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THE WOMAN OF SORROWS: CLARA'S SELF-DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR
BASED ON SUPERNATURAL BELIEF IN *WIELAND, OR THE TRANSFORMATION*:

AN AMERICAN TALE BY CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

by

Paden B. Carlson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

English

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2017

ABSTRACT

The Woman of Sorrows: Clara's Self-Destructive Behavior Based on Supernatural Belief
in *Wieland, or the Transformation: An American Tale* by Charles Brockden Brown

by

Paden B. Carlson, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2017

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Much has been devoted to the study of causality and ambiguity within Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland, or the Transformation*. While there is textual and cultural evidence providing explanations for Clara's behavior, little has been said about the ramifications of Clara's actions. This essay seeks to add to the discussion of *Wieland* by exploring Clara's transformation from theistic rationalist to someone who is inclined to believe in supernatural explanation concerning seemingly inexplicable events.

In more than one instance, Clara's supernaturally-charged beliefs endanger her. Brown uses Clara's increasing reliance on supernatural explanation to suggest that, should the early United States similarly abandon rational thinking, it will likewise expose itself to harm and self-destruction. To Brown, Clara's narrative represents the United States' potential trajectory should it fail to return to rational thought.

The early United States struggled to find clarity amid the conflicting roles that religious belief and rationality played. The Second Great Awakening created a surge in national religiosity; this was a surge that Brown was wary of. By using Clara as a

metaphor, Brown argues that, not only should the early United States return to rational thought, women were central to reinstating a national equilibrium between rationality and religiosity.

(47 pages)

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I offer special thanks to my family, included in which are some of my dearest friends. Without their support, I would have shrunk from my potential. To my colleagues in the graduate department at Utah State University, I am forever grateful for your camaraderie and willingness to allow me to join you in the ranks of self-improvement.

Paden B. Carlson

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INTRODUCTION

In one of Wieland's final scenes, Clara, the narrator and protagonist of the novel, sinks into a fit of despair and contemplates suicide. Clara is contemplating suicide because she is overcome by the evils that have befallen her family and the evils that must inevitably befall her because of her belief in the supernatural. Thinking only of the destructive future that awaits her, Clara's thoughts are suddenly revived as Carwin enters her room. Having "no breath to interrupt his tale by interrogations or comments," Clara listens to Carwin admit to being responsible for the mysterious voices heard in Mettingen (162). After listening to Carwin's less-than-satisfactory confession, Clara watches in horror as her brother, Wieland, staggers barefoot into the room.

As Theodore Wieland stands poised to murder his only sibling, Clara, Carwin, who is supposedly gifted with divine powers, intercedes on her behalf by telling Wieland that he has been misled. When Wieland realizes that his senses have been fooled by illusion, Clara notes his sudden transformation from a state of perceived heroics, to an understanding of his error, "finally restor[ing] [him] to the perception of truth" (172).

Here, it may appear that Brockden Brown means to highlight Theodore Wieland's transformation; Brown's true intent, however, is to chronicle Clara's transformation from someone who considers self-harm because of her supernatural belief to someone who can rationally explain the mysterious circumstances in which she finds herself. Early in the novel, Clara espouses tenets of theistic rationalism, an ideology rooted in rationality, as a means of approaching mysterious circumstances. As the novel proceeds, Wieland documents Clara's transformation from rational theist to someone who relies on supernatural explanation to explain mysterious events such as the voices she begins to

hear. Clara's supernatural beliefs, however, have destructive consequences. Specifically, Clara dashes herself against a wall at one point and later considers suicide by cutting her veins. By the end of the novel, Clara seems to recognize these negative consequences of her supernatural belief, and she ends up affirming reason as her guide once more. In fact, Clara admits at the close of the novel that, had [she] been gifted with ordinary equanimity or foresight, the double-tongued deceiver would have been baffled and repelled" (183). Clara clearly understands that, had she possessed an ordinary amount of reasonability, she would not have been fooled.

It is no wonder that Brown ends the title of his novel by noting that it is "An American Tale." To Brown, *Wieland* is just that—a tale of America, where Clara acts as a metaphor for the early United States and its efforts to reconcile rationality with supernatural belief as it moved forward. During the time when Brown was writing *Wieland*, the United States was facing its own conflict about the role of religious belief and rationality, exemplified by the influence of the Second Great Awakening. Brown uses *Wieland*, and specifically Clara, to illustrate the dangerous effects of supernatural belief, while simultaneously encouraging individuals to use reason as a lens through which to view the world. Should the United States continue to rely on supernatural thought, the results would prove harmful. Just like Clara, the United States would, by affirming the rational once more, progress in a productive way.

Wieland supplies Brown with the ideal platform for discussing the effects of the Second Great Awakening, which was marked by a rise in religiosity. While the character of Clara allows Brown to address the pitfalls of a nation plagued by religious enthusiasm, her character also allows him to engage with the belief that women were central to

national identity through their influence in the home. Through his novel, Brown uses Clara to argue that the United States needed to part with supernatural reliance and that women were central in helping the nation to do so.

Critics tend to focus on the culture that informs Clara's actions, as opposed to the ramifications of those actions.¹ Hedlin, for example, explores the causality between Clara's experiences and her behavior, detailing various cultural phenomena responsible for informing Clara's beliefs.² Other criticism has focused on the novel's ambiguity, though this essay maintains that Brown's primary intention is to demonstrate the ill-effects of Clara's belief in the supernatural, and not to preoccupy readers with questions that have no answers.³ Essentially, Brown is not so much concerned with Clara's truthfulness or the notions that inform her decisions, as he is concerned with the ramifications of disregarding reason, which can eventually lead to national upheaval.

¹ I refer here to critics like Christine Hedlin, Thomas Koenigs, and James R. Russo.

² See Christine Hedlin's "Was There Not Reason to Doubt?": *Wieland* and Its Secular Age."

³ Specifically, I refer here to Thomas Koenig's essay on *Wieland*, "Whatever May Be the Merit of my Book as a Fiction": *Wieland*'s Instructional Fictionality."

THE TRANSFORMATION OF CLARA WIELAND

At the start of the novel, Clara is presented as a character who is grounded in a religious tradition, but who eventually chooses reason as her guiding principle. Clara's parents initially introduce her to religion and the supernatural. Clara's father, who felt that a divine "command had been laid upon him, which he had delayed to perform," believed his death was at hand and that what "awaited him was strange and terrible" (14). Following his portentous thoughts, Clara's father visits his temple one last time where "a gleam diffused itself...and instantly a loud report, like the explosion of a mine, followed" (16). Wieland senior is then found "scorched and bruised" as though he had been struck by some heavy object, and his clothes lay in a pile of ash beside him. Soon after, Clara's father succumbs to his injuries and dies. Wieland senior's death is a mysterious one because of the events surrounding it. Not only does Wieland senior present mysterious injuries associated with illuminated clouds, he maintains that he never saw an assailant. Although Clara's father does not "exact from his family compliance with his [religious] example," Clara's mother is "no less devout" (12-13).⁴ Because of their reliance on religion, Clara's parents undoubtedly believe in the supernatural.

