THE GOTHIC ELEMENT IN THE NOVELS
OF CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

APPROVED:

M. S. Shockley
Major Professor

Lewis W. Newton
Minor Professor

M. P. Wells
Director of the Department of English

Cas J. Johnson
Dean of the Graduate School
THE GOTHIC ELEMENT IN THE NOVELS
OF CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

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Willie Jim Cannon, B. A.

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CHAPTER I

THE GOTHIC NOVEL IN ENGLAND

Man has enjoyed the tale of terror as far back as any record goes. Fear and awe of natural phenomena have inspired tales which tried to explain these mysteries. Man had no way to account for floods, thunder, lightning, hail, earthquake, the origin of mankind itself. Makers of myths in early days of civilization, story tellers of days gone by, jesters or minstrels in the courts, old beldames, wandering minstrels, singing or telling their tales of demons, goblins, ghosts, witches, fairies, and princesses, intrigued their listeners with the strange and terrible plots which comprised their songs or stories. "Human nature desires not only to be amused and entertained, but moved to pity and fear."¹

English literature gives only

... a brief tantalizing glimpse of the vast treasury of folk tales and ballads that existed before literature became an art and lived on side by side with it, vitalizing and enriching it continually. Yet here and there we catch sudden gleams like the fragment in King Lear:

"Child Roland to the dark tower came.
His word was still Fie, Foe, and Fum
I smell the blood of a British Man."²

¹Edith Birkhead, The Tale of Terror, p. 3.
²Ibid., p. 3.
Romances of chivalry, set in an atmosphere of supernatural wonder and enchantment, embody tales of terror. Notable examples are *Morte d'Arthur* and *Sir Amadas*. Terrors of the invisible world fascinated the dramatists of the Elizabethan age. Shakespeare's apparitions and witches in *Macbeth*, Marlowe's letting Dr. Faustus bargain with the devil, Ben Johnson's twelve witches in *Masque of the Queen* bear witness to this fact. Bunyan had witches, devils, and fiends in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Burns in *Tam o'Shanter* revealed with somewhat humorous reality the terrors that a reveller must face in returning home in a storm. In Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* terror was inspired by the skeleton-ship, its ghastly crew, the spectre-woman and her deathmate. In *Christabel* there were unearthly scenes, as well as in *Kubla Khan*. Some of the poems of Keats which suggested mystery and terror were *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *Isabella*, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*.3

The innate desire for the marvelous was not met by the English novel in the first half of the eighteenth century.

Smollett, who in his *Adventure of Ferdinand, Count Fathom* (1753), seems to have been experimenting with new devices for keeping alive the interest of a picaresque novel, anticipates the methods of Mrs. Radcliffe. Although he sedulously avoids introducing the supernatural, he hovers perilously on the threshold.4

To Horace Walpole, whose *Castle of Otranto* was published on Christmas Eve, 1764, must be assigned the honor of having

3Ibid., pp. 4-11.  
4Ibid., p. 12.
introduced the Gothic romance and of having made it fashionable. Walpole may be regarded "as a typical upper-class dilettante who, living in comfortable circumstances and lacking a definite aim in life, is tempted to devote his time to congenial minor occupations. Feeling himself attracted by the past, by the Gothic Era, he commenced to study the period with all the spasmodic enthusiasm of the amateur."  

The memory of Walpole as a collector of antiquities has been preserved chiefly through his whim of transforming Strawberry Hill, his estate on the Thames, near Windsor, into a kind of Gothic castle. The elements and basic outlines of Gothic architecture had not at that time been fully investigated, and the necessity for a thorough reconstruction on the basis of style remaining unperceived, the methods adopted were simple enough. In the measure permitted by the previous structure of Strawberry Hill and the disposition of its rooms, a round tower was added here, a chapel thrown out there, stained glass placed in the windows, old armour and weapons distributed in suitable spots, a mantelpiece made out of an altar, and so on, the result being fondly imagined to constitute a Gothic castle. Twenty years were occupied in these reconstructions and collection of material, during which time Strawberry Hill acquired fame and became a resort for hosts of the curious. The proprietor and creator of the establishment was apparently well satisfied with the result, for he published an illustrated account of the place.  

5 Eino Raitio, The Haunted Castle, p. 12. 6 Ibid., p. 2.
Strawberry Hill helped considerably in bringing about renewed knowledge and appreciation of the period. Despite the many well-preserved real medieval relics in England, Walpole and the majority of his contemporaries had formed for themselves from that almost legendary building, the haunted castle, the notion which he attempted to delineate in his new romanticism.\(^7\)

This is not to be taken as implying that Walpole’s Gothic building activities were the sole generators of his desire to experiment with the Gothic spirit in literature. Edmund Burke had, in 1756, published his study of ideas of the sublime and beautiful, thereby formulating the theory which the whole school of terror followed in practice. In 1762, two years before the appearance of *The Castle of Otranto*, Bishop Hurd had published *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*. Hurd appears as an enthusiastic advocate of the Gothic Era, "propounding the question whether Gothic romance might not contain something peculiarly suited to the views of a genius and to the ends of poetry, and whether the philosophically inclined people of his own day had not gone too far in making of it a perpetual source of ridicule and contempt."\(^8\)

The influence of such views and of Hurd’s book in drawing attention to Gothicism cannot be overestimated. Among these in whom a desire was born to attempt practical results in this

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\(^7\) *Ibid.*, p. 3.  
field was Walpole. His knowledge of medieval conditions was fragmentary and inexact. He had his own conception of literature, with the exception, perhaps, of a few popular ballads.⁹

That The Castle of Otranto was immediately accepted and became very popular "is an indication of the eagerness with which the readers of 1765 desired to escape from the present and revel for a time in strange, bygone centuries."¹⁰ The first edition was sold out in two months and others followed rapidly. It was translated into three other languages, French, Italian, and German.

