown seems to be saying that the injustice of the system of imprisonment for debt arises not from the law, which manages to keep unscrupulous reprobates off the streets, but from the relentless avarice of those who use the law indiscriminately. Therefore, Brown agreed with the principle of imprisonment of unwise spendthrifts, even

though this practice was under attack by reformers. Brown simply did not agree with Godwin that men could be convinced to be virtuous by expostulation and example. Innate viciousness could only be met with traditional force and repression.

Although Brown's social philosophy in Arthur Mervyn is clearly not Godwinian, the novel fails to communicate his concepts clearly. This failure is partly a result of the ambiguity of Arthur Mervyn's character. Although Arthur is meant to be an embodiment of social virtue, he is often impetuous and almost oblivious to the feelings of others. At times he seems to be motivated by a spirit of acquisitiveness.²¹ Arthur's personality is static, and he experiences no fundamental change in his journey from "raw youth" to manhood. Therefore his story provides instruction in an allegorical sense: virtue is pitted against evil, and virtue triumphs. Brown's last novel, Jane Talbot, provides a clearer exposition of his views concerning the social role of the individual. Jane Talbot, unlike Arthur Mervyn, is not meant to embody static virtue. Instead her story tells of her evolution from weak-willed girlhood to wise and experienced womanhood. Maturity and fulfillment are finally achieved when she learns to temper her romantic impulses with rational self-denial. In so doing she maintains the fundamental social bonds between parent and child, thereby establishing a solid base on which the remainder of society can rest.

In the first portion of the book Jane is writing to her absent lover, Henry Colden, to whom she describes at length the incidents of her early life. The most significant portion of

her tale is the story of her father's downfall which was caused by her brother, Frank. Frank's temperament is very much like her own--he, too, is impetuous, "fervent and unruly." Jane's father indulges his son's every wish: "My father's temper was easy and flexible; my brother was at once vehement and artful. Frank's arguments and upbraidings created in his father an unnatural awe, an apprehension and diffidence in thwarting his wishes and giving advice, which usually distinguish the filial character."²² Although Jane's father has become rich by virtue of his frugal habits and thrift, Frank rapidly squanders the entire fortune until at last the old man is forced into bankruptcy and "sent to a premature grave."²³ Frank escapes debtor's prison by sailing for France, where he joins the republican army and is enriched "by lucky speculations in the forfeited estates."²⁴ The story of Frank's prodigality is a prelude, an introduction to the theme of family disintegration which determines the action in the latter part of the novel. Frank's selfishness leads, with luck, to his personal enrichment, but only with terrible human costs. His thoughtless spending drives his father to poverty and despair, and, at last, to the grave. Frank's later association with the French republicans is meaningful. Brown, like many Americans, was horrified by the social upheaval caused by the French Revolution: significantly, he seems to be equating the breakdown of family ties in America with the revolutionary activities in Europe. Frank's act of robbing his father of his hard-won wealth is parallel to his robbing a French count of his estate and title. The consequences of both acts are the

same: social disintegration.

Jane is under the protection of her foster mother, Mrs. Fielder. Mrs. Fielder is a wealthy old woman whose ideas are rigid and traditional. Unlike Jane's father's submissiveness to his child, Mrs. Fielder demands Jane's obedience. She arranges Jane's marriage to a man she can not love, Lewis Talbot. She hopes that Talbot's solid character will curb Jane's romanticism, but instead Jane finds that she can not communicate with her husband. When Jane meets Henry Colden, a man who understands her sentiments, they become close friends. When Talbot dies they quickly avow their love for each other and make plans to marry. Mrs. Fielder, however, is violently opposed to the match, and she threatens to disinherit Jane should she marry Colden. The reason for her opposition, she explains, is that Colden is a Godwinian. She says of Godwin's Political Justice, "The writer has the art of the grand deceiver; the fatal art of carrying the worst poison under the name and appearance of wholesome food; of disguising all that is impious or blasphemous, or licentious, under the guise and sanctions of virtue."²⁵ Mrs. Fielder believes Colden to be, as a result of his Godwinism,

the advocate of suicide; a scoffer at promises; the despiser of revelation, of providence and a future state; an opponent of marriage, and as one who denied (shocking!) that any thing but mere habit and positive law, stood in the way of marriage; nay, of intercourse without marriage, between brother and sister, parent and child!²⁶

She refuses to believe that Colden has not acted according to his beliefs, and, backed with some flimsy evidence, contends that he had once seduced Jane while her husband was away on

business. Mrs. Fielder's view of Godwinism was fairly common in England and America in 1800. It is an inaccurate and exaggerated version of Godwin's ideas, and Brown undoubtedly knew better. However, Mrs. Fielder's attack on Godwinism is never refuted within the novel, and all the action of the characters supports her assertions. Henry Colden guiltily admits that he once was a Godwinian, but that he is no longer sure about what he believes. Once, he says, he committed some terrible sin (there are hints that he had seduced a girl), but he had repented and had been scrupulous in his behavior with Jane. Jane is torn emotionally between her mother and her lover. She realizes that her mother's fears are not founded strictly on reason--that Henry is not criminal and that they are well-suited for each other. Jane is willing to live in poverty with Henry rather than to submit to her mother's tyranny. However, when Jane learns that Henry's father has threatened to disown him should the marriage take place--and there is apparently no reason for the elder Colden's interference--Jane gives Henry up. Later, she admits, "What I did, was in oblivion of self; was from a dutious regard to his genuine and lasting happiness."²⁷ Jane feels that Henry's relationship with his father is more important than their marriage. Her decision also serves to reconcile her with her mother. Obviously, Jane finds the family ties between parent and child more necessary to maintain than the ties between lovers. Her attitude is one of self-denial in hopes of re-establishing familial harmony. (Notably, Jane Talbot was written at the time when Brown broke off his engagement with a

Miss Potts because of his mother's disapproval.)²⁸ Jane's decision leads to the resolution of her problems. Several months later, Mrs. Fielder is dying, and she begs Jane's forgiveness for her rigor. She says, "Thou hast done much for me, my child. I begin to fear that I have exacted too much. . . .I leave you affluence and honor at last. I leave you the means of repairing my injury."²⁹ Jane awaits Henry's return from a long sea voyage and at last they marry.

Jane Talbot is an anti-romantic and anti-revolutionary novel. Traditional social forms are upheld in spite of the disruptive effects of romantic love and radical philosophy. Out of social harmony and order, true happiness emanates. Brown saw the ideal individual's social role as one of self-denial and adherence to a norm. For an individual to know how to conduct himself in times of crisis, he must in some way recognize the "norm" and direct his action in such a way as to uphold it. Brown never clearly defined how this was to be done, but I believe that he relied on a type of "common sense." Common sense, as Brown seems to have conceived of it, is a public, or societal conception of right and wrong, and, as such, it is as much an intuitive concept as a rational one. "Conscience" is a common sense of right and wrong. Brown saw conscience as a social control--a factor which orders the unruly unconscious mind. Jane's brother Frank has no common sense of deference to her father, and his actions lead to disaster. Jane, on the other hand, submits to her mother's wishes and discovers true happiness thereby.