After her mother dies from the shock of her husband's sudden death, Clara is adopted by her aunt, which is when her relationship to religion and reason begins to change. After she is taken in by her aunt, Clara's education is "modelled by no religious standard," and she is "left to the guidance of [her] own understanding" (21-22). This understanding is rooted in rationality, evidenced by the way in which Clara interprets her

⁴ For a more comprehensive study of Clara's heritage, see Charles C. Bradshaw's "The New England Illuminati: Conspiracy and Causality in Charles Brockden Brown's 'Wieland'".

father's death. Clara, who is six when her father dies, frequently receives "an exact account of [that] mournful catastrophe" from her uncle, whose testimony she believes "is peculiarly worthy of credit" (15, 18). Clara's uncle is "inclined to believe that half the truth [has] been suppressed" from Wieland senior's account of his attack (18). Even Clara declares that "there [is] something in [her father's] manner that indicate[s] an imperfect tale" (18). Clara's suspicion of supernatural interference is blatant when she further considers the events surrounding her father's death:

Was [his death] the penalty of disobedience? this the stroke of a vindictive and invisible hand? Is it fresh proof that the Divine Ruler interferes in human affairs, mediates an end, selects, and commissions his agents, and enforces, by unequivocal sanctions, submission to his will? Or, was it merely the irregular expansion of the fluid that imparts warmth to our heart and our blood, caused by the fatigue of the preceding day, or flowing, by established laws, from the condition of his thoughts (Emphasis mine, 18-19).

Here, Clara's attempt at a belief in supernatural interference illustrates her inclination to sometimes lean on her religious parentage. Although she first considers the possibility that the "Divine Ruler" has somehow intervened by punishing her father for eluding his duty, Clara ultimately sides with her uncle, a "man of science," when she attributes her father's unfortunate and seemingly bizarre death to bodily malfunction (123). This early consideration of her father's death demonstrates just how unsteady Clara is. Because of her upbringing, she cannot help but vacillate between the supernatural and the rational throughout most of the novel.

Clara's inability to separate her religious upbringing from her rational outlook is best understood through theistic rationalism, which was an amalgamation of rationalism, Christianity, and natural religion, with rationalism being the predominant characteristic. Unlike deists, who resisted the belief that God intervened in human affairs, theistic rationalists believed that "God was active in human affairs..." and "that reliable information about God and about what He wills is best discovered and understood by examining the evidence of nature and the laws of nature, which He established" (Frazer 15, Smith 25-6). At the onset of *Wieland*, Clara clearly sides with reason, though she cannot help but fall back on tenets of religion from time to time.

Clara's tendency to align herself with reason in interpreting seemingly inexplicable events coincides with the beliefs of theistic rationalism, upon which the United States was founded. Although it may initially appear that Clara is a deist because she seems to disavow the supernatural by firmly accepting reason as her guide, I would argue for a broader sense of what Peter Kafer calls deism when he says that Clara, at the start of the novel, "self-consciously mold[s] herself within a pleasant, easygoing deism" (Kafer 124). Instead of Kafer's insight concerning Clara's deism, Clara's initial state in the novel is more congruent with theistic rationalism than deism, the main difference being that theistic rationalism was "a hybrid belief system mixing elements of natural religion, Christianity, and rationalism," while deism was "a critique of Christianity and written revelation from God" (Frazer 14-16). Essentially, theistic rationalists believed that God did in fact intervene in human affairs, though He did so using methods that were comprehensible only through an examination of nature. Deists, on the other hand,

believed that God was absent in human affairs; that He simply created the universe and stood back.

Clara more aptly fits the mold of a theistic rationalist because of her standing in society. During the early to mid-part of the eighteenth century in the United States, theistic rationalism appealed “to the well-educated elite—specifically, those versed in Enlightenment thought” (Frazer 14). Clara, who grows in the shadow of her brother’s Ciceronian teachings, and who is “instructed in most branches of useful knowledge,” easily meets the definition of a well-educated elite, especially given her large inheritance (20).

Despite her best efforts to remain rational, Clara often reminisces about her father’s mysterious death, demonstrating how she believes that the supernatural may, in fact, play a part in human affairs.⁵ Her inability to wholly deny the supernatural suggests a potential inroad for later supernatural belief. This inability is evidenced when she acknowledges that, “as a consolation in calamity religion is dear” (22). Here, Clara submits that religion is only relevant in times of distress. Even though she thinks religion is only necessary in times of difficulty, however, Clara still acknowledges its usefulness. It seems, then, that while Clara insists on resisting supernatural explanations, there is a side of her that is inclined, in times of uncertainty or difficulty, to engage with supernatural interpretation as a form of consolation.⁶

⁵ See chapters four and sixteen for these reminiscences.

⁶ Because religion can be defined as an “action or conduct indicating belief in, or obedience to, and reverence for a...superhuman power,” I propose that, for purposes of my argument, religion, the divine, or anything beyond what is seemingly natural, is synonymous with the supernatural (OED).

The United States is also rooted in a religious tradition that engaged with the supernatural. New England colonies, as well as mid-Atlantic regions, were founded for religious reasons, and allowed Puritan thought to spread. Puritan culture, which was heavily influenced by supernaturally-charged beliefs, contributed to the founding of the United States. The First Great Awakening, which occurred in the mid eighteenth century, further spurred religious participation by encouraging believers to believe more fully in God's grace and presence in the lives of the converted (Lambert 19). Over time, the US broke away from these religious traditions to embrace rationality, and, in particular, reoriented its religious views toward rational theism.

Just as Clara builds her life upon principles of theistic rationalism, so, too, was the United States built upon foundations of a rational dominance that was infused with supernatural possibility. For Clara, who at first appears to be a deist because she so vehemently defends reason, theistic rationalism better fits her set of beliefs because she cannot deny the existence of a supernatural or divine presence. Like the United States, which was under the influence of founders who were theistic rationalists, Clara begins Wieland by noting her adherence to rationality and reason, both of which she builds her a foundation upon. However sure she is that reason is her guide, Clara, like the founders, cannot deny the existence of the divine. These US founders, while notably affirming rationality as their guide, simultaneously acknowledged the presence of providential agency, however minor.

During his inaugural address in 1789, only two years after the creation of the United States Constitution, George Washington stated that "No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand, which conducts the Affairs of men more than

the People of the United States. Every step, by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation, seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency.” Here, it is evident that Washington adhered to notions of divine interference, acknowledging that the United States’ newfound independence was due, in part, to providential agency. While it is true that Washington recognized a divine presence in the founding of the United States, “his religious views were shaped by the ideas of the Enlightenment” and he “identified science as a primary factor in the ‘advancement of religion’” (Frazer 206). More important, however, may have been the way Washington “emphasized that God and His ways were ‘inscrutable’ and virtually impossible to understand” (206). Washington’s inability to understand God’s methods of operation coincides directly with notions of natural religion, which is a crucial element of theistic rationalism.