Walpole developed a set pattern for the Gothic novel which is defined as "a form of novel in which magic, mystery, and chivalry are the chief characteristics. Horrors abound; one may expect a suit of armor suddenly come to life, while ghosts, clanking chains, and charnel houses impart an uncanny atmosphere of terror."¹¹ "The Castle of Otranto is significant not because of its intrinsic merit, but because of its power in shaping the destiny of the novel."¹² His followers, Mrs. Radcliffe, Clara Reeve, Maturin, Lewis, and Godwin, adhered to the pattern. The Gothic novel was imitated by the "shilling shockers," stories which "varied in length from mere anecdotes

⁹Ibid., p. 3. ¹⁰Birkhead, op. cit., p. 20.
¹¹Wm. F. Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature, p. 190.
¹²Birkhead, op. cit., p. 20.
to tales of thirty thousand words." These chapbooks with nameless authors derived their name from their selling price, seventy-two pages for a shilling.

Both the Gothic novel and the chapbooks are characterized by looseness in plot construction. The stories, following the pattern of the novels, fall into two groups. There are those whose setting is a Gothic castle patterned after The Castle of Otranto and The Mysteries of Udolpho. The other group follows such stories as The Monk and The Italian, their setting being a monastery or a convent. Contributing to the loose plot is the appearance of new characters who often give a lengthy life history. Consequently, there is confusion and the events seem carelessly strung together. Often members of a family are scattered all over the face of the earth at the beginning of a story and the gradual drawing them into the main setting is tedious and confusing. Others, who have been living near each other for a lifetime, find, in the end, that they are brother and sister. Sub-plots running along with the major plot complicate the events in many of the novels and stories.

Lewis's The Monk is a typical example of plot structure of the Gothic novels. Although the main plot concerns Ambrosio,

14Watt, op. cit., p. 21.
15Ibid., pp. 46-47.
a monk, there are three minor plots tied loosely to the main action. The love story of Agnes and Don Raymond is connected to the main plot through the convent at Madrid. Here, where Agnes is an unwilling nun, Ambrosio discovers her guilt, connecting her with Don Raymond. While Agnes is imprisoned here, Ambrosio completes the ruin, even the death of his own sister and his own downfall. The stories of the Bleeding Nun and the Wandering Jew, Ahasuerus, are attached to the Raymond and Agnes story. Other typifying elements in The Monk are very noticeable. Characters are scattered to many places and their relationship is concealed. Ambrosio is of unknown parentage, while Antonia and Elvira have no relations or friends. Ambrosio's parentage is not revealed until the prince of darkness is preparing to kill the monk. Ambrosio had poisoned his widowed mother and dishonored and killed his sister.

Following the pattern of the Gothic novel in arousing suspense and inspiring terror, The Monk employs imprisonment, unidentified relations, seduction, incest, robberies, murder, melodramatic rescue, prolonged flight, romantic love, insanity, capture by bandit, and supernatural visitation, all the elements considered necessary for the Gothic novel.

Settings for the action of a Gothic novel had definite, stereotyped patterns as did the plots. If the story took place

17Railo, op. cit., pp. 1-327.
in a haunted castle, it had to be partially in ruins, have a striking clock, a damp, foul-smelling dungeon, a tower in which to place an unwanted relation, trap-doors, secret panels and poorly lighted passageways. The stories taking place in a convent or monastery used a bell in lieu of a striking clock, a cell instead of a tower for confining innocent heroines, and a subterranean vault to replace the verminous, damp dungeon.

Such stage-settings inevitably confront the reader of horror-romanticism. He "quickly observes that this 'haunted castle' plays an important part in these romances; so important, indeed, that were it eliminated the whole fabric of romance would be bereft of its foundation and would lose its predominant atmosphere."18

Clara Reeve's one invention, which was to become an essential ingredient of all tales of horror which use the old castle setting, was the deliberate use of an empty suite of rooms supposed to be haunted. Into the framework supplied by Walpole, she poured "the first leavening of female sensitivity. Little else of import -- no subterranean passages, secret doors or similar contrivances -- is to be found in her work."19

Ann Radcliffe developed Walpole's and Reeve's settings to the fullest extent, especially the ruins, which seemed to her more romantic than a sound building. She brought into the 'haunted castle' the old abbey and monastery. The broken arches and solitary towers of these rise gloomily impressive among the twilit trees, producing an eerie atmosphere tinged with devotion.20

Properties, atmospheric and otherwise, were well adapted by Walpole, Reeve, and Radcliffe to heighten the desired impression. The moon emerges from behind a cloud to reveal a ghastly scene that alarms the villain and prevents his crimes from being committed. Sometimes the moon shines through the stained-glass windows of a church, revealing to the tyrant the glassy eyes of his dead heir. The moon is intended to awaken a nocturnal atmosphere tinged with fantasy, fear, or sadness. Weird and indistinct shapes are caused by the moonshine. Old doors which creak on their rusty hinges, wind sweeping through the vaults and passages and extinguishing the lanterns or candles, lightning and thunder allying with the wind in a storm -- all lend to the atmosphere required for horror within a castle, convent, or monastery. Other phases of nature which produce effects desired by the writer are caves, precipitous cliffs, desolate surroundings, thick forests, owls, bats, and ravens.\(^{21}\)

The characters are "stereotyped puppets which cavort stiffly against this artificial background with the jerking of a certain time-worn set of strings which divide themselves conveniently into two rival camps, the good and the bad."\(^{22}\) The first group comprises the hero and heroine and a few others, and the second group is composed of "murderous monks, cruel

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\(^{21}\)Ibid., pp. 11-12.

\(^{22}\)Ibid., p. 31.
abbesses, bluebeard barons, tyrannical parents, sorceresses, and bandits."

The chief character in The Castle of Otranto is Manfred, of whom a dark and forbidding picture is given, who is not the rightful heir to Otranto and whose secret agony makes him the luckless hero of the tragedy of destiny.