The significant differences between the social philosophies

of Godwin and Brown derive from their opposing concepts of psychology. Godwin's faith in man as a potentially perfectly rational being led him to instruct his readers to rely on their own judgment rather than to trust formal laws and institutions. Brown, however, since he believed that men were frequently irrational creatures, advised readers to conform their judgments to traditional structures. Both advocated self-denial, but for different ends. A famous example from Political Justice is the anecdote about Archbishop Fenelon, whom Godwin admired: If the Archbishop's palace were in flames, writes Godwin, and we are faced with the choice of saving Fenelon or his valet, we would of course save Fenelon, as he is a great thinker and thus of more value to society than the valet. Godwin says, "Suppose I had been myself the valet; I ought to have chosen to die, rather than Fenelon should have died."³⁰ Even if the valet had been Godwin's mother (he later omitted that choice, as it was too controversial), his father, or brother, the choice must remain the same. For the sake of social justice, the more valuable person must be saved, even if that means self-destruction. Even the social ties of family are secondary.

Brown proposes a somewhat similar situation to that of Fenelon and the burning palace, in Wieland. Believing himself to be, as Godwin, a rational man, Wieland is convinced, through the testimony of his senses, that God exists and is an active force in the world around him. Knowing that God is more important than any man, when he hears the voice of God command him to kill his wife and children, he feels it is his duty to obey.

According to Godwin's logic, Wieland's murderous actions are entirely consistent, the ultimate in self-denial. Although Godwin himself would not have supported killing for the sake of an anthropomorphic deity, he may have supported it for the sake of political justice. Wieland is simply appealing to a higher justice when he says,

'Thou, Omnipotent and Holy! Thou knowest that my actions were conformable to thy will. I know not what is crime; what actions are evil in their ultimate and comprehensive tendency, or what are good. Thy knowledge, as thy power, is unlimited. I have taken thee for my guide, and cannot err. To the arms of thy protection I intrust my safety. In the awards of thy justice I confide for my recompense.'³¹

Wieland accepts the revelation of God's will for his guide, while Godwin relies upon his reason. But both, Brown might say, are ignoring common sense. When Clara Wieland concludes the narrative of Wieland, she says, "If Wieland had framed juster notions of moral duty and of the divine attributes, or if I had been gifted with ordinary equanimity or foresight, the double-tongued deceiver would have been baffled and repelled."³² What she seems to mean by "juster notions" is that Wieland should have relied more on the common sense of duty and of God, which would certainly have removed any question of murder. As for Clara, if she had been more "ordinary" and thus more attuned to the common sense, she might have been able to overcome Carwin's deceptions. By straying from common morality as to the primacy of the family, chaos results, in spite of good intentions. This would imply that Brown would save his mother before he would save Fenelon from the fire.

Therefore, Brown's social philosophy, far from Godwin's re-

volutionary ideal, is extremely conservative. Inevitably, the individual's social role, if defined by a common sense of social mores, is to support a static society. In such a society, social roles become de-personalized, and thus, Brown's philosophy is ultimately anti-individualistic. This subjugation of individuality to societal demands is made especially clear in Brown's ideas of woman and her social role, the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter IV: Woman's Sphere

. . . for knowest thou not the force
 Contagious of a fair example, set
 By virtue femininely cloth'd, and deck'd
 With charms that hover only round the shrine
 Of lovely woman, loveliest when, amidst
 Her radiant sphere, by mystic notes and high
 Led on, the muses and the graces meet,
 To mingle energies and mingle charms.

from "Devotion: an Epistle,"
 written by Brown in 1797.¹

Brown's ideas about women provide an illustration of his social theory. He saw woman as an agent of stability--on her shoulders rested the burden of maintaining family harmony, and, in a larger sense, social harmony in general. She was to be the enemy of Chaos. In answer to revolutionary feminists of his day, who would have eliminated sex distinctions², Brown proposed an alternative ideal--woman as goddess of the domestic sphere. Brown elevated the female role in the household above that of the male, and even exalted the housewife's arts above those of the statesman. He sought to reinforce a way of life which he probably felt was under attack, and woman's sphere became a symbol of that way of life. Woman became for Brown a bulwark against change and revolution. He was a quasi-feminist: improvements in women's lot which would strengthen her traditional role, such as better education, voting rights, and even freedom of divorce, were acceptable to Brown. This liberalism has inspired comparisons between his views and those of the feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft.³ But Brown drew the line at allowing women to enter the professions, which Mary Wollstonecraft demanded as a right.⁴ By entering the professions, which were properly

Man's sphere, Woman weakened herself, and thereby she weakened society. Brown's fictional heroines reflect his concept of Woman's Sphere, and his treatment of women in his novels was a clear break from the sentimental tradition, one of the phenomena of the early novel, which had glorified women not as wives and mothers but simply as human beings.

One of Brown's earliest published works was a short book entitled, Alcuin, A Dialogue on The Rights of Women (1798). It received very little contemporary notice, probably because it is a very ambiguous, cautious piece of writing. The ambiguity arises from the author's habit of speaking through both participants in the dialogue, whose views on the subject of women's rights are somewhat opposed. It is difficult to determine exactly where Brown stood in this early work, which is another indication of his intellectual confusion during this period of his identity crisis. But the dialogue is crucial to an understanding of his view of woman's role.

The actors in the dialogue are Alcuin, a poor young schoolmaster, and Mrs. Carter, a fairly well-to-do, middle-aged widow. Brown uses his characters strategically--knowing that Mrs. Carter has more prestige than Alcuin in the eyes of the reader, because of her social standing and age, he has her defend his most radical views. Alcuin plays the conservative defender of the male's sphere. But, in the second part of the dialogue, when Brown wishes to debunk some revolutionary ideas, he places them in the mouth of Alcuin and has Mrs. Carter act the conservative. It is obvious that Brown uses Alcuin and Mrs. Carter as devices

to raise questions and draw out opinions, but he does not allow either character to absolutely succeed in convincing the reader or each other.

Mrs. Carter is hardly a feminist--she personally poses no threat to male dominance, as her description reveals. She is described as an excellent hostess, her home, "the favourite resort of the liberal and ingenious,"⁵ who, one would suppose, are men. But it is not Mrs. Carter's intellectual accomplishments which attract her guests:

These things did not imply any uncommon merit in the lady. Skill in the superintendence of a tea-table, affability and modesty, promptness to inquire, and docility to listen, were all that were absolutely requisite in the mistress of ceremonies. . . .Some one was required to serve the guests, direct the menials, and maintain, with suitable vigilance, the empire of cleanliness and order. This office may not be servile, merely because it was voluntary. The influence of an unbribed inclination might constitute the whole difference between her and a waiter at an inn, or the porter of a theatre.⁶

Mrs. Carter's "affability and modesty," her "docility," reveal her acquiescence in her role that Alcuin so blithely compares to servitude. Mrs. Carter, in practical terms, accepts her subjugation, but does not in intellectual terms, as we soon discover.

Alcuin engages Mrs. Carter in conversation by asking, "Pray, Madam, are you a federalist?"⁷--that is, does she support the new Constitution? The lady, initially timid to answer such an unconventional question, is reassured by Alcuin's claim that he believes in woman's intellectual equality with man. Thus Alcuin concedes the first, most common, point of contention between conservatives and feminists--the question of inherent ability. He says, "Women are generally superficial and arro-

gant, and ignorant, because they are generally cooks and sempstresses."⁸ He therefore accepts the Lockean view that a person's rational faculty will reflect his environment, and he includes women in that view. Such a position dismisses the question of education--women should be educated in order to improve their intellects. Such a stand would come naturally to Brown as a Quaker, for Quaker girls generally received a basic education and Quaker women sometimes served as teachers.