Like Washington, Benjamin Franklin also acknowledged an ever-present deity: “Here is my Creed: I believe in one God, Creator of the Universe. That He governs it by his Providence” (Franklin, Seavey 352). Franklin, like Washington, uses the term Providence, which suggests divine guidance or foresight.⁷ However willing Franklin was to submit to the notion that God is omnipresent, “it should be noted that Franklin’s discussion of divine attributes as well as providence is based on inductive extrapolations from experience...he was intensely suspicious of...ecclesiastical (and supposedly revealed) authority, believing instead that knowledge of the deity is best gleaned from an examination of the ‘book of nature’” (Walters 75). Like a theistic rationalist, Franklin

⁷ See the OED definition for Providence.

believed in providential interference, but retained the belief that such interference could only be understood by viewing it through the lens of nature.

In 1787, Thomas Jefferson, who is largely considered a theistic rationalist, wrote a letter to Peter Carr on the subject of religion: “Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion” (Forman 360).⁸ Jefferson’s advice to Carr is anything but subtle. That is, Jefferson clearly believed that reason should guide one’s judgements. Not only did Jefferson direct Carr to seek the truth using reason, he stated that “those facts in the bible which contradict the laws of nature, must be examined with more care...” (360). As Lambert so aptly stated, beliefs like Jefferson’s were viewed by evangelicals as being dangerous because they taught individuals to view the Bible through the lens of reason instead of revelation.

While it is evident that Jefferson espoused reason as a means of approaching the divine, he did, in his second inaugural address in 1805, state that he would need “the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our fathers, as Israel of old...who...covered our infancy with His providence and our riper years with His wisdom and power...” (255). In this address, it is evident that Jefferson believed in providential agency as did Washington and Franklin. By acknowledging the presence of “that Being in whose hands we are,” Jefferson publicly demonstrated his belief in the divine. However clearly the founders stated their belief in divine presence, they declared, like the theistic rationalist, that reason and rationality should ultimately guide one’s judgement.

⁸ As earlier noted, Smith states that Jefferson more aptly fit the mold of a theistic rationalist than that of a deist.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, however, the US was once again inclined to believe more heavily on the supernatural. The Second Great Awakening exemplifies the nation's move to supernatural belief. Like Clara, the United States, a nation that was initially founded on theistic rationalism, experienced a type of metamorphosis induced by a religious revivalist movement known as the Second Great Awakening. This Second Awakening commenced in the 1790s in New England and lasted until the mid-nineteenth century (Ahlstrom 387). The Second Great Awakening was an evangelical religious movement that sought to revive religious belief and experience in the United States, ushering in a period defined by "enthusiasm, emotion, and an appeal to the super-natural" (Clark 16). As enlightenment notions swelled in the United States during the Great Awakening, so, too, did the unrest of religious zealots. This unrest was caused by those who believed that reason overpowered revelation. In fact, the "most dangerous to evangelicals was the belief that human reason, not divine revelation, became the path to enlightenment. That meant that the Bible as revealed truth must be interpreted before the bar of reason, and unreasonable sections must be disregarded or explained as myth" (Lambert 40). Such revivalist enthusiasm, characterized by a belief in Biblical authority and faith-based deliverance from sin, "set ablaze one section of the nation after another," introducing marked changes characterized by the advent of camp meetings (Boyer 227). These camp meetings were popular social gatherings situated in rural areas, and they often served to unite newly-invigorated sects like Methodists and Baptists (Frank 157, Bates 641).

The Second Great Awakening closely tied religious beliefs to supernatural ideas and intervention. By showing the damaging effects of Clara's supernatural beliefs, Brown

reveals his own concerns about the divide between Enlightenment ideas and evangelical teachings in the early United States. While the correlation between religion and the supernatural in the late eighteenth century is a complex study, early American documents clearly illustrate how people were both preoccupied with and concerned about supernatural influence in the early United States. Specifically, people were concerned about supernatural conversion. This practice spread throughout the United States, taking root in Southern states like Kentucky,⁹ and was a constant topic of conversation among those living in places like Massachusetts and Pennsylvania.

Despite the fact that opinions varied on religion and the supernatural during the Second Great Awakening, what is important is that religion and the supernatural were of such relevance that they were often discussed and closely associated with one another. In *General Assemblies Missionary Magazine*, there appeared an article entitled “True Religion Spiritual and Supernatural,” published in Philadelphia in 1806, wherein the author states that “the religion of the gospel of Jesus Christ is a spiritual and supernatural religion” (511). Here, the author clearly states that religion and the supernatural should be considered in tandem.

In a review of an article published in 1804 in the *Christian Observer*, Conducted By Members of the Established Church, the author, who, while opposed to supernatural conversion, states that there is “an opinion too much countenanced by many, that faintings and extraordinary agitations in religious congregations are supernatural” (640). Although this author does not necessarily condone supernatural conversion, they yield to the understanding that many others feel that religion is a supernatural experience. One

⁹ See accounts like the one produced in “Remarks on Baxter’s Letter.”

author even stated that “It is surprising what influence over the human mind, superstitious fear of supernatural power has, even over this whose firmness of mind resists impressions of other sorts” (Commentator 213). Here, another author submits just how common it was for people of the time to believe in the supernatural. These few demonstrations of publications during the time in which Wieland was written suggest just how much supernaturally-focused conversations existed and were often associated with religion.

Also of emphasis in the Second Great Awakening was the notion of supernatural conversion. Supernatural conversion meant that individuals converted to religious practices based on their supernatural experiences. For instance, “Evangelical Protestants taught that...individuals needed a life-transforming, supernatural conversion that would lead to a holy life” (Hankins 2). Evidence of this kind of supernatural conversion in Wieland appears in many forms; one of which is when Wieland abandons his Ciceronian teachings based on the supernatural voices he hears. In the case of the novel, Brown takes the notion of supernatural conversion and demonstrates how such experiences can be, and likely are, based in irrationality. In the case of Clara and her brother, their supernatural episodes are simply brought on by Carwin’s human voice. In fact, Clara seems to be undergoing a supernatural conversion in the novel when she states that she is “no longer at liberty to question” the voices she and others have heard (53). It is almost as if Clara is saying that her ability to question has been revoked, and she must convert because of the seemingly supernatural voices she hears.