Ann Radcliffe's tyrants are like Manfred, although the motives behind their deeds are often more insignificant. Montoni, the lord of Udolpho, is her character who is best adapted to awaken interest, and the one for whom the author has the greatest affection.\[24\]

In contrast to the tyrants with their dark passions and gloom is the hero with his "sunny humanity, and joyous outlook, coupled with outward beauty."\[25\] He is innocent, regarding the world with open and candid gaze. Theodore, the hero of Walpole's story, is a peasant who rises to increasing importance as he falls in love with Manfred's daughter and saves Isabella from insult. He resembles the portrait of his ancestor Alfonso which depicts "a lovely prince, with large black eyes, a smooth white forehead and manly curling locks like jet."\[26\] With this description the outward appearance of the romantic hero was established once and for all.

\[23\]Ibid., p. 31.  
\[24\]Railo, op. cit., p. 30.  
\[25\]Ibid., p. 38.  
\[26\]Ibid., p. 39.
On the whole Ann Radcliffe's young heroes resemble Walpole's and Reeve's, but they are more romantic, braver and more refined. Osbert, the young lord of Athlin, and Valancourt are two of her most typical.

The heroine of the Gothic novel is "a rosy embodiment of womanly beauty and virtue." Walpole's Isabella has the accomplishments of all the heroines. After her persecutions she is rescued by the young hero, never once forgetting her good reputation as a dignified woman.

Clara Reeve's Emma is an ordinary, gentle and beautiful girl without any remarkable adventure. After a happy childhood she marries the hero, presenting him, in the quickest time possible with five sons and a daughter, all of which is carefully recorded by the author.

Ann Radcliffe's ideal romantic maiden is about twenty, of medium height, slenderly built, but extremely well-proportioned. "Her face is half-hidden by the dark hair which falls in plaits over her bosom. Her beauty is enhanced by the soft and pensive melancholy which lends to her blue eyes such an interesting air." Her heroines are accomplished and persecuted.

This existence of endless persecution was now laid by the Walpole-Reeve-Radcliffe trio in romantic surroundings,

27 Ibid., p. 39.  
28 Ibid., p. 41.  
29 Ibid., p. 42.
and given greater effectivity by real adventures, the chief feature of which is a perpetual flight from persecutors in circumstances of great romanticism and terror. What makes the persecution and hairbreadth escapes of the romantic maiden interesting to the student of literature is that, as a factor of excitement added to the plot, they point the way to a novel of excitement, and can for this reason be regarded as constituting a practically new invention of great vitality.\textsuperscript{30}

The character contrasting to the virtuous heroine is the demon-woman. Like the heroine, the demon-woman is accomplished, but she is a beautiful, passionate, depraved person whose role it is to win the hero from the one he loves. If her plots fail, she falls into passionate rages, but she is the perfect heroine until her victim is securely in her power.

Next to the villainous tyrant is the criminal monk, a character created by the antagonism of Protestant countries toward the papacy.\textsuperscript{31} Lewis's Ambrosio is depicted with "aquiline nose, large, black, sparkling eyes, and dark brows joined almost together, the burning, piercing glance that few could withstand."\textsuperscript{32} As previously recounted, the monk murders his mother and seduces and murders his sister.

Ann Radcliffe's Father Schedoni in The Italian is conceived differently from Ambrosio.

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., p. 43.  
\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., p. 173.  
\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., p. 174.
He is not a young, inexperienced saint preserved from temptations, but a person long hardened in the ways of crime and vice, alarmingly gifted and strenuous, hypocritical, unfeeling and merciless. It was impossible for Mrs. Radcliffe to write a novel dealing with erotic strayings, and so such sins were relegated to the monk's past, and a dark mystery in that line only hinted at with faint suggestions.\textsuperscript{33}

Ann Radcliffe raised the type of criminal monk into perhaps greater prominence than it had been brought by Lewis; both retained their suggestive power, and it was within the charmed circle of this power that Maturin began his literary activity. His first novel, \textit{The Fatal Revenge}, rises from the romanticism of Ann Radcliffe, and its chief character, the object of greatest interest to the author, is the pseudo-monk, Schemoli. The book is a complete arsenal of romantic terror, in which the whole Walpole-Radcliffe-Reeve battery of themes has been conscientiously assembled, increased and developed both in extent and suggestive atmosphere. The basis of Ambrosio's actions was erotic passion, that of Schedoni congenital wickedness; the origin of Schemoli's activity is the lust for revenge stirred up by a wrong done to an innocent woman.\textsuperscript{34}

Next to the monk as examples of horror and cruelty are the "bluebeard baron" and the cruel abbess, both of whom create terrible predicaments for the innocent victims, usually the hero and the heroine. The baron seduces the heroine or forces her into a marriage without love. The abbess keeps the unfortunate girl hidden behind gloomy convent walls. These helpless victims suffer physical and mental agony.

\textsuperscript{33}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 179. \textsuperscript{34}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 180.
Appearing with conspicuous regularity in the Gothic novel are the supernatural characters, which are really quite disappointing to one looking for terror. The ghost most typical is the murdered lord of the castle, who, for some reason, has been left unburied, and he wants to see that his descendants win back the castle from a usurper and to get for himself a decent burial. Other visitors, however, are more successful in thrilling the reader. The "Bleeding Nun" is an example. Lucifer, usually pictured as a huge monster, is often depicted with tongues of flames darting from his mouth.

One character, who recurs often in literature, is the Wandering Jew. He has been known by many names, but he is best known in Gothic writings as Ahasuerus. He is usually described as having a "Majestic appearance, with powerful features, and large, black, flashing eyes; something in his glance awakens a secret awe akin to horror." He is melancholy, grave, and solemn. God has set his seal upon him, "a flaming gleaming cross on his brow, which awakens the utmost terror in the beholder."

These "stereotyped puppets" speak with as much artificiality as they act. Their diction is "flowery and abounds

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35 Watt, op. cit., p. 42.  
36 Railo, op. cit., p. 197. 
37 Ibid.
in long Latinate words."\(^{38}\) They weep easily, they sigh heavily, they exclaim frequently, and they repeatedly punctuate their conversations with questions. The first person is often avoided entirely; the "hero and heroine refer to themselves and each other as 'the luckless Theodore' and 'the miserable Matilda.'\(^{39}\)

Many of the passages are long and oratorical, especially the ones given by characters in sorrow. Other passages flow as from an inspired pen and are utterly fascinating in their ability to lead the readers on and on.