Alcuin's question about federalism leads Mrs. Carter into a discussion of woman's economic role, and then into her political role. She complains that the sphere of activity allowed to women is too narrow. Alcuin answers, "It is by no means clear, that a change in this respect is either possible or desirable. The arts of women are far from contemptible, whether we consider the skill that is required by them, or, which is a better criterion, their usefulness in society."⁹ Alcuin argues that women can not enlarge their sphere of activity without losing some of their necessary social skills. Mrs. Carter, unconvinced, protests, "Of all forms of injustice, that is the most egregious which makes the circumstances of sex a reason for excluding one half of mankind from those paths which lead to usefulness and honour."¹⁰ Alcuin agrees, but points out, "it is possible to misapprehend and to overrate the injury that flows from the established order of things."¹¹ After all, women may obtain a living as green grocers and local traders. "But are we not (cried the lady) excluded from the liberal professions?"¹² At this point, Brown uses Alcuin to express his own disapproval of

women entering the professions. Alcuin protests, women act a doctor's role when they are nurses or midwives, although they should refrain from handling anything complex; and, in some congregations women are allowed to preach, although they are not paid. There is no law preventing a woman from becoming a merchant: "You have free access, for example, to the accompting house. It would be somewhat ludicrous, I own, to see you at the Exchange, or superintending the delivery of a cargo."¹³ As for the law, "True, we are not accustomed to see female pleaders at the bar. I never wish to see them there. But the law, as a science, is open to their curiosity, or their benevolence. It may even be practiced as a source of gain, without obliging us to frequent and public exhibitions."¹⁴ In short, Brown is arguing that woman's sphere is potentially quite broad, if she is discreet and proper. He hints that glory and fame are not worthwhile goals for the professional. Alcuin launches an attack upon the professions. His primary complaint is that lawyers, doctors and preachers pursue their callings for gain rather than from a spirit of benevolence. "How does a mercenary divine, a lawyer, or physician, differ from a dishonest chimney-sweep?"¹⁵ This anti-professional attitude is reminiscent of Brown's rebellion against his family's wishes that he become a lawyer. Brown seems to be speaking through Alcuin, as through a mask. Alcuin's major argument against women professionals is that women would lose their dignity by engaging in such mercenary roles, and that they would appear ridiculous performing the public part men play.

Having eliminated women from the professions, Brown goes on to assert women's right to vote. This stand may seem inconsistent, and may even be considered "radical" in light of the fact that he was writing 120 years before the Nineteenth Amendment, but if one looks at the Quaker influence on Brown, he is not unconventional. From 1790 to 1807 women were allowed to vote in New Jersey, and suffrage had been granted to them mainly because the New Jersey Quakers supported it. Thus, there was a tradition within the Quaker community that granted women a kind of political equality. Notably, the women of New Jersey seldom exercised their privilege.¹⁶ Using Brown as an indicator as to why women would not vote, it seems that they were not expected to do so. Mrs. Carter, returning to Alcuin's first question about her political feelings, answers,

If to uphold and defend, as far as woman's little power extends, the constitution, against violence; if to prefer a scheme of union and confederacy, to war and dissention, entitle me to that name, I may be justly stiled a federalist. But if that title be incompatible with a belief that, in many particulars, this constitution is unjust and absurd, I certainly cannot pretend to it.¹⁷

She then launches an attack on constitutional restrictions of the suffrage, in particular, of women's suffrage. Brown uses her again to expound his more liberal, less accepted, views. Alcuin agrees with her basic point, but again acts the conservative:

If this innovation be just (said I), the period for making it has not arrived. You, Madam, are singular. Women in general do not reason in this manner. They are contented with the post assigned them. If the rights of a citizen were extended to them, they would not employ them.¹⁸

Mrs. Carter protests, "If they were wise, . . .they would desire it: meanwhile it is an act of odious injustice to withhold it."¹⁹ Alcuin concedes the argument, but adds the qualification that women should not seek office, for the same reason that they should not be professionals:

I must own I should not be a little surprized to hear of a woman proferring her services as president or senator. It would be hard to restrain a smile to see her rise in a popular assembly to discuss some mighty topic. I should gaze as at a prodigy, and listen with a doubting heart: yet I might not refuse devotion to the same woman in the character of household diety.²⁰

Thus a woman is admirable only within a very restricted sphere--the household--and ludicrous outside it. Women can safely be allowed the vote (after all, few of them would exercise their right) because voting did not interfere with traditional male-female roles. Voting was scarcely traditional in the 1790's in any sense. But actual leadership was male and always had been, and woman should pose no threat in that sphere.

Alcuin concludes his argument in the first half of the dialogue by deluging Mrs. Carter and women in general with a flattering view of women as men's superiors, in position, happiness, virtue and beauty, although just equals in intellect. Woman's role is superior because it is less worrisome and more secure than man's, and her other qualities flow from this fact. For instance, her intellect adapts itself to her restricted knowledge of the world: "There is a limited sphere, in which they are accurate observers. They see, and hear, somewhat of the actions of those around them. These are, of course, remembered; become the topic of reflection; and when opportunity offers,

they delight to produce and compare them."²¹ Jane Austen is perhaps an example of the type of intellectual Brown is describing. Thus, in part one of the Alcuin dialogue, Brown advocates a broadening of female power politically, but seems unbending on the point that woman's sphere remain a domestic one. He says, "There must be one condition of society that approaches nearer than any other to the standard of rectitude and happiness."²² Woman provides that standard.

The second part of Alcuin is less subtle than the first. Oddly, the roles of Alcuin and Mrs. Carter are reversed--Alcuin acts the radical, and is undercut by Mrs. Carter's conservatism. Then Mrs. Carter goes on, Brown hopes with the reader on her side, to propose his most "radical" views, in favor of liberalized divorce laws. With remarkable inconsistency, Alcuin suddenly resumes his conservative role as protector of the male's province. However, it seems that Brown believed in the right to divorce (a right which did not imply a negation of customary marital roles, he carefully points out), but his ideas so shocked his contemporaries²³ that he never published this part of the work. Practical considerations seemingly defeated his idealism in this case.

The argument begins when Alcuin describes an imaginary journey he has taken to a land where sex distinctions exist only on a physical level. Men and women dress the same, are employed at the same tasks, and are equally educated. Alcuin protests to his imaginary guide that women would not be laborers--"But in my opinion, said I, the frame of women is too delicate, their limbs

too minute for rough and toilsome occupations. I would rather confine them to employments more congenial to the female elements of softness and beauty."²⁴ But otherwise he proposes no objection to this utopian scheme, until he broaches the subject of marriage. The guide informs him that there is no such institution, and Alcuin prudishly interrupts himself and informs Mrs. Carter that he feels such speculations should not be discussed in mixed company. Mrs. Carter then dismisses the utopian vision (which resembles the conceptualizations of William Godwin, or of the radical novelist, Robert Bage), as unworthy of discussion:

A class of reasoners has lately arisen, who aim at the deepest foundations of civil society. Their addresses to the understanding have been urged with no despicable skill. But this was insufficient, it was necessary to subdue our incredulity, as to the effects of their new maxims, by exhibiting these effects in detail, and winning our assent to their truth by engrossing the fancy and charming the affections. The journey that you have lately made, I merely regard as an excursion into their visionary world. I can trace the argument of the parts which you have unfolded, with those which are yet to come, and can pretty well conjecture of what hues, and lines, and figures, the remainder of the picture is intended to consist.²⁵

Thus, Alcuin's imaginary scheme was simply a ploy, an attempt by Brown to bring the radical viewpoint into the discussion and to dismiss it without debate as "visionary" and subversive. Notably, Alcuin does not argue with Mrs. Carter's judgment. Instead, he asks what her opinion is, as he had believed that she was an opponent to the institution. Offended, she answers, "When I demand an equality of conditions among beings that equally partake of the same divine reason, would you rashly in-

fer that I was an enemy to the institution of marriage itself?"²⁶

She then commences to define her complaints about marriage.