The Second Great Awakening had a major impact on early American culture. While the Second Great Awakening did not take on as much fervor in New England as it did in areas like Kentucky and Tennessee, where “Methodist and Baptist

sects...[continued] recruiting new Christians by the tens of thousands,” this widespread conversion was, in large part, characterized by notions salvationsim and anti-intellectualism (McLoughlin 107, Mathews 26). Salvationism, or the notion that one can be saved through faith in God, was a principle that rejected intellectual explanations of the divine. In this respect, the beliefs that fueled the Second Great Awakening stood in stark opposition to the ideas of the Enlightenment, which taught that God and the supernatural should be viewed through a rational lens (Walters 42). Ministers in the United States were obviously concerned about the rising influence of Enlightenment thought, and, because of this concern, prompted revivalist teachings. William G. McLoughlin notes how ministers, who were worried about a possible encroachment of deistic thought, as well as a decline in church attendance, “called fervently for a new awakening to revive the spiritual life of the nation” (101-02). Due to revivalist notions prompted by such ministers, the United States entered a period of religious unrest where rational ideas clashed with supernatural explanation.

This surge in evangelical Christianity in the United States, which was accompanied by anti-intellectualism, mirrored Clara’s own rejection of the intellectual rationalism and embrace of the supernatural in *Wieland*. Perhaps more expressive of this similitude is Christophersen’s statement that “the dramatic core of *Wieland*...is Clara’s—and America’s—discovery of a deep self that defies Enlightenment assumptions” (41). In other words, the United States’ acceptance of revivalist religion, like Clara’s acceptance of supernatural explanation, challenges reason and intellect, both of which are key features of the Enlightenment.

Clara, who begins *Wieland* by noting her strict adherence to rationality, increasingly relies on supernatural thought as she listens to Wieland's and Pleyel's accounts of hearing voices. Her acceptance of the supernatural is also compounded by her own experiences hearing voices. Years after Clara and her brother are adopted, Wieland hears a mysterious voice speak to him as he visits his father's temple. After he hears "a voice [call him] from behind," Wieland claims that the voice belongs to his wife, Catharine, though she denies having spoken to him (32). Once Wieland recounts his experience to Clara and Pleyel, Clara notes how Wieland's narrative "was heard...with different emotions" (32). Specifically, Clara declares that she "could not deny that the event was miraculous, and yet [she] was invincibly averse to that method of solution" (33). Here Clara appears invulnerable to supernatural persuasion. By using the word "invincible," she declares that she is decidedly resolute when it comes to rejecting the supernatural. In other words, Clara asserts that there is nothing that could possibly cause her to accept that the mysterious events surrounding her are supernaturally derived. At the same time, however, by noting that the event was "miraculous," she simultaneously suggests that she has the potential to believe in the supernatural. At this point in the novel Clara remains clearly resistant to supernatural explanation, though her words suggest a new possible avenue for belief.

Following Wieland's mysterious experience, Clara listens to Pleyel's claim that he has heard a disembodied voice which sounded as though it belonged to his sister, Catharine. It is after Clara listens to Pleyel's account that her behavior shifts, and she openly admits her belief in the supernatural. While Pleyel and Wieland take a walk so that they may discuss a trip to Europe, they hear a voice that "did not come from one side

or the other, from before [them] or behind” (40). Pleyel tells Clara that the voice instructed him not to go to Europe because his fiancé had died. Because Clara was with Catharine the entire time Pleyel was away, she knows that Catharine did not speak to Pleyel. Troubled by Pleyel’s narrative, Clara ruminates on the events surrounding his account:

The tales of apparitions and enchantments did not possess that power over my belief which could even render them interesting. I saw nothing in them but ignorance and folly, and was a stranger even to that terror which is pleasing. But this incident was different from any that I had ever before known. Here were proofs of a sensible and intelligent existence, which could not be denied. Here was information obtained and imparted by means unquestionably super-human (41).

Here, an apparent shift takes place in Clara’s ideology. While she tries to cling to the idea that supernatural or divine possibility does not influence her thoughts or actions, adding that such belief is “folly,” she ultimately admits that the voice Pleyel hears is produced by a force that is “unquestionably super-human.” At this moment in the novel, Clara begins to believe more heavily in supernatural interference, eventually leading her to act in a manner that is self-harming.

Soon after Pleyel’s inexplicable experience, Clara begins hearing voices herself, which advances her descent into irrational or supernatural belief. While she lies in her bed at night, Clara listens to the clock strike twelve. The clock, which “was the same instrument which formerly hung in [her] father’s chamber” causes Clara to reminisce on

his death (50).¹⁰ As Clara sits in darkness, her “attention [is] attracted by a whisper, which, at first, appear[s] to proceed from lips that [are] laid close to [her] ear” (50). Though she initially thinks it is the voice of her attendant, Judith, who rouses her, Clara listens to two mysterious voices plot her death. She then recalls with “what wonder that I was petrified by sounds so dreadful! Murderers lurked in my closet. They were planning the means of my destruction. One resolved to shoot, and the other menaced suffocation” (51). In an instant, Clara flees her unseen assailants and faints on her brother’s doorstep. Though she does not know it at the time, she learns that “there was another circumstance that enhanced the mysteriousness” of her encounter with the voices in her closet. As she lays unconscious, a voice calls out: “Awake! arise!...hasten to succor one that is dying at your door” (52).

Clara quickly adopts a new lens through which she views the inexplicable episodes in Mettingen. Not only does she recant her earlier rejection of Wieland’s narrative, she declares that she is without power to dismiss the supernatural nature of events surrounding her. Shortly following her jarring experience, Clara admits that she is “no longer at liberty to question the reality of those accents which had formerly recalled [her] brother from the hill; which had imparted tidings of the death of the German lady to Pleyel; and which had lately summoned them to [her] assistance” (53). While Clara does not readily admit that her own experience is supernatural in nature, she does declare that she believes both Wieland’s account and Pleyel’s account of hearing supernatural voices. While Clara first disbelieved Wieland, considering him delusional, her later acceptance

¹⁰ Note how Brown uses Wieland Senior’s clock as a means of foreshadowing coming events that, like Wieland Senior’s death, are mysterious in nature. Clara can often be found reminiscing on her father’s death when she is about to encounter inexplicable events.

of his story illustrates her own belief in the supernatural nature of those mysterious events surrounding her. I would suggest that, when Clara states that she “is no longer at liberty” to deny the miraculous events in Mettingen, she is really saying that some unseen, governing force will no longer allow her to disbelieve. Based on her experiences, Clara no longer feels capable of resisting the supernatural forces at work. Where once she could deny the supernatural, she may no longer do so.

Once Clara begins to assume a belief in the supernatural, she worries that it will appear as though she has lost her reason. Some weeks after Clara first encounters the mysterious voices in her bedroom, she finds herself “disposed to seek relief in a walk” (54). While resting, Clara falls asleep and dreams that her brother tries to kill her, although a voice intervenes to warn her. Clara is then awakened by Pleyel and, upon returning to her home, “deliver[s] [herself] up to contemplation” (56). As she ponders her experience, Clara acknowledges that some “will believe that calamity has subverted [her] reason, and that [she] is amusing [them] with the chimeras of [her] brain” (56). Though she insists that her story cannot be denied, Clara is obviously anxious about her reputation. Not only does she state that she thinks some will believe she has concocted the voices she hears using her imagination, she worries that people will think she has lost her reason. Because Clara can sense that she is losing her rational outlook, she becomes anxious and suspicious, worrying what others will think of her. This anxiety about her appearance is the negative result of focusing on supernatural possibility. To put it another way, because Clara considers supernatural explanations for the voices she hears, she becomes anxious, thinking that supernatural explanation means she is no longer rational.