The Castle of Otranto is a short, lively and spirited story. The conversations are swift interludes in the narrative, which never pauses for a deep analysis of situation or mood. One recognizes throughout the animated, cursory, rapidly-flitting epistolary style of its author. The works of Mrs. Radcliffe and Clara Reeve are ponderous and slow in style. . . . Lewis is very modern in his narrative style; his sentences are short, the tempo brisk and the dialog animated. In this respect his book is incomparably more readable than Godwin's or Maturin's works, where elaborate explanations in long strung-out sentences call for energy and effort on the part of the reader. Godwin is particularly weak in dialog, nor does he greatly cultivate this style of writing; Maturin is better, but his conversations have constantly to give way before the overflowing, torrential flood of descriptive matter.\(^{40}\)

Clothed in love and sentimentality, these tales of innocence persecuted by ferocious villains in settings of gloom and supernatural horror made up the Gothic romance, the supernatural

\(^{38}\)Watt, op. cit., p. 45.  
\(^{39}\)Ibid., p. 46.  
\(^{40}\)Ibid., p. 316.
always having an explanation, belated or otherwise. Despite the romantic appeal and fascination of these artificial plots and characters speaking in flowery terms, the intensity of the Gothic age would inevitably subside.

There is considerable difference of opinion regarding the duration of Gothic literature in England. Some commentators, seeing in Mrs. Radcliffe's work the finest flowering of the school of terror, have traced the falling away of the general interest in Gothic fiction from the day she laid down her pen in 1797 and have termed later novelists in the tradition like Lewis and Maturin 'belated advocates' of an outmoded genre. In other eyes, however, the vogue for sentimental terror continued unabated through the second decade of the nineteenth century or until The Heroine (1813), Waverly (1814), or Northanger Abbey (1818) turned the tide of popular favor elsewhere.41

41 Robert D. Mayo, "How Long was Gothic Fiction in Vogue?" Modern Language Notes, LVIII (January, 1943), 60.
CHAPTER II

THE GOTHIC NOVEL IN AMERICA

"When the Revolution made a conscious separation between American and English literature, America had already developed a considerable literary activity. Among the fruits of this incipient literary culture were a mass of religious writing, much verse, some history, a few attempts at drama, and a large amount of political and controversial writing."¹ The type of writing noticeably absent from these early contributions is the novel. Although England had already produced great novels, Colonial America had no novelist. Since interest had been very active in poetry and drama, the apparent neglect of the prevailing literary fashion in England cannot be attributed to lack of ambition and literary ability.

Two important aspects of early culture in America responsible for the absence of the novel are the Puritan spirit which still survived and the colonial spirit.

The Puritan scorn of the light forms of literature is well known. Its survival is evident in these words of Timothy Dwight:

Between the Bible and novels there is a gulf fixed which few novel readers are willing to pass. The consciousness of virtue, the dignified pleasure of having performed one's duty, the serene remembrance of a useful life, the hope of an interest in

the Redeemer, and the promise of a glorious inheritance in the favor of God are never found in novels.\textsuperscript{2}

In their prefaces, many of the novelists in the earlier period in America show a nervous consciousness of being censured, and they attempt to avoid any such censure as Dwight's by explaining that their works are to direct the young mind. The Reverend Enos Hitchcock, one of our earliest writers of fiction, has his heroine say, "Nothing can have a worse effect on the mind of our sex than the free use of those writings which are the offspring of the modern novelists."\textsuperscript{3}

Mrs. Foster, Mrs. Rowson, and the other literary ladies show the same dread of "the pernicious effects of novel reading."\textsuperscript{4}

The opinions of the whole country were not controlled by Puritan beliefs. Much more general was the colonial spirit, under whose influence Americans looked to England as their mother country, sent their sons to England to be educated whenever it was possible, and sought in English manners a model for their own. Naturally readers filled with such a spirit satisfied their taste for fiction with stories of English life.

This spirit of filial acceptance could not survive the Revolution. As soon as the confusion which follows a war had subsided, the more thoughtful people decided that manners,  


\textsuperscript{4}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}, p. 2.
literature, and laws should be home-made. Ardent patriots set themselves to the task of portraying American manners in the literature. Consequently the new spirit of national self-consciousness combined with gradual cessation of the Puritan spirit to make the last ten years of the eighteenth century one of novel writing, as well as of novel reading.

The first narrative of any consequence in America was Sarah Wentworth Morton's *The Power of Sympathy*, published in 1789. In a solemn preface the author declared her purpose "to expose the dangerous consequences of seduction," and in terms of Christian zeal dedicated her novel to the young females of America. Despite all its protestations of sanctity, the book proved too seductive and was promptly suppressed.

*Charlotte Temple* (1790) by Mrs. Susanna Rowson, a story of seduction founded on fact, charmed more than one generation of naive readers of fiction. Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797) solemnized the pathetic career of Elizabeth Whitman of Hartford. In the very year in which Charles Brockden Brown's first novel appeared, John Davis gave to the world *The Original Letters of Ferdinand and Elizabeth*. In this narrative the heroine, in writing to her lover, expressed the temper of American novels of that day. She writes: "Come to me this night! Bring with thee pistols, and when the clock strikes twelve we'll both become immortal."5

Such was the tenor of American fiction when Brown began to write. From his contemporaries he drew but little in either matter or manner. They had, however, broken down the Puritan opposition to novel-reading and prepared the soil for sturdier growth.

Didacticism and sentimentality characterized the British novel in the period immediately preceding the vogue of the Gothic romance. Naturally the same moods and purposes appear in the first American novels, most of which, like their British models, were the work of women.

These early novelists, despite their common aim, represent no concerted movement. According to them, the function of the novel was almost wholly utilitarian. They did not discover the new type of novel or pattern a characteristic type, but looked for their models in the very British fiction whose influence they sought to destroy. It was unfortunate that the methods they copied were from such an uninspired and uninspiring period.