My objections are weighty ones. I disapprove of it, in the first place, because it renders the female a slave to the man. It enjoins and enforces submission on her part to the will of her husband. It includes a promise of implicit obedience and unalterable affection. Secondly, it leaves the woman destitute of property. Whatever she previously possesses, belongs absolutely to the man.²⁷

Mrs. Carter seems to be arguing that a woman must have freedom, even dominance within her domestic sphere. Alcuin agrees but asserts that when a difference of opinion occurs, and a decision should be made, the husband should make it, simply because it would be equally unjust if the wife were given decision-making power. Mrs. Carter answers that, "No one can sacrifice his opinions,"²⁸ but she adds that most marital disagreements are artificial. True incompatibility can be alleviated only by "an unlimited power of divorces."²⁹ Alcuin concedes the justness of divorce in extreme cases, but protests that such liberal laws could destroy the institution of marriage itself. "If marriages can be dissolved and contracted at pleasure, will not everyone deliver himself up to the impulse of lawless appetite?"³⁰ Mrs. Carter answers that a marriage based on passion is unsound, and recommends patience as a proper foundation for a relationship. She follows with a stoical disavowal of emotion and a condemnation of the "languishing and sighing lover." She says,

It is from the unhappy that patience is demanded. This virtue does not annihilate the evil that oppresses us, but lightens it. . . .Its office is to prevent these reflections from leading us to rage and despair; to make us look upon lost happiness without relapsing into phrenzy; to establish in our bosoms the empire of cold and solemn indif-

ference. . . .

I know that love, as it is commonly understood, is an empty and capricious passion. . . . In the majority of cases it is nothing but a miserable project of affectation. The languishing and sighing lover is an object to which the errors of mankind have annexed a certain degree of reverence. . . .

In proportion as men become wise, their pursuits will be judiciously selected, and that which they have wisely chosen will continue for a certain period, to be the objects of their choice. Conjugal fidelity and constancy will characterize the wise.³¹

Nothing, therefore, can be more disruptive to Brown's society than passionate love. The unhappiness of marriage is to be borne, as long as it is not absolutely oppressive. How different is Mrs. Carter's view of marriage from that of Alcuin at the end of the first part of the dialogue. Alcuin saw marriage and woman's domestic role as a delight and a haven. Mrs. Carter sees the marital situation as a cross to be borne willingly. Brown held both views. In his mind, the two views were compatible, as neither rejected marriage--one idealized it, the other viewed it critically, but accepted it as practical. Brown is consistent in that he sees marriage as an absolute good that is not to be subverted, but instead praised, or criticized constructively. Thus it can be seen why Brown is so rigid about woman's social role. By leaving the home, woman destroys marriage, as Brown knew it, and thereby destroys the entire structure of male-female relationships. Brown sensed that chaos would result from the obliteration of family tradition and the social upheaval that would result. Mrs. Carter rejects the revolutionary vision of a unisex utopia, and also rejects the concept of romantic love--both aim at destroying the elemental

foundations of society, or so Brown believed.

Brown's view of women and marriage remained consistent until his death. In The Literary Magazine and American Register, which Brown edited from 1803 to 1807, there are several editorials on the subject, and all express the same feelings as had Alcuin, years before, although his statements are clearer, as his views had crystallized.

In an article entitled, "Property and Marriage," Brown restates his concept of marriage as an absolute good:

Almost all the relative duties of human life will be found more immediately, or more remotely, to arise out of the two great institutions of PROPERTY AND MARRIAGE; they constitute, preserve, and improve society. Upon their gradual improvement depends the progressive civilization of mankind; on them rests the whole order of civil life.³²

Brown's uncompromising statement belies an uneasiness, perhaps a fear, that the two institutions were under attack and needed reinforcement. Perhaps he sensed that the social mobility of the growing American nation was threatening property, and the expanding economic role of women was threatening marriage.

The role woman is to play in marriage is, of course, as important as the institution itself:

A young woman is very ill-adapted to enter into the most solemn of social contracts, who is not prepared, by her education, to become the participator of her husband's cares, the consoler of his sorrows, his stimulator to every praise-worthy undertaking, the partner in the labours and vicissitudes of life, the faithful and economical manager of his affairs, the judicious superintendent of his family, the wise and affectionate mother of his children, the preserver of his honour, his chief counsellor, and, to sum up all, the chosen friend of his bosom.³³

Thus a woman's world revolves around her husband and her chil-

dren.

The professional woman posed a significant threat to Brown's ideal of marriage. And no professional woman was more threatening to him personally than the female novelist. Not only were women authors the obvious feminists of the day, but they were more popular than Brown was. Anne Radcliffe, for instance, wrote best sellers while Brown complained that his sales could barely pay the expenses of printing. It is no wonder that he wrote so bitterly, "Nothing is so terrible, to most men, as a literary wife."³⁴ The literary woman of necessity neglects her home:

Women, like men, are known to the world at large, chiefly by their writings. Such, therefore, being obliged to handle the pen frequently, have some apology for inattention to other objects. Of that numerous class of females, who have cultivated their minds with science and literature, without publishing their labours, and who consequently are unknown to general enquirers; how many have preserved the balance immoveable between the opposite demands of the kitchen, the drawing room, the nursery, and the library? We may safely answer from our own experience, not one.³⁵

Brown condemns the woman who neglects her household duties--"her inattention and unskillfulness produces the most injury."³⁶

There may seem to be a contradiction when Brown insists that a woman be educated, while considering a studious woman pernicious, but he is actually quite consistent. The end of a woman's education is to heighten her ability to please her husband and to teach her children, while at the same time it improves her disposition. The most important element a woman brings to marriage, Brown says, is a pleasant temper. "A well governed temper, is, of all qualities, the most useful to conduct us

steadily through the vexatious circumstances, which attack, with undistinguishing violence, the prosperous and the unfortunate; and is eminently necessary to women, whose peculiar office is to lessen the inconveniences of domestic life."³⁷ But if a woman is not to venture into the intellectual sphere, what is her consolation if she wishes to achieve personal fulfillment? Brown assures her that she is actually the force in control of society --she can manipulate emperors and rule kingdoms. "It may be said that women rule men because men love women; but I take leave to add, that women rule men frequently because men fear women."³⁸ Brown's world is thus woman-centered: at the heart of American society is woman, subtly powerful, directing all aspects of society from her rocking chair. One has visions of the boy Charles reciting his lessons to a powerful grandmother.