After her mysterious dream, Clara fails to find purpose in the future, further demonstrating the negative effects of supernatural belief. Taken in thought and reflecting “with astonishment on [her] situation...” Clara declares that she “was visited by dread of unknown dangers, and the future was a scene over which clouds rolled, and thunders muttered” (60). Here we see a shift in Clara’s perception of the future. Unlike the beginning of the novel, where Clara states that “the future, like the present, was serene,” Clara now admits that the future is ominous and threatening (21). As her sense of reason fails and she becomes more invested in supernatural belief, Clara is emotionally harmed by the idea that her future is bound to be a tragic and dangerous one, as evidenced by her thoughts of “unknown dangers.” Clara’s inability to foresee a happy future will ultimately cause her to think irrationally. As these irrational thoughts persevere, Clara becomes physically self-destructive, as evidenced by her consideration of suicide.

Once Clara demonstrates that supernatural belief prevents her from imagining a happy future, she exhibits self-destructive behavior that is physical in nature. While Pleyel agrees to stay at Clara’s home following her distressing encounter with mysterious voices in her closet, he is absent one night, leaving Clara “tormented by phantoms of [her] own creation” (69). Consumed by thoughts of what lay in her closet, Clara touches the lock upon the closet door and hears a voice reveal itself from within: “Hold! Hold!” In a scene of involuntary reaction, Clara “dashe[s] [herself] against the wall” (71). Brown uses this moment to first display the physical self-harm caused by supernatural belief. Indeed, Clara states that her “actions were dictated by frenzy” and that “reason had forborne, for a time, to suggest or to sway [her] resolves” (73). Because she forgoes reason, her actions become involuntarily self-destructive. While Clara continues to

reference “reason,” she fails to maintain a rational outlook. For instance, though she states that “the cry, loud and piercing as it was, was nevertheless human,” she soon after admits that Carwin, who she knows is culpable, “is gifted with supernatural power” (77). Even though Clara recognizes the rational explanation that Carwin is producing the voices himself, she is still drawn to the idea that he is producing these voices through supernatural means. The fact that Clara insists Carwin is “gifted with supernatural power” clearly indicates that she cannot differentiate between the rational and the supernatural. Essentially, Clara progressively demonstrates that she is not capable of thinking rationally unless such thoughts are subject to supernatural interpretation. It seems, then, that while Clara knows Carwin is human, she concurrently believes that he has supernatural abilities, indicating a clear belief in supernatural interference.

Although Clara understands that Carwin is responsible for the menacing voices in Mettingen, she also believes in “the power that...interpos[es] to save [her]” from Carwin’s machinations (77). If Clara’s belief in Carwin’s supernatural abilities is not enough to convince readers that she believes in supernatural interference, Clara simultaneously declares “how thankful [she] should...be” that an unknown power acts on her behalf. To be clear, Clara not only believes that a mortal man possesses supernatural powers, she also believes that some divine presence has safeguarded her from Carwin.

Later, after resolving to meet Carwin so that she may “summon him to penitence and retribution,” Clara is surprised to witness a mysterious light emanating from within a room in her home (114). As she approaches the stairs of her house, Clara wonders how the mysterious light has suddenly vanished. She notes how the episode is “not dissimilar”

to “the mysterious interposition which had been experienced on the last night” (114).¹¹ Like her previous encounter with inexplicable events in her dream, Clara wonders if “a new warning” will be issued by an “angel” on her behalf (114). Just as a mysterious voice intercedes to warn her of the abyss her brother beckons her towards, Clara again hears “the same piercing exclamation of hold! hold!” (114). After ascending the stairs, Clara again considers her father’s untimely death. In her moment of reflection, Clara wonders if the light she has seen may “have been the companion of that supernatural visage; a meteorous refulgence producible at the will of him to whom that visage belonged...” (115). Here, Clara no longer speaks as though the supernatural is questionable. She matter-of-factly states that there is a supernatural visage present in her window, though she is not certain of its origins.

Having escalated from only thinking her future is doomed, Clara extends her destructive actions beyond simply dashing herself against the wall by considering suicide. Clara’s suicidal thoughts in the second half of the novel are the culmination of her self-destructive behavior. Some time after hearing voices, Clara desires to return to her abandoned home in Mettingen. Admitting that her thoughts are “mixed up with notions of supernatural agency,” Clara sits in a darkness that suites “the colour of [her] thoughts” and notes how she can “use a lancet with some skill, and could distinguish between vein and artery. By piercing deep into the latter, [she] could shun the evils which the future [had] in store for her...” (144, 147). Here, the association between a belief in the supernatural and the self-destructive behavior flowing from it is especially acute. As is common for Clara, who often experiences supernatural episodes prefigured by thoughts

¹¹ The “last night” that Clara is referring to is that night when a voice saves her from death in her dream.

of “supernatural agency,” at this point in *Wieland*, her suicidal inclinations are prefaced by thoughts of the supernatural. Again, Clara displays thoughts of an ill-fated future—one in which she believes she “could shun the evils” of by ending her life.

Although many were carried away by the ideas of the Second Great Awakening, many others expressed concern, like the author of “Some Cursory Remarks On Superstition and Enthusiasm,” which discusses how “superstition...indicate[s] the absence of an enlightened understanding and a sound judgment” (333). In further disdain of certain superstitious belief, the author continues by noting how “a...hurtful species of superstition is that which, in religion, lays an undue stress on mere external observances” (334). Clara easily fits this author’s definition of a “hurtful species of superstition” based in “external observances” because she invests so much thought on what she hears and sometimes thinks she hears. Clara is the perfect illustration of the ills that spring from undue superstitious belief and Brown meant it that way. *Wieland* reflects these concerns about the influence of the supernatural, which is why Brown uses Clara to show the dangerous effects of supernatural belief and the need to return to reason and the rational.

Because Brown was writing on the brink of the Second Great Awakening, it is no wonder that he incorporated his concerns for the future of the United States within *Wieland*. As Christophersen observes, “*Wieland*...poses a...highly skeptical vision of God and the American experience” (51). This “skeptical vision of God” is the result of Brown’s own thoughts on religion and superstition, as revealed through his personal correspondence and his membership in the Friendly Club. Just previous to the Yates murders and his subsequent, fictionalized retelling of it, Brown wrote a letter to his friend, Joseph Bringhurst. In this letter, Brown discusses his thoughts on religion, stating

that, “I really think Christianity... [has] been pernicious to mankind” and has “created war and engendered hatred, [and entailed] inexpressible calamities on mankind” (Brown’s letter to Joseph Bringhurst, October 24, 1795). Here, Brown’s thoughts on theology are clear: religious adherence breeds destruction, especially in a national, if not global, manner. Not only are Brown’s anti-Christian sentiments clear in his personal correspondence, his membership in a prominent New England club further attests to his disdain for religion.