Even though their accomplishment was inconsiderable from the point of view of literary merit, these early novels have a certain interest as documents in the history of taste. Their authors, and presumably their readers, were of the cultivated class, consciously seeking what it supposed to be the best. Too, to introduce novel writing to America at all was a very important achievement. Although the Gothic novel
followed in a few years, the honor of leading the way in
the new field belongs to the novel of the didactic tradition.

The period with which American fiction began was followed
by the popularity of the first really gifted American novelist,
Charles Brockden Brown, variously known as "The First American
American Man of Letters."

In 1797 in American fiction "the dairymaid and hired
man no longer weep over the ballad of the cruel stepmother,
but amuse themselves into an agreeable terror with the haunted
houses and hobgoblins of Mrs. Radcliffe."6 "In The Asylum, or
Alonzo and Melissa, published in Poughkeepsie in 1811, the
Gothic castle with its full equipment of 'explained ghosts,'
has been safely conveyed across the Atlantic and set up in
South Carolina . . ."7

Brown's literary career began in 1798 with his first
published novel, Wieland, which gives him his place in American
literature. It was evident at once that he belonged to the
Gothic School, because he employed the supernatural appearances,
the expiation of crimes and the working out of curses which
were the substance of The Castle of Otranto and The Mysteries
of Udolpho, two of the most typical of Gothic stories in

6Loshe, op. cit., quoting The Algerine Captive, by
Royall Tyler, p. 21.

7Birkhead, op. cit., p. 197.
England. Almost before Wieland was published, Brown wrote his second novel, Ormond, or The Secret Witness, which with two other novels, Arthur Mervyn and Edgar Huntly, appeared in 1799. He is said to have worked at this time on five novels at once.  

Wieland and Ormond were the first considerable romances produced in America. Their importance as pioneer work was recognized from the beginning, and they brought their hard-working young author a place of honor in the community, if not much pecuniary reward. In a letter to his brother James, dated from New York on February 15, 1799, he gives a hint of the quick vogue of Ormond, published only in that year:

My social hours and schemes are in their customary state. ... Up till eleven, and abed till eight, plying the quill or the book, and conversing with male and female friends, constitutes the customary series of my amusements and employments. I add somewhat, though not so much as I might if I were so inclined, to the number of my friends. I find to be the writer of Wieland and Ormond is a greater recommendation than I ever imagined it would be.  

In 1801 appeared Brown's last two novels, Clara Howard, or the Enthusiasm of Love, and Jane Talbot. In contrast to all his other tales these two are entirely without bloodshed; there is not a single murder. Clara Howard is completely without a villain, and in Jane Talbot there is only a poor

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9 Ibid., p. 24.
little spinster villainess. Brown seemed to be escaping from
the influence of the tale of terror and began indulging in
the analytical study.

Brown prides himself on "calling forth the passions and
engaging the sympathy of the reader by means not hitherto
employed by puerile superstitions and exploded manners, Gothic
castles and chimeras."10 Notwithstanding this lofty scorn
for "Gothic castles and chimeras" Brown condescended to take
over from Ann Radcliffe the device of introducing apparently
supernatural occurrences which are finally explained as
natural. His conscience forbade him to thrust upon his readers
spectres in which he did not believe himself.

Strong and original as was Brown's work it did not lead
to the establishment of a school in American fiction. The
only one of his contemporaries who showed any disposition to
follow in his footsteps was George Watterston, whose first
story was The Lawyer, or Man as He Ought Not to Be, published
in 1808. His second story, Glencarn, or the Disappointments
of Youth, was published in 1810 and showed even more traces
of Brown's influence.11

The Asylum, or Alonzo and Melissa by I. Mitchell, previously
mentioned, appeared in the year after Brown's death. It was a
romance in the true "Radcliffian spirit." The effect of the

10 Brown, Edgar Huntly, p. xix.
long book, with its elaborate description of scenery, is one of greatest naivete', and the tale viewed as the only product of Ann Radcliffe's influence, seems an inadequate representative of her school.

The question of the importance of the Gothic novel in early American fiction ultimately reduces itself to the importance of Charles Brockden Brown. Inevitably, like all contemporary American novelists, he sought his inspiration in British literature. It is probable that the popular German novels and dramas of horror were of some influence in strengthening the hold which the tale of villainy and crime had obtained over his imagination. English novels, noticeably Caleb Williams, furnished the actual incentive to his tales of crime. He differed from his contemporaries in that he changed the ideas he borrowed and added much of his own material. He seemed to realize that American readers were developing a general desire for novels reflecting native manners. His stories have as setting the real life of his time, but it is only a setting. In Edgar Huntly, in which the American Indian began his career in our fiction, he denoted a large part of his book to wilderness life and Indian adventures, yet he still put forward a mysterious crime as the motive of his tale, and thus persistently identified himself with the short-lived school of terror.12

12Ibid., p. 57.
Whether Brown might have done work of great and sustained excellence, if his life had fallen in a period when fiction offered more sober influences and better models, is a question which cannot be answered. As it is, he remains an interesting, but, as far as novel-writing is concerned, an isolated figure in the American literature of his time. Although on the one hand he fulfilled in many respects the aims of contemporary American novelists, and although on the other he introduced to America the fashion then prevailing in British fiction, — yet he had no imitators in his genre, and he exerted no immediate influence on American fiction. In the general history of American literature he has, however, always held an important place. The influence on many greater writers which has been ascribed to him is in itself a claim to consideration. And he has always found readers to whom his emotional intensity and his command of certain effects of terror have compensated for his lack of construction and characterization. In the history of early American fiction his peculiar importance comes from the fact that he is the earliest American novelist who has won reputation and influence outside his own country.\(^{13}\)

\(^{13}\)Ibid., pp. 57-58.
CHAPTER III

ENGLISH GOTHICISM IN BROWN’S NOVELS

The only genuine Gothic novelist in America was Charles Brockden Brown, working under English influences. His morbid temperament, the result of ill health, made him especially susceptible to the spell of the Gothic romance in England. Caleb Williams, The Monk, The Mysteries of Udolpho, and The Castle of Otranto, all coming within a few years, made a powerful impression on him. Their extravagant melodrama and pseudo mystery, their terrible crimes, dismal corridors, malignant spirits, and haunted castles inevitably stimulated his imagination. He set himself to the task of creating a Gothic novel that would "put America on the literary map with a vengeance, and in Wieland very nearly succeeded."