The women in Brown's novels reflect his view of woman's social importance. They are generally wealthy, educated, active, and yet modest and maidenly. One might mistake them, at first, for heroines of the Clarissa Harlowe mold--that archetypal female created by Richardson in Clarissa (1754), who represented to the middle classes of Europe the triumph of bourgeois virtue over aristocratic excess³⁹, and who symbolized for women the triumph of the female individual over her male oppressor. Clarissa is abducted and raped by the rakish, high-born Lovelace, and yet she succeeds in undoing his meagre victory over her person, by dying. A martyr, she takes her virtues with her to the grave, and, supposedly, to heaven. After Clarissa's demise, hundreds of fictional heroines met similar fates--and such was

the novelistic tradition that Brown inherited. But Brown did not subscribe to the sentimental tradition, as it has been called. For the theme of the novel of seduction, whether it was bourgeois fantasy or female sex fantasy, was irrelevant to Brown. As a post-Revolutionary American, bourgeois-aristocrat conflict had no meaning, and, unlike Richardson, whose best friends were women, Brown could not identify with female fantasy. Thus, he quite unsympathetically writes about Clarissa,

Those evils and privations she was unable to endure. The loss of fame took away all activity and happiness, and she died a victim to errors, scarcely less opprobrious and pernicious, than those of her tyrants and oppressors. She misapprehended the value of parental approbation and a fair fame. She depreciated the means of usefulness and pleasure of which fortune was unable to deprive her.⁴⁰

If Brown had written the denouement of Clarissa, after her rape he would have had her pick herself up and carry on as best she could. He saw her death as a revolt of an individual against society and against her social role as wife and mother. Clarissa is a truly feminist novel, and as such its theme was unacceptable to Brown. His first two novels, Wieland and Ormond, debunk the novel's sentimental tradition, and outline Brown's vision of the ideal woman.

Clara Wieland is in many ways a tragic heroine, and thus her personality has elements of greatness. It may be that Brown meant her to represent an ideal of womanhood, marred, however, by a tragic flaw. That flaw is her inability to perceive reality and to judge her place within that reality. What seems particularly to blind Clara to the dangers surrounding her are her fears of seduction or rape--precisely the hobgoblins most

sentimental novels are concerned with. Although Clara does not have particularly inflated notions about the importance of chastity, she does have delusions that her rape is imminent, if she drops her guard for a moment. Her fears are not actually unfounded, for they are inspired and encouraged by the artful manipulator, Carwin.

One night Clara, very disturbed about her relationship with her would-be lover, Pleyel, retires late to her bedchamber. She inexplicably feels the presence of some being within her closet, and she has reasons for fear--she has heard mysterious voices threatening her murder coming from the closet, and she has had ominous dreams about her brother trying to kill her. Still she tries to open the door, then calls to the person within to come out. She believes that it is her brother, Wieland, within the closet. It is important to note that her premonitions about Wieland are correct, although they are incomprehensible to her. The premonitions emanate from her unconscious mind, but she does not trust them. She is surprised, however, when Carwin comes out of the closet. Actually Carwin had hidden within the closet in order to read Clara's diary, but fearing that a full confession would mean revealing to her his power as a ventriloquist, he decides to tell her a plausible lie. He tells her that he planned to rape her, and bear away "the spoils" of her honor. Clara believes him immediately, and forgets entirely her fears about her brother. The next day, when she finds her sister-in-law Catherine murdered, she assumes that Carwin has raped and murdered her out of sheer malice. Thus Clara, the only person

even remotely aware of Wieland's potential for murder, is easily diverted by the popular seduction fantasy.

Pleyel, Clara's lover, is fooled by Carwin's manipulations, too. In a perverse joke, Carwin (immediately after the episode with Clara in her bedroom) imitates Clara's voice, and convinces Pleyel, against all the evidence of her former actions, that she is profligate and lewd. Pleyel is so sure that Clara has been seduced by Carwin that he refuses to see her again. The lovers are driven apart by an imaginary conflict, and both become victims of the popular fantasy. In general, sexual conflict in Wieland exists on an illusory level. Even Wieland's murder of his wife is based on a delusion. Brown seems to be suggesting that sexual conflict should not exist, if traditional male-female roles are performed, and that ideally the sexes are totally compatible and capable of living in harmony. Such a concept is reminiscent of Mrs. Carter's statement in Alcuin that most marital disagreements are artificial. Thus at the end of Wieland, balance and harmony are restored when Carwin reveals the truth of his deceptions to Pleyel, so he and Clara can be married. The fantasy of seduction is dismissed--it is a fantasy based on the concept of a natural state of war between men and women--and marital peace takes its place.⁴¹

Brown used his next novel, Ormond, as another stage on which he presented his views about women. The female characters represent some of the current and opposing ideals of Woman. The themes throughout the novel are anti-romantic and anti-revolutionary, and Brown's heroine, Constantia, is a hallmark of

his conservatism.

Helena Cleves is Ormond's mistress. She represents the Rousseauistic ideal of womanhood: she is physically alluring, radiant and warm in her affections, and a brilliant artist. Her face is "blushful and bewitching."⁴² When she moves it is with airy elegance. She is trained in all the pleasure-giving arts: she dances, she sings, she paints, she plays the piano. Ormond realizes that she is more than a virtuoso:

In the selection and arrangement of notes there are no limits to luxuriance and celerity. Helena had long relinquished the drudgery of imitation. . . . Her harp and clavichord supplied her with endless combinations; and these, in the opinion of Ormond, were not inferior to the happiest exertions of Handel and Arne.⁴³

In spite of her accomplishments, Ormond (and Brown) has no respect for her. A slave to her passions, she consents to live as Ormond's mistress, and then regrets her loss of reputation. Ormond despises her because she is non-intellectual: "Her presence produced a trance of the senses rather than an illumination of the soul. It was a topic of wonder how she should have so carefully separated the husk from the kernel, and be so absolute a mistress of the vehicle of knowledge with so slender means of supplying it."⁴⁴ Brown presents us with a picture of an intelligent, creative, spontaneous woman--and yet he condemns her. He condemns her, one suspects, because she has given up the opportunity to be a respectable wife and mother, by settling for the lesser role of mistress and sensual plaything. In fact, she seems to be incapable of motherhood--after a prolonged relationship with Ormond she has not become pregnant (in sentimental

novels, seduced, virtuous girls always become pregnant as a punishment for their sins). Ormond observes that she would be incapable of instructing their offspring in subjects such as history and natural science, and so would be an unfit mother of sons. Helena is doomed to die unwed--she commits suicide when Ormond tells her he loves Constantia Dudley. But her death arouses little grief. Brown saw Helena as weak, too little prepared for the part she must play in life, and in her dying she is not a martyr to an inflexible society, but a victim of her own folly. Helena represents the unguided unconscious, or the depraved will, which is beyond redemption.

An equally accomplished and fascinating woman is Ormond's sister, Martinette de Beauvais. Martinette and her brother were orphaned as children in Europe and were separated when Ormond was sent away to school. An Italian woman adopted her and engaged a priest to instruct her. The priest, much to Martinette's disgust, tried to seduce her, and when he failed, compensated for his frustrations by teaching her everything he knew. "His passion for science was at least equal to that which he entertained for me, and both these passions combined to make him a sedulous instructor. He was a disciple of the newest doctrines respecting matter and mind."⁴⁵ Martinette not only received a man's education from the priest, but he also introduced her to the ideas of the Enlightenment. After enduring a few years of his teachings, Martinette found a new protectress, a wealthy Englishwoman who constantly changed religions and husbands. Martinette then fell in love and married Wentworth, a

young Englishman, "a political enthusiast, who esteemed nothing more graceful or glorious than to die for the liberties of mankind."⁴⁶ Together they set out to fight in the American Revolution. Martinette says, "I delighted to assume the male dress, to acquire skill at the sword, and dexterity in every boisterous exercise. The timidity that commonly attends women gradually vanished. I felt as if imbued by a soul that was a stranger to the sexual distinction."⁴⁷ Here is a truly liberated woman! She relates a tale of her feats during the French Revolution:

If thou wert with me at Paris, I could show thee a fusil of two barrels, which is precious beyond any other relic, merely because it enabled me to kill thirteen officers at Jemappe. Two of these were emigrant nobles, whom I knew and loved before the Revolution, but the cause they had since espoused cancelled their claims to mercy.⁴⁸

At the time of the telling of her tale to Constantia Dudley, Martinette is an emigré, living in Philadelphia until the end of the Terror. With the fall of Robespierre, she returns to Paris. Brown had to deport her--she had no place in the American scene. In fact, he dismisses her with only a few words. Her tale provides Constantia with "many reflections on the deceitfulness of appearances."⁴⁹ Constantia's reaction to Martinette's tale provides the clearest indication of Brown's feelings about Martinette: "Constantia shuddered, and drew back, to contemplate more deliberately the features of her guest. Hitherto she had read in them nothing that bespoke the desperate courage of the martyr and the deep designing of the assassin. . . .She felt that antipathy was preparing to displace love."⁵⁰ Martinette is abhorrent, but engrossing. Brown almost admires her courage and dar-

ing--but he deports her, nevertheless. She represents the overly educated person who has lost her common sense of God and propriety.

Brown's ideal woman is Constantia Dudley: she is a mistress of survival. She encounters the trials of American cities --the plague of yellow fever, the threat of poverty in an era of extreme social mobility, the social breakdown caused by avarice and alienation, family breakdown caused by unemployment and drink--and she overcomes each evil as it challenges her. She is sustained by her common sense approach to her problems and by her willingness to practice self-denial. We are reminded of Mrs. Carter's advocacy of self-denial in marriage as a source of social harmony. Constantia was given all the advantages of wealth as a child--fine clothes, jewels, books, and an education. Besides learning from her mother the arts of the housewife, her father gave her a classical education. He "sought to make her, not alluring and voluptuous, but eloquent and wise."⁵¹ When her father loses all his money through the fraud of his business partner, Constantia faces her poverty bravely and sensibly. She sells all but her most essential belongings: "Her music and even her books were not spared, . . .she was thenceforth to become an economist of time as well as of money."⁵² She becomes a seamstress and soon her income is all the family has to live with. When famine threatens, she learns that corn meal is particularly nutritious: "Indian meal was procurable at ninety cents a bushel. By recollecting former experiments, she knew that this quantity, with no accompaniment but salt,

would supply wholesome and plentiful food for four months for one person."⁵³ When it is necessary, Constantia denies herself simple pleasures--she is an ascetic, nun-like creature. Her house is like a cell: "The walls, though broken into roughness by carelessness or time, were adorned with glistening white. The floor, though loose and uneven, and with gaping seams, had received all the improvements which cloth and brush could give."⁵⁴ Constantia's self-abnegation seems to please Brown, while Helena's voluptuousness disturbed him. When Constantia's hand is sought by a suitor, she rejects him, as, "She had no design of entering into marriage in less than seven years from this period."⁵⁵ Constantia does not allow romance to enter her vision of the future. Further self-denial is necessary during the time of plague. When yellow fever strikes, Constantia, although fearing for her health, goes to watch over a dying neighbor. She helps a widow with her housework after her husband has died. When she and her family become sick, they have mild cases and quickly recover, presumably because of their general asceticism and virtue. Providence at last rewards Constantia for her goodness--when Helena dies, she leaves a will in which Constantia is named her heir. Constantia is thereby enriched, and so has run the gamut from riches to rags to riches.

Constantia used the guides of her reason, or her early education, and her common sense of right and wrong, and overcame the various obstacles common in American society. But a new problem arises which is atypical: Constantia is wooed by the high-minded villain, Ormond. Ormond is a revolutionary, a Deist

and a member of the secret society of the Illuminati. Constantia is fascinated by his intellect, and so is nearly ensnared by his insidious charms. She is attracted to him because of one fatal flaw in her make-up: she has had no religious instruction.

She was unguarded in a point where, if not her whole yet doubtless her principal security and strongest bulwark would have existed. She was unacquainted with religion. She was unhabituated to conform herself to any standard but that connected with the present life. . . .In her struggles with misfortune, she was supported and cheered by the sense of no approbation but her own.⁵⁶

Fortunately a friend, Sophia Courtland, arrives just in time to give Constantia the necessary moral advice and religious instruction which enable her to break off her relationship with Ormond. Sophia describes herself, "Sophia Courtland has never been wise. Her affections disdain the cold dictates of discretion, and spurn at every limit that contending duties and mixed obligations prescribe."⁵⁷ Like Jane Talbot, Sophia has an emotional sense of God's existence, which she passes on to her too-rational friend, Constantia. Her mind is thereby finally integrated, and she is ready to face a final trial, the assault of Ormond.

The final scenes of Ormond are a succinct representation of Brown's views of woman's social function. Ormond, when Constantia has refused him, threatens her and plots her rape. One night, Constantia is alone in her country house--it is an especially dark and gloomy night. Ormond comes to the house and locks all the exits. Constantia becomes Woman, locked within her house, her sphere. Ormond has come to rape her: he is Chaos personified. Initially Constantia strikes a pose direct

from the pages of Clarissa: "Ormond! Beware! Know that my unalterable resolution is to die uninjured. I have the means in my power. Stop where you are; one step more, and I plunge this knife into my heart."⁵⁸ But Ormond, fittingly, does not subscribe to sentimental notions of the sanctity of the female body. He answers, "Living or dead, the prize that I have in view shall be mine."⁵⁹ As he attacks, Constantia drops her weak sentimental pose, and stabs Ormond in the heart. With Ormond dies revolution and romance--the foreign menace they represent is dispelled. Constantia, as Woman triumphant, has defeated Chaos and upheld Order.

Chapter V: A Defense of Commercialism

Thomas Jefferson wrote, in his Notes on the State of Virginia in 1787,

Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. . . .Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example. It is the mark set on those, who not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, as does the husbandman, for their subsistence, depend for it on the casualties and caprice of customers.¹

Jefferson was not only praising agrarian virtue, he was condemning commercial vice as well. Moral corruption among cultivators, he said, is the exception rather than the rule, but virtue is exceptional among merchants and tradesmen. Jefferson envisioned a future for America based upon his belief in rural virtue: yeoman farmers were to create a landscape checkered with small farms. Charles Brockden Brown reacted defensively to the idealization of farm life and to the anti-commercialist attitudes that that idealization fostered. As a member of a merchant family and a lifelong resident of Philadelphia, he sought to define an ideal future landscape for America which was more consistent with his own experience. He wrote in 1802,

Whether the good or the evil produced by commerce preponderates, is one of those complicated questions concerning human society, not easily or satisfactorily solved. Those who look only on the dark side of the picture, and see only vices and miseries which follow in the train of opulence and refinement, will incline the scale against commerce. Those who regard the enlargement and activity of the human mind as essential to the happiness and improvement of society; who perceive and relish the diversified enjoyments which flow from art and science, and for which we are chiefly indebted to com-

merce; considering that life, in every situation, must be a compound of good and evil, will decide in favor of a commercial state.²

Brown's principle argument in favor of a commercial state is that the diversity of experience inspired by wealth and the city "enlarges" the mind, and thereby improves human society. Again, Brown used his ideas about the mind as a basis for his defense of the status quo. In fact, one can trace in Brown's writings his propensity to identify certain aspects of the American landscape with the different levels of the human mind. The depraved, or unruly, unconscious mind is drawn as analogous to the frontier area and its characteristic lawlessness. Settled, rural America is the home of common sense virtue, and traditional societal values, but is also a seat of ignorance: it represents the unconscious mind structured with an intuitive sense of good and evil. The city, finally, is the source of education and refined culture; the rational, conscious mind is developed there. Consistent with his view of the virtue of the "whole mind", Brown saw the ideal American landscape as being both urban and rural, as only such a society could produce his concept of a "whole" man.