During the 1790s, Brown belonged to the New York Friendly Club—an institution dedicated to “progressive intellectual exchange” (Barnard and Shapiro xiv). As a member of the Friendly Club, Brown, along with his closest associates, formed “a basic skepticism towards theism and religious institutions” (Barnard). Brown’s associates included Elihu Hubbard Smith, who was a physician trained by Benjamin Rush, and William Dunlap, who was a prominent painter, playwright, and theatre manager.¹² Together, these members of the Friendly Club “chose the novel and the stage as vehicles” to promote their philosophies (Waterman 535). Brown’s philosophy, as evidenced in novels like *Wieland*, and noted by critics, was clearly anti-religious and sought to address the turmoil of the 1790s (535).

While Brown appears to be a religious skeptic, perhaps he merely uses works like *Wieland* to reflect the “philosophical conflict between...Calvinists and the new Enlightenment rationalists” that was so prevalent during the Second Awakening (McLoughlin 99). Calvinism, which stressed humankind’s sinful and deceitful nature, opposed Enlightenment notions which were based on the belief that humankind was good

¹² Note that Rush is considered to be another founder of the United States.

and reasonable. As McLoughlin notes, Enlightenment thinkers believed that the United States had taken its fate in its own hands when it broke away from Great Britain and succeeded in overcoming the greatest empire in the world. Calvinist ministers, however, failed to acknowledge that humans were capable of acting on their own behalf (99-100). Instead, Calvinists taught that God was the only being capable of acting on behalf of an individual. Although this discord between Enlightenment notions and Calvinism was accentuated during the Second Awakening, Enlightenment thinkers did not entirely reject notions of the divine. This notion is demonstrated when Brown creates Clara, a character who, though she eventually returns to reason, maintains a basic belief in God.

While Wieland demonstrates the negative effects that flow from supernatural reliance, Brown does not simply point to such effects without suggesting a remedy. For Brown, the solution is simple: the United States, like Clara, must reaffirm reason in order to ensure a stable future. Brown's ultimate purpose in composing *Wieland* is, I argue, to convince the United States to return to a foundation which was built upon theistic rationalism. Brown's novel culminates in Clara's return to reason or theistic rationalism as she realizes the "infatuation...of [her] conduct," simultaneously stressing the importance of reason over supernatural possibility (177). While Clara's initial transformation from rational inclination to supernatural reliance transpires somewhat subtly in *Wieland*, her final transition from supernatural interpretation to rational affirmation is quite pointed. Clara's actions represent the sincerity of her final transformation as she abandons thoughts of suicide, turning instead to thoughts of self-preservation and the fact that a human, not a divine being, is responsible for the voices she hears.

Clara's first step in returning to rationality is demonstrated by her realization that Carwin is solely responsible for inciting chaos among the inhabitants of Mettingen. After listening to Carwin confess that he is responsible for the voices heard by Wieland, Pleyel, and herself, Clara asks him if he is not then responsible for Wieland's murderous actions, having prompted him and "robbed him of reason" (149). Clara's language here points to a significant shift in her perspective: she is attributing Wieland's loss of reason not to the supernatural, but instead to Carwin, who, other than possessing the gift of ventriloquism, is decidedly human. While Carwin does confess to producing menacing voices, he adamantly maintains that he is not responsible for urging Wieland to kill. The fact that Clara maintains Carwin's culpability in prompting Wieland to kill, despite Carwin's denial in having done so, only strengthens the notion that Clara ultimately claims reason as her guide. In other words, Clara is resolute in her accusation of Carwin, demonstrated by the way in which she refers to Carwin as the "author" of her misfortunes (45). Instead of considering a supernatural explanation for the murders in Mettingen, Clara maintains that Carwin, who is quite human, is responsible. While Carwin could, in fact, be telling the truth about his innocence, Clara resolutely blames him instead of considering supernatural possibility.

The blame which Clara ascribes to Carwin is evidenced earlier in the novel when she introduces him to readers. Writing about the accounts in Wieland years after their occurrence, Clara reflects back on the horrendous events, including Wieland's murder of his wife and children. In this reflection, Clara insists that Carwin's power of ventriloquism is what dismantled the lives of all in Mettingen, and she states that her family's undoing is the result of "the evils of which it is but too certain that [Carwin]

wast the author” (45). The fact that she ultimately accepts that Carwin is responsible for the atrocities committed by Wieland is evidence that she is thinking rationally once more.¹³ If it were not enough that Clara identifies Carwin as the author of her misfortune early in the novel, she does so again, unequivocally stating in chapter twenty-four that he “was the author of all [their] calamities” in Mettingen (163).

When Clara accepts that Carwin alone is responsible for the voices in Mettingen, and that he was not aided by some unknown entity, she noticeably alters her behavior by devising a plan for self-preservation. Clara asks Carwin to deliver her from the murderous hands of her brother. Following Carwin’s confession, both Clara and Carwin stand in awe as a disheveled Wieland stumbles into their midst. Wieland is quick to declare that God has guided him to Clara: “Poor girl! a dismal fate has set its mark upon thee. Thy life is demanded as a sacrifice. Prepare thee to die. Make not my office difficult by fruitless opposition. Thy prayers might subdue stones; but none but he who enjoined my purpose can shake it” (164). While it is obvious at this point that Wieland still believes he is being driven by a divine force, Clara’s reaction to his murderous threat supports the argument that she has rediscovered her sense of reason. Although she remains visibly frightened, Clara does not, as Wieland suggests she might, appeal to heaven to save her. Instead, after Wieland orders Carwin to leave the room, Clara admits that she is “ready to inflict death upon [her] menacer” (167). Cloaking that same penknife at her side with which she meant to commit suicide, Clara declares that “this instrument of [her] preservation would have been plunged into [Wieland’s] heart” had he advanced

¹³ Note that Clara’s realization here comes after Carwin confesses to producing most of the voices heard in Mettingen.

upon her (167). Although she cannot bring herself to kill her own brother, instead throwing “the knife with violence on the floor,” Clara devises another means of deliverance. Realizing that Carwin, who authored the misfortune in Mettingen, can act on her behalf, Clara calls out to him (167).

Instead of entreating her “angel” to intervene on her behalf, Clara uses her sense of reason to call upon Carwin to “counterwork [the] hellish stratagem” that she believes he is responsible for constructing (114, 170). While Clara does note how a “prayer was breathed” by her, indicating a continued belief in the divine, she does not wait for revelation or divine intervention, but immediately calls upon Carwin to assist her (170).¹⁴ In this scene, Clara’s supernatural reliance unravels as she intentionally abandons her earlier held assumptions about supernatural interference. Where once she believes that a divine presence acts to save her, she now relies on her own ability to reason through a difficult situation.