The English romance which affected him most was Caleb Williams, the work of William Godwin. After Wieland appeared, Brown modestly wrote:

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

2 Ibid., p. 37.
His specific indebtedness to Godwin appears chiefly in a fondness for the central situation of Caleb Williams, an innocent and somewhat helpless youth in the grasp of a patron turned enemy. The parallel is exact in Arthur Mervyn, which brings a young man of the same name to Philadelphia, makes him blunder into the secret of a murder, and subjects him to elaborate persecutions from the murderer. A surviving fragment of the lost Sky-Walk shows that Brown there varied the Godwin situation by making the patron a woman. In Ormond, by still another variation, a woman is the victim; Constantia Dudley, pursued by the enthusiast and revolutionary Ormond until in self-defense she is obliged to kill him... But Brown's victims do not have to undergo the cumulative agony of Godwin's, for the reason that Brown worked too violently to be able to organize a scheme of circumstances all converging upon any single victim. And more than his vehement methods of work handicapped him in his rivalry with Godwin: to be a master of the art of calm and deliberate narrative, he must have had Godwin's cold and consistent philosophy of life, which Brown had not.3

The structure of Ormond is in broad outline like Caleb Williams, too, wherein one main character is treated in detail before a second enters the story at about the half-way mark.

The two parts of Arthur Mervyn form a work much like Caleb Williams not only because the two heroes possess a similar curiosity, but also because the varied subject matter illustrates a single idea. The incidents are uniformly within the range of ordinary experience.4

Brown held firmly to the Godwinian axiom that wealth and rank pervert the understanding. Wieland refused to claim a large estate in Germany to which he was entitled, asking, "Was it laudable to grasp at wealth and power even when they were within our reach? Were not these the two great sources of

3Carl Van Doren, The American Novel, p. 11.
4Harry R. Warfel, Charles Brockden Brown, p. 143.
depravity?" Mrs. Lorimer's husband and son were both marked by these "vices that grow out of opulence and a mistaken education." 

The charitable feelings of Mervyn and Huntly are complicated by an insatiable curiosity, a motif which Brown borrowed from Godwin. Caleb William's statement was: "The spring of action which, perhaps more than any other, characterized the whole train of my life, was curiosity." 

"Why," asks Mervyn, "is my fortune so abundant in unforeseen occurrences? . . . my propensity to look into other people's concerns...?"

Fred Lewis Pattee, in the preface to his edition of Wieland, has this to say:

The influence of Caleb Williams upon Wieland has been overstressed by critics. Godwin's theories concerning fiction undoubtedly had their effect upon Brown, and undoubtedly they set the key not only of Wieland, but of Ormond and Arthur Mervyn. Godwin had sounded a new note in fiction. In the original preface to Caleb Williams he had written, *The question now afloat in the world respecting things as they are is the most interesting that can be presented to the human mind." The novelist, he contended, must dominate his reader, hold him by a very powerful interest, even terrorize him. The novel must have a moral purpose and the reader must be changed because of his reading. It must be a tale "that shall constitute an epoch in the mind of the reader, that no one, after he has read it,

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5 Charles Brockden Brown, Wieland, edited by Fred Lewis Pattee, p. 42.
6 Brown, Edgar Huntly, p. 36.
7 William Godwin, Caleb Williams, p. 4.
shall ever be exactly the same man that he was before. 'And yet, though woven of the most amazing and horrible and uncommon of materials, the novel must move at every point within the laws and established course of nature as she operates in the planet we inhabit.' It was his task as a novelist, he contended, 'to mix human feelings and passions with incredible situation, and thus render them impressive and interesting.'

The style of Godwin — headlong, intense — had undoubtedly its effect upon Brown, as did also Godwin's humanitarian objectives and his obvious moralizing. Wieland is spiced thickly with apothegms and axioms of the Godwin variety. . . . Moreover, the rough sketch of Carwin presented in the novel is of Caleb Williams texture. Despite seeming monstrous crimes, Carwin is defended. He is 'an unfortunate man,' a thing to be pitied, a victim in the hands of an unscrupulous master who attempts to make him his cat's-paw, and he is also, like Williams, the victim of an uncontrollable curiosity.9

"He [Charles Brockden Brown] was the Godwin of America," says John Neal in his contributions to Blackwood's Magazine, September, 1824.10

An article in the Restrospective Review said of Brown and Godwin: "Charles Brockden Brown was the first writer of prose fiction of which America could boast . . . He grounded himself upon the manner of Godwin . . ."11

In "Brockden Brown and the Novel," William Barton Blake says:

Brown's place with reference to novelists who loomed large on the contemporary literature stage

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9Wieland, pp. xxxv, xxxvi.

10John Neal, American Writers, p. 65.

need not be argued here. If Brown himself had been asked to whom among writers of fiction he owed most, he would have unalteringly answered, 'To William Godwin, author of Caleb Williams, or Things as They Are.'

Ann Radcliffe's influence on Brown is not so great as that of Godwin, but without a doubt, Brown read her works and was impressed. A Gothic novel seeks above everything else to arouse the emotion of terror in the reader. Brown certainly followed Radcliffe in this element. In the works of both novelists, the incidents are terrible.

*Wieland* is a tale of terror not unlike *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*. Carwin, a man of horror is closely comparable to Ann Radcliffe's *Italian*, Schedoni, described thus:

There was something terrible in his air, something almost superhuman. His cowl, too, as it threw a shade over the livid paleness of his face, increased its severe character, and gave an effect to his large melancholy eye which approached to extremely singular, and that cannot be easily defined. It bore the traces of many passions, which seemed to have fixed the features they no longer animated. An habitual gloom and austerity prevailed over the deep lines of his countenance, and his eyes were so piercing that they seemed to penetrate at a single glance into the hearts of men, and to read their most secret thoughts.