In Edgar Huntly; or, The Memoirs of a Sleepwalker, Brown attacked the romantic idealization of frontier life. This idealization was based upon a belief in the virtue of a life in nature unencumbered by the corruptions of civilization. As such, this romanticism was anti-commercial, and in Brown's eyes, therefore anti-intellectual. Edgar is a romantic, and he prefers darkness and wildness to civilization. As the novel opens,

he is walking alone at night, and admits, "A nocturnal journey in districts so romantic and wild as these, through which lay my road, was more congenial to my temper than a noonday ramble."³ Darkness, as was shown in chapter two, is used by Brown to symbolize the unconscious mind freed from common sense guides for behavior. Edgar's midnight walk, for instance, is not sensible. Only a few weeks before, Edgar's best friend had been shot and killed on this same path, at the same dark hour. But Edgar is foolishly confident, and has no fears for his own safety. As he approaches the place of the murder, Edgar perceives a man digging a hole beneath a tree. As Edgar walks nearer to him, the man stops digging and begins to weep and groan. Edgar immediately concludes that this man is the murderer of his friend, that he is sleepwalking because of his guilty conscience. The man suddenly jumps up and walks quickly off into the woods. Edgar resolves to follow him, in spite of the dangers of the wild: "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."⁴

In a figurative sense, the somnambulist leads Edgar into the recesses of his unconscious mind. Edgar's night journey in the woods is a journey into madness. Edgar follows the man for several nights, and discovers that he is Clithero Edny, a servant on a neighboring farm. Clithero is a maniac who feels that his state of mind is reflected by the forests and caverns he frequents. He tells Edgar,

The wilderness, and the cave to which you followed me, were familiar to my Sunday rambles. Often have

I indulged in audible griefs on the cliffs of that valley. Often have I brooded over my sorrows in the recesses of that cavern. This scene is adapted to my temper. Its mountainous asperities supply me with images of desolation and seclusion, and its headlong streams lull me into temporary forgetfulness of mankind.⁵

The wilderness encourages Clithero's delusions. His "forgetfulness of mankind" suggests that Brown expected selfish, anti-social behavior from those whose minds are wild and unstructured. Edgar, like Clithero, responds emotionally to caverns, traditional symbols of the unconscious:

My attention has often been excited by the hollow sound which was produced by my casual footsteps, and which shewed me that I trod upon the roof of caverns. A mountain-cave and the rumbling of an unseen torrent are appendages of this scene, dear to my youthful imagination. Many of romantic structure are found within the precincts of Norwalk.⁶

In contrast to Edgar and Clithero's fascination with caverns and the unconscious, Brown describes the experience of Edgar's teacher, Sarsefield, the representative man of culture and refinement who does not indulge in romantic speculations about the world. A world traveller, he was once waylaid by bandits and taken into their underground society: "The time was not misemployed which he spent immured in caverns and carousing with robbers. His details were eminently singular and curious, and evinced the acuteness of his penetration, as well as the steadfastness of his courage."⁷ Unlike Edgar, Clithero, and the robber band, Sarsefield does not enter the caverns voluntarily. But once there, his intellectual penetration renders his experience useful. And when Sarsefield enters the wilderness, he does so partly "to investigate its botanical and mineral produc-

tions."⁸ Thus Sarsefield brings order to the wild through his use of reason and knowledge, while the madman and the romantic succumb to the lawlessness of the forests.

Brown implies that the romantic is susceptible to madness when Edgar, like Clithero, begins to sleepwalk. Unaware of his actions, Edgar walks barefoot into the forest, enters a cavern, falls into a pit, and is knocked into a state of insensibility. Heretofore he has experienced the wilderness only as an idea, or as a romantic's vision. Thus his first reactions when he awakens reflect his habit of imposing unrealistic interpretations on the scenes around him. He imagines that a tyrant has thrown him into a dungeon, or that he has been buried prematurely.⁹ That such events happen only in the plots of contemporary Gothic novels does not occur to Edgar. But the physical reality of his situation forces Edgar to draw more logical conclusions: "I now felt the cravings of hunger, and perceived that, unless my deliverance were speedily effected, I might suffer a tedious and lingering death."¹⁰ Still he fights to suppress reality: "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 temper that afflicted me existed only in my own distempered imagination."¹¹ The consolation of these doubts could not last long. "Every hour added to the proof that my perceptions were real. My hunger speedily became ferocious."¹² This episode at the bottom of the pit symbolizes Edgar's necessary struggle to overcome his romantic illusions about the world he lives in. When

Edgar's hunger drives him at last to action, he climbs out of the pit and makes his way to the mouth of the cavern. There, at the entrance to the cave, he comes across an Indian war party consisting of five men. Driven by hunger and thirst, Edgar slips by four of them, who are asleep, stealing weapons as he passes. Outside of the cave he confronts the guard, and quickly and silently kills him with a tomahawk. Edgar is experiencing the reality of frontier life which includes Indian warfare and sudden, violent death. He reacts to his violent deed with horror and guilt:

Never before had I taken the life of a human creature. On this head I had, indeed, entertained somewhat of religious scruples. These scruples did not forbid me to defend myself, but they made me cautious and reluctant to decide. Though they could not withhold my hand when urged by a necessity like this, they were sufficient to fill me with remorse and dismay.¹³

Edgar is discovering that the laws of the wilderness do not conform with traditional societal rules of morality. Physical survival becomes the end of all actions. Edgar does not ponder his first killing for long--he rushes to drink from the stream into which he has thrown the Indian's body. He says, "I did not escape all compunction in the present instance, but the tumult of my feelings was quickly allayed. To quench my thirst was a consideration by which all others were supplanted."¹⁴ Edgar's emotions are no longer his guide; his "feelings" are secondary to his physical needs. In order to escape the rest of the Indians, Edgar plunges into the pathless wilderness. It no longer seems romantic and attractive to him. On the contrary, it is threatening and bleak:

No fancy could conceive a scene more wild and desolate than that which now presented itself. The soil was nearly covered with sharp fragments of stone. Between these, sprung brambles and creeping vines, whose twigs, crossing and intertwining with each other, added to the roughness below, made the passage infinitely toilsome. Scattered over this space were single cedars with their ragged spines and wreaths of moss, and copses of dwarf oaks, which were only new emblems of sterility.¹⁵