Grasping Clara’s arm, Wieland shrinks from back from her as Carwin’s masked voice bursts from the shadows: “Man of errors! cease to cherish thy delusion: not heaven or hell, but thy senses have misled thee to commit these acts. Shake off thy phrenzy, and ascend into rational and human. Be lunatic no longer” (172). Suddenly “restored to the perception of truth” by a voice which he thinks is divine in origin, Wieland becomes “weighed...by the recollection of his deeds” (172). At this moment Clara recognizes Wieland as having been “transformed...into the man of sorrows” (172). No longer under Carwin’s spell, Wieland sits in silence as Clara notes the “ghastly changes of his

¹⁴ Clara’s continued belief (at least to some degree) in the divine aligns with notions of theistic rationalism, which does not necessarily refute supernatural presence.

countenance” (173). Moments later, Wieland plunges the penknife which Clara held movements ago, into his neck. Wieland’s realization that his senses have “misled” him, transforms him from a murderous maniac into a sorrowful man.

While Wieland’s transformation transpires almost instantaneously, I argue, like Christophersen, that “the central transformation of [Wieland] is Clara’s” and not Wieland’s (28). This transformation is marked by Clara’s “realization that she is no longer mistress of the irrational feelings inside her” (30). Instead of relying on the irrational, supernatural explanations for the voices she hears, Clara eventually realizes that she does not have to believe in the supernatural after all. Clara continues her development from a state of supernatural reliance to rational affirmation as she further considers Carwin’s duplicitous actions. Dwelling on what she believes is Carwin’s complicity in Wieland’s murders, Clara declares that, while she does not necessarily “care...from what source [the] disasters [in Mettingen] have flowed,” she is sure that such “havoc was produced by an illusion of the senses” (174). For perhaps the first time in the novel, Clara admits that the disastrous circumstances flowing from supernatural reliance are actually a result of “an illusion of the senses.” This declaration is especially significant because it accentuates Clara’s final transformation from supernatural interpretation to rational affirmation, ensuring readers that she understands her senses have been deceived by illusions. The very fact that Clara can recognize and admit that her senses have been deceived is evidence that she is thinking rationally once more. Instead of saying that the “havoc was produced” by supernatural means, Clara states that it is an “illusion,” indicating that, while she once believed Carwin to be “gifted with supernatural power,” she now realizes that perception was not real (77). Having regained a rational

perspective, Clara is now capable of understanding that Carwin's abilities are not supernatural in nature. This understanding is, perhaps, due to Carwin's admission that his ventriloquism could possibly be "an art which may be taught to all" (150). In fact, Carwin further grounds his ability in realistic experience by stating that he "cultivated [his] gift...which seemed capable of unlimited improvement" (151). Carwin's diction here clearly indicates that his ventriloquism is quantifiable and humanistic.

In what may be intended as an admission of shame on behalf of the United States, Brown uses Clara to concede that supernatural reliance is destructive and counterproductive to one's well-being. Written three years after the ruinous events transpire in Mettingen, Clara reflects "upon [her] sensations and reasonings of that period with wonder and humiliation" (177).¹⁵ It is here that Clara truly internalizes the implications of supernatural reliance. Instead of relying on notions of the supernatural, which notions cause destruction throughout *Wieland*, Brown argues that the United States should return to rationality in order to survive.

Soon after her confession, Clara attempts to describe her dreams that have turned dark and ominous:

Sometimes I was swallowed up by whirlpools, or caught up in the air by half-seen and gigantic forms, and thrown upon pointed rocks, or cast among the billows. Sometimes gleams of light were shot into a dark abyss, on the verge of which I was standing, and enabled me to discover, for a

¹⁵ While Clara maintains her habit of introspective thought, she does so now without considering the supernatural. In nearly every previous episode where Clara becomes reflective, she does so while entertaining thoughts of supernatural possibility. Her abandonment of supernatural thought is another factor pointing to her rational state.

moment, its enormous depth and hideous precipices. Anon, I was transported to some ridge...and made a terrified spectator of its fiery torrents and its pillars of smoke (177).

Why, after years have passed and Clara has chosen reason as her guide once more, does she experience a horrific vision? Perhaps the answer lies in what Clara does not choose at the close of the novel. The fact that Clara does not rely on the supernatural any longer may be more illuminating than it appears. Note how Clara does not plunge from the “hideous precipices” into the “enormous depth.” While she is on the verge of destruction, Clara watches as “gleams of light” illuminate the “dark abyss” before her, warning her of what lay ahead should she continue. Although disturbed by such images, Clara eventually awakens. She is not consumed by the “fiery torrents and its pillars of smoke.” She is spared. In a masterful way, Brown uses Clara’s dream to demonstrate how her return to reason spares her from a deadly fate. Just as Clara stands at the precipice of a dark abyss, the United States faces a similar fate should it continue without the gleam of reason to guide its future.

While critics widely acknowledge that the Wieland family serves as a symbol for the early United States, my argument emphasizes the ways in which Clara is the symbol for the early republic, and not, more broadly, the Wieland family as a whole.¹⁶ Even though critics like Christophersen have drawn much-needed attention to Clara’s transformation, , my argument accounts for the ways in which supernatural reliance is destructive to Clara and, consequently, the early United States. Through Clara, Wieland

¹⁶ See critics like Hedlin and Christophersen for more on this subject.

parallels the early republic's struggles, and these struggles, though addressed in part by critics, include the negative, even destructive, side-effects of supernatural reliance.

CLARA AS RATIONALIST, CLARA AS WOMAN: THE GENDER POLITICS OF WIELAND

As a woman, Clara acts as a particularly strong character because of her ability to give rise to the future generations of the United States, allowing Brown to use her character to explore the United States' trajectory. Although she is not a wife or mother during the majority of her narration of *Wieland*, Clara eventually prepares to raise a family by moving to Europe and marrying Pleyel. In this regard, she acts as an ideal symbol for the future of the United States.

Societal attitudes toward women and their roles as mothers and political participants at the time in which *Wieland* was written were complex. Women were not allowed to participate in the political sphere; however, their responsibilities as mothers and wives made them more visible during the United States' formative years. Women were, in some regards, considered more influential to national progress than those that participated in political and highly religious roles. This influence was considered to be the result of domestic duties like raising children and taking care of husbands. Through their domestic responsibilities, women were able to influence the political sphere in meaningful ways.

In the late eighteenth century, the political roles of women were defined by their ability to shape the characters and morals of citizens. A woman's influence as wife, mother, and daughter was part of an ideology known as republican motherhood, which gained traction at the turn of the eighteenth century. According to Susan Hill Lindley, republican motherhood meant that women were responsible for raising children who would positively contribute to the nation in responsible ways (Lindley 59). As Linda

Kerber states, “the Republican Mother’s life was dedicated to the service of civic virtue; she educated her sons for it; she condemned and corrected her husband’s lapses from it” (Kerber 202). I would add that the “Republican Mother,” or, in this case, Clara, also condemned and corrected her brother and her father for it. Clara is often seen inwardly resisting her brother’s supernaturally-charged tales, as well as denying that her father’s experience was supernatural in nature. In fact, at the close of the novel, Clara states that “if Wieland had framed juster notions of moral duty, and of the divine attributes...the double-tongued deceiver would have been baffled and repelled” (183). She clearly speaks as though she knows what would have corrected Wieland’s irresponsible behavior—moral duty. Clara’s notion of moral duty existed because she was a product of the day in which she lived.