Here is Brown's picture of Carwin:

His cheeks were pallid and lank, his eyes sunken, his forehead overshadowed by course,

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13 Wieland, p. xxxix, quoting *The Italian*, by Radcliffe.
straggling hairs, his teeth large and irregular, though sound and brilliantly white, and his chin discolored by a tetter... And yet his forehead, so far as shaggy locks would allow it to be seen, his eyes lustrously black, and possessing, in the midst of haggardness, a radiance inexpressibly serene and patient, and something in the rest of his features which it would be in vain to describe, but which served to betoken a mind of the highest order, were essential ingredients in the portrait... His eyes wandered from one object to another. When these organs were fixed upon me, I shrank into myself. 

Ann Radcliffe leads her characters into spectacular situations that freeze their blood, but she carefully conceals the nature of the horror from the reader until the final unveiling. Emily in The Mysteries of Udolpho lifts a curtain from what she believes to be a picture, and before she can leave the chamber, she drops senseless to the floor. Not until near the end of the book is the reader enlightened by what she saw. This device became characteristic of Brown; however, he is far more suggestive than Radcliffe. He lures one on and on irresistibly by mysteries the reader feels are soon to be explained; then, as in The Mysteries of Udolpho, all the ghosts and supernatural machinery are carefully brought out and explained as natural phenomena -- to the modern reader's disgust. What Emily saw illustrates the horror and the explained supernatural in Radcliffe's writing.

It may be remembered that in a chamber of Udolpho hung a black veil, whose singular situation

14 Wieland, pp. 60-61.
had excited Emily's curiosity, and which afterwards disclosed an object that had overwhelmed her with horror; for, on lifting it there appeared, instead of the picture she had expected, within the recess of the wall, a human figure, of ghostly paleness, stretched at its length, and dressed in the habiliments of the grave. What added to the horror of the spectacle, was, that the face appeared partly decayed and disfigured by worms, which were visible on the features and hands. On such an object it will be readily believed that no person dared endure to look twice. Emily, it may be recollected, had, after the first glance, let the veil drop, and her terror had prevented her from ever after provoking a renewal of such suffering as she had then experienced. Had she dared to look again, her delusion and her fears would have vanished together, and she would have perceived that the figure before her was not human, but formed of wax.15

Matching from the standpoint of horror and explanation of the supernatural is the passage from Wieland taken from Wieland's testimony after the murder of his family which he was led to do by the voice of Carwin, who, the reader finally learns, is a ventriloquist.

She shrieked aloud, and endeavoured to free herself from my grasp; but her efforts were vain. . . . Till her breath was stopped she shrieked for help -- for mercy. When she could speak no longer, her gestures, her looks appealed to my compassion. My accursed hand was irresolute and tremulous. I mean thy death to be sudden, thy struggles to be brief. Alas! my heart was infirm; my resolves mutable. Thrice I slackened my grasp, and life kept its hold, though in the midst of pangs. Her eye-balls started from their sockets. Grimness and distortion took place of all that used to bewitch me into transport, and subdue me into reverence. . . .

I lifted the corpse in my arms and laid it on the bed. I gazed upon it with delight. Such was the elation of my thoughts, that I even broke into laughter.16

16 Wieland, p. 194.
Particularly in *Ormond* does Brown imitate Ann Radcliffe's heroines. Incidents are profuse which evoke the emotions of terror or pity. Constantia Dudley is maneuvered into all the distressful circumstances possible, not so much by means of supernatural incidents but by commonplace occurrences, making life almost unbearable. They include epidemic disease, imprisonment, fraud, counterfeiting, false doctrines, and threats of ravishment. Brown's descriptions, his use of the sex motif, and the melodramatic ending follow the pattern of Radcliffe's novels.

Emily and Constantia are cast in the same mold. Both are victims of circumstance; both are in poverty. Both are betrayed by seeming benefactors. Both are creatures of reason and do not yield to their emotions. Both are educated by their fathers in the classics. Both are sweet and brave with souls of fortitude. No obstacle or sorrow is sufficiently great to daunt them. Both prefer death to a stained reputation. In *Ormond* the emphasis on sex occurs not merely through the several scenes of seduction, but it is pervasive throughout the analysis of the fundamental psychology of the characters.17

Even though Brown lacks Lewis's reckless mendacity, there are noticeable resemblances of his novels to *The Monk*, which is not so much a novel of suspense depending for part of its effect on the human instinct of curiosity, as it is a novel of terror, working almost entirely on the even stranger and more primitive instinct of fear. As in *The Monk*, Brown's plots are loosely constructed, his descriptions are detailed and extravagant. Sometimes they both use short, staccato sentences

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17 Warfel, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.
to enforce a point, but more often the reader is led on by long, involved sentences. There is terror in the Brown novels, but it is not carried beyond the limits by being described in revolting detail. Lewis had no scruples against an incredible ending, while Brown finally explained every mystery. Lewis's immature exaggeration makes some characters seem like pantomime characters who inadvertently step into a melodrama, but the caricature becomes amusing because of its crudity. Brown's characters are all serious and show a more mature mind. There is no doubt that Brown read Lewis's works; they were so notorious that almost any contemporary writer would have been certain to explore their pages. They did not, however, have the apparent influence of the works of Godwin and Radcliffe.

Brown's four Gothic romances which give him his place in the history of American literature show the influence of the English Gothic romances in varying degrees. Wieland, which is considered the strongest and most interesting of Brown's Gothic romances, is closest to the English novels.