Although he runs along quickly, the remaining Indians catch up with him, and in the ensuing shoot-out he manages to kill three of them. Again, he is remorseful, his words echoing the "noble savage" concept: "Three beings full of energy and heroism, endowed with minds strenuous and lofty, poured out their lives before me. I was the instrument of their destruction."¹⁶ In spite of this remorse, when Edgar sees his opportunity to kill the fifth Indian, he shoots him. His feelings of guilt cause him to hesitate for an instant, and the wound is not fatal. He resolves to relieve the Indian's agony by shooting him again, but again he fails to kill him. Finally, he stabs him with his bayonet. "This task of cruel lenity was at length finished. I dropped the weapon and threw myself on the ground, overpowered by the horrors of this scene. Such are the deeds which perverse nature compels thousands of rational beings to perform and to witness!"¹⁷ Thus nature is "perverse," turning rational men into savages. In spite of Edgar's objections, it is apparent that he exults in his role as Indian killer: "I left the savage where he lay, but made prize of his tomahawk. . . . Prompted by some freak of fancy, I stuck his musket in the ground, and left it standing upright in the middle of the road."¹⁸ Later he discovers another Indian's body by the roadside. He says, "I was

weary of contemplating these rueful objects. Custom, likewise, even in so short a period, had inured me to spectacles of horror. I was grown callous and immovable."¹⁹

Brown has created a picture of the wilderness as a lawless, violent world in which conventional morality is inconsistent with survival. A reasonable man, he implies, should regard the wilderness with terror, and should not imagine that a "higher law" is in operation there. Man's state in nature is perverse and cruel, Brown would say, and it is only civilization that inspires virtue. After he has escaped the Indians and returned to his home, Edgar has a respectful fear of wildness. When he enters the forest again, he runs along in fright: "This was the spot which had witnessed so many perils during the last year; and my emotions, on approaching it, were awful. With palpitating heart and quick steps I traversed the road."²⁰ At the end of the novel, Edgar is planning to join his tutor Sarsefield in his home in New York City. Edgar not only has learned from his experience about the true character of wild nature, but he has learned about his unconscious mind. He says, "What light has burst upon my ignorance of myself and of mankind!"²¹ Wildness therefore serves a purpose in Brown's intellectual landscape-- it reminds men of their frailty and insignificance. Edgar's experience reveals that society's laws are mutable, and therefore are to be protected and upheld. Brown's lesson is, again, anti-romantic and anti-revolutionary.

In Wieland and Arthur Mervyn, the relationship between the city and the country is dealt with explicitly. The scene in

Wieland is set at a large farm which represents a mixture of art and nature: Brown describes it in classical terms, as a type of Arcadia.

Schuykill was here a pure and translucent current broken into wild and ceaseless music by rocky points, murmuring on a sandy margin, and reflecting on its surface banks of all varieties of height and degrees of declivity. These banks were checkered by patches of dark verdure and shapeless masses of white marble, and crowned by copses of cedar, or by the regular magnificence of orchards, which, at this season, were in blossom, and were prodigal of odours. The ground which receded from the river was scooped into valleys and dales. Its beauties were enhanced by the horticultural skill of my brother, who bedecked this exquisite assemblage of slopes and risings with every species of vegetable ornament, from the giant arms of the oak to the clustering tendrils of the honeysuckle.²²

However, Brown does not mean the farm to represent an example of the products of yeoman virtue and industry. Wieland is not a farmer, he is a gardener, ornamenting his grounds. The farm is tended by tenant farmers living in a hut near the mansion. Brown sees the farmers as simple and virtuous, but ignorant and superstitious. Clara says of the farming class,

I reflected on the alliance which commonly subsists between ignorance and the practice of agriculture, and indulged myself in any speculations as to the influence of progressive knowledge in dissolving this alliance and embodying the dreams of poets. I asked why the plough and the hoe might not become the trade of every human being, and how this trade might be made conducive to, or at least consistent with, the acquisition of wisdom and eloquence.²³

Clara's reflections echo the Jeffersonian dream of an agrarian utopia, but Brown implies that such dreams are an indulgence, or a waste of time. Ignorance is the lot of the farmer. Only the wealthy leisure class, enriched by trade in agricultural goods,

can achieve any intellectual refinement. Wieland, who was reared and educated in the city, is the creator of Arcadia, not the plowman.

The hero of Arthur Mervyn is a young country boy who has lived all his life on a poor Pennsylvania farm. The youngest son in a large family, his mother has indulged all his wishes, and provided him with a classical education. This education taught him that farming is the best way of life. Arthur says, "My books had taught me the dignity and safety of the middle path, and my darling writer abounded with encomiums on the rural life."²⁴ Like Edgar Huntly, Arthur bases his judgments not on experience, but on romantic generalizations. Arthur's home experience should have taught him that rural life has its seamy aspects: after his mother's death, Arthur's aging father married a young and licentious milkmaid, and threw Arthur out on his own. Arthur resolved to seek his fortune in the city, but had few hopes of finding a pleasant life there: "Discords and evil smells, unsavoury food, unwholesome labour, and irksome companions, were, in my opinion, the unavoidable attendants of the city."²⁵ Although he stays in the city for only five days, Arthur's preconceptions about it are confirmed, and he strikes out again for the country. "He could not outroot from his mind the persuasion that to plough, to sow, and to reap were employments most befitting a reasonable creature, and from which the truest pleasure and the least pollution flow. . . .The trade of ploughman was friendly to health, liberty, and pleasure."²⁶ Arthur finds employment at the first farm he encounters as he

leaves the city. Here he finds the simple, unaffected way of life he has been seeking. Brown portrays this farm family as traditional in every respect: they are moderate Christians (Quakers, in fact); the family consists of a farmer and his wife, and two beautiful daughters; their manners are "quiet, artless and cordial"²⁷; they are frugal and industrious. Arthur's dreams about the country are entirely verified by this family's way of life, and he settles down to spend his life in that spot. However, a plague of yellow fever which breaks out in the nearby city shatters this idyll. The farmer's eldest daughter goes mad with fear for the safety of her fiancé, who works in the town. Brown is reminding his readers that even in Arcadia, the weakness of the human mind can shatter peace and bring on evil. Arthur returns to the city to find the lost lover. By doing so, he discovers the true value of city life. He meets benevolent persons who nurse him when he falls sick with fever, and who aid him in his search. They are learned and kind city-dwellers with whom he feels a natural kinship. Returning to the country, he encounters men guided only by superstition and avarice. He achieves a more mature outlook:

To say truth, I was now conscious of a revolution in my mind. . . . On my first visit to the city, I had met with nothing but scenes of folly, depravity and cunning. No wonder that the images connected with the city, were disastrous and gloomy; but my second visit produced somewhat different impressions. Maravegli, Estwick, Medlicote, and you, were beings who inspired veneration and love. Your residence appeared to beautify and consecrate this spot, and gave birth to an opinion that if cities are the chosen seats of misery and vice, they are likewise the soil of all the laudable and strenuous productions of mind.²⁸

Arthur has discovered that no place is either all good or all bad. The city has evil aspects, but these are compensated for by its stimulating intellectual atmosphere. He adds, that the advantages of the country are of course not to be overlooked:

Competence, fixed property and a settled abode, rural obligations and conjugal pleasures, were justly to be prized; but their value could be known, and their benefits fully enjoyed only by those who have tried all scenes; who have mixed with all classes and ranks; who have partaken of all conditions; and who have visited different hemispheres and climates and nations.²⁹

Brown's objection to the agrarian ideal, therefore, was that it proposed to eliminate diversity from the American scene. Diversity of experience, he implied, was a source of the mental integration which he felt was a social necessity. To make American life uniformly agrarian would support traditional moral forms but would also eliminate higher culture from American life. A society, therefore, which provided a variety of choices of locales and occupations, would most likely be a healthy society. There was a place for the city, the country, and the frontier in this scheme of Brown's. It was a scheme, in fact, which called for no change at all in the direction of American life, and therefore, it was a defense of the status quo.

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