It was widely held in the late eighteenth century and well in to the nineteenth century, that the United States’ independence rested in the virtue and morals of its citizens. These virtues and morals were believed to be instilled in the home as mothers taught their children (202). Theorists like Benjamin Rush argued that women should be viewed as self-reliant, independents, who, though they could not actively participate politically, could strengthen the nation by raising responsible citizens (202). Because women were charged with keeping homes and raising children, their influence was widespread and potentially long-lasting. If they themselves were not morally sound, they could not raise virtuous and responsible children. These morals came by way of religious instruction. Therefore, it was highly significant when more women were converted than were men during the First Great Awakening. The First Awakening meant that women like Clara could, regardless of their social status, experience conversion like never before

(Lindley 41). This conversion added to a woman's moral repertoire, making her more virtuous and, therefore, more capable of raising virtuous children. Unlike previous periods in history where divine experiences were reserved specifically for men, both the First and Second Great Awakenings introduced a surge in female conversion and public visibility. Women were, in a manner, placed on the national stage, and viewed more readily as responsible for the nation's future welfare than they had previously been.

Brown's choice to present his arguments about the supernatural using Clara, a female character, reinforces his intention to have her serve as a parallel for the United States. In light of the fact that women were considered nationally influential, it is no wonder that Brown made Clara the narrator of *Wieland*. Although not a wife or mother at the time her tale transpires, she is preparing to raise a family, and is, no doubt, influential in her role as sister and daughter. Clara, who is no doubt influenced by supernatural belief at times, becomes a metaphor for the national dilemmas facing the early republic, such as the nation's struggle to reconcile religion and rationality. She must be careful when it comes to relying too heavily on supernatural thought, or the consequences could be detrimental. After all, she is the sole surviving member of the Wieland family at the close of the novel. If Clara doesn't become a responsible mother, the Wieland family dies with her. It is up to Clara to save her family and the rising generation. However much independence women gained by participating (within limits) in the religious revivals of the new world, Brown is saying that they need to be wary of supernatural thought because they are responsible for rearing future members of the new nation. Indeed, it was supernatural thought that killed Wieland senior, Wieland, and Wieland's wife and children. Had Clara decided to rely solely on supernatural thought at the close of the

novel, she likely would have taken her own life as did her brother, thus destroying any hope for future generations. Likewise, should the nation's revivalist movements gain momentum, rising generations would be destroyed by supernatural thought.

CONCLUSION

Although I maintain that *Wieland* acts as an allegory for the destructive effects of supernatural reliance within the United States in the late eighteenth-century, Brown's novel resists any definitive reading. Not only does the novel have many ambiguities, such as the fact that *Wieland* senior's death is never adequately explained, it also doubles back on itself by presenting contradictory statements, such as the fact that Carwin never admits to prompting *Wieland* to kill and adamantly defends his innocence through the end of the novel, leaving readers to question who, besides *Wieland*, is to blame. Critics of the novel often comment on these numerous ambiguities and possible interpretations. Larzer Ziff notes "the particular purposes of *Wieland*...have never been precisely identified" (51). Ziff's insight remains true for more contemporary critical interpretations like those of Thomas Koenigs, who notes how "the novel's explicitly didactic aim...has tended to puzzle critics..." (51, 715). Perhaps *Wieland* continues to "puzzle" scholars because characters like Clara remain conflicted about their experiences.

Of particular concern are Clara's own contradictory statements. In "'The Arm Lifted Against Me': Love, Terror, and the Construction of Gender in *Wieland*," Andrew J. Scheiber argues that "there are disturbing paradoxes—some would say outright contradictions—in Clara's character and in her narration" (173). For instance, while Clara does indeed become more reliant on the supernatural, she notes how her "opinions were the sport of eternal change," suggesting that she is a character who cannot make up her mind (137). While critics do not necessarily agree on the reasons for Clara's contradictory behavior, they tend to agree that there appears to be "on major fault with *Wieland*: its loose and unbalanced structure" (Russo 60). This "loose and unbalanced

structure,” I argue, is perhaps the result of Brown’s own inability to make up his mind on the matter of rationality and the supernatural. Although Brown appears to disavow religion and the supernatural in novels like *Wieland*, his eventual return to Christianity suggests his inability to make up his mind (Chapman 21).

Brown does use genuine events as the foundation for his allegorical tale, thereby mixing reality with the supernatural in a way that further supports my argument that the novel mirrors the conditions of the United States. Included in an advertisement in the preface of the novel, wherein Brown notes how the events in *Wieland* “are extraordinary and rare,” is the claim that “most readers will probably recollect an authentic case, remarkably similar to that of *Wieland*” (3).¹⁷ Rowland Hughes addresses this remarkable similarity in his essay, “‘Wonderfully Cruel Proceedings’: The Murderous Case of James Yates,” when he states that, “from [*Wieland*’s] first publication, the critical consensus has been that Brown took the broad outline of [his] dark tale...from an account of a real familicide that...occurred...near Albany in upstate New York, in 1781” (44).. Yates, whose story was published in the *New York Magazine* in 1786, was accused of murdering his family after hearing supernatural personages order him to do so. However impossible it may be to prove whether or not Brown based *Wieland* on Yates’ murderous deeds, the fact that Brown points to an “authentic case” of religious derangement reveals his thoughts concerning the dangerous nature of supernatural reliance in regard to the United States’ trajectory at the time. In other words, by insisting that the tale (supposedly

¹⁷ Given the fact that Brown composed *Wieland* in 1798, it should be emphasized that the readers to which he refers are those who are living during the time when *Wieland* was published.

the Yates narrative) to which he is alluding is “authentic,” Brown suggests that the events depicted in *Wieland* have some connection to real events in the United States.

On the other hand, Brown’s Quaker heritage, his adolescent disavowal of religion, and his eventual embrace of divine institutions illustrate his vacillation from one axiom to another, never able to make up his mind. As Christine Hedlin observes in her essay, “‘Was There Not Reason to Doubt?’: *Wieland* and Its Secular Age,” “Clara blames herself for wavering among her possible explanations for her experiences, and perhaps Brown intends his readers to do the same” (Hedlin 756). While Hedlin rightly asserts that Brown intends for readers to blame themselves for their “wavering” beliefs, maybe *Wieland* is merely Brown’s way of blaming himself for his earlier beliefs. Perhaps *Wieland* illustrates Brown’s own transformation from a man of sorrow and supernatural inclination to a man of rational affirmation.

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