In respect of its main features, Ormond stands about midway in the series of Brown's novels, the order of which seems to have been as follows: Wieland, Arthur Mervyn (Part I), Ormond, Edgar Huntly, Arthur Mervyn (Part II), Clara Howard, Jane Talbot.18 In Ormond, he abandons the marvelous which he had used in Wieland, except for a faint suggestion seen in

18 Brown, Ormond, p. xxix.
Ormond's almost superhuman skill at disguise, but retains and develops in the hero-villain of the title role the conception of character first revealed in Carwin. Although he is growing in conservatism, this Godwinian element still shows through just as it did in Carwin. "He gives up, in his last two novels, both his great-minded figures and his bizarre psycho-physical phenomena, leaving Clara Howard and June Talbot relatively tame performances."¹⁹ "The pithy sentences remain, skillful plot structure survives, nerve-tingling suspense still enchains interest, but by comparison with its predecessors the novel is uninteresting."²⁰

When Brown ceased the use of abnormal psychology, including sex perversion, evil exhibited in terrible brute force, and intellectual satanic cleverness; when he quit employing the scientific phenomena of sleepwalking, ventriloquism, epidemic disease, spontaneous combustion of human beings; when he no longer included the wild elements of nature, excluding even the Indian and the panther, the Gothic excitement was lost. Although he remained close to Godwin in his moralizing, he lost the strength and interest of his better books. Horror and terror, then, instead of love and romance, were Brown's proper elements. When he withdrew from the areas of terror, he became

¹⁹Ibid., p. xxix.
²⁰Warfel, op. cit., p. 192.
merely another author of romantic narrative. "Meritorious though the novel [Clara Howard] is, it lacks the hair-raising compulsiveness and originality which make Wieland and Edgar Huntly minor classics."\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., p. 194.
CHAPTER IV

AMERICAN GOTHICISM IN BROWN'S NOVELS

That a genuine task challenged the American imagination before any considerable body of fiction could be achieved is a fact which Charles Brockden Brown faced when he gave up journalism for the novel. As previously shown in this study, Brown had little to challenge him in American writings. He had to face the problem of reaching people who still believed that fiction belonged to the Old World, fact to the new; people who looked back with admiration and nostalgia on the soil where they had lived. In America, though prose fiction was the popular form, the narratives were all romantic repetitions of the English novels. It is not surprising that Brown, the first native professional novelist in the United States, should have hesitated before devoting himself to the sphere in which lay his real strength. Since novels were still frowned upon by a large part of the respectable people of the time, the profession of novelist in America simply did not exist, and Brown's first claim to what fame and popularity he achieved rests upon his founding of that profession.

He was a great reader, and matured rapidly from an intellectual point of view. Those who are disconcerted at the precocity of his heroes forget that Brown saw nothing improbable in the language of Arthur Mervyn, for at the age of ten, he probably
talked the same way. The extraordinary activity
of his mind fostered by his custom of taking long
walks in the neighborhood of Philadelphia, where
the habit of brooding over ideas drawn from his
reading resulted in abstractions often powerful
and often absurd. This quality was transferred to
his heroes. . . . He was greatest at planning and,
while his projected epics on the discovery of
America, on the conquest of Peru, and on the con-
quest of Mexico, which he had outlined at the age
of sixteen, did not materialize, they show his
preferences for American scenes.1

A letter by "Speratus" which is probably Brown's shows
that he was prompted by native inspiration. In speaking of a
new work to be projected by him he says:

To the story telling moralist in the United
States is a new and untried field. He who shall
examine objects with his own eyes, who shall employ
the European models merely for the improvement of
his own taste, and adopt his fiction to all that
is genuine and peculiar in the scene before him,
will be entitled at least to the praise of originality.2

An unusual combination fused to influence Brown in his
choice of writing. His inspiration to use native material,
the publication of the English Gothic romances, and strange,
melancholy thoughts were sufficient to mold his works into
what they became. His use of native material, which finally
evolves as American Gothicism, is easily observable upon reading
Brown's novels.

Brown deliberately selected remarkable incidents of con-
temporary life for use in his novels. Wieland was based in

1Arthur Hobson Quinn, American Fiction, p. 26.
part upon an actual occurrence. A farmer in New York went suddenly crazy under the influence of two angels whom he saw in a bright light and who urged him to destroy his idols. He killed his horses, his wife and his children, and visiting his sister apparently to kill her, he was captured and confined as a lunatic. Of course the incident is subordinate to portrayal of the soul of Wieland.

His concern with native material is illustrated most definitely by his picture of the yellow fever in Arthur Mervyn. Fever is not used merely as a background; it makes the sudden disappearance and reappearance of the characters probable. Naturally that atmosphere of confusion, in which anything may happen, suited admirably the peculiar gifts of Brown. A brooding sense of terror hangs over the city, but the romantic material and idealized characters are held in check by the realistic description of the plague. The descriptions of the hospital bring the novel down to earth. Brown had escaped yellow fever in Philadelphia in 1793, but he had the disease in 1798 in New York; he simply transferred the experience to his native city for his novel. He was exposed to the infection through the generous action of his friend, Elihu H. Smith, the physician and playwright, who took an Italian, Dr. Scandella, into his house when Brown was visiting him. Brown used the incidents of Scandella's death in Arthur Mervyn.

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3Quinn, op. cit., p. 27. 4Ibid., p. 30.
Two passages will illustrate Brown's skill in horror and use of native background -- one, a sketch of a burying party; the other a description of the hospital, unforgettably terrible.

I met not more than a dozen figures, and these were ghost-like, wrapt in cloaks, from behind which they cast upon me glances of wonder and suspicion; and, as I approached, changed their course, to avoid touching me. Their clothes were sprinkled with vinegar; and their nostrils defended from contagion by some powerful perfume. . . . Death seemed to hover over this scene, and I dreaded that the floating pestilence had already lighted on my frame. I had scarcely overcome these tremors, when I approached a house, the door of which was opened, and before which stood a vehicle, which I presently recognized to be a hearse.

The driver was seated in it. I stood still to mark his visage, and to observe the course which he proposed to take. Presently a coffin, borne by two men, issued from the house. The driver was a Negro, but his companions were white. Their features were marked by a ferocious indifference to danger or pity. One of them as he assisted in thrusting the coffin into the cavity provided for it, said, 'I'll be damned if I think the poor dog was quite dead. It wasn't the fever that killed him, but the sight of the girl and her mother on the floor. I wonder how they all got into that room. What carried them there?'

The other surlily muttered, 'Their legs to be sure.'

'But what should they hug together in one room for?'

'To save us trouble to be sure.'

'And I thank them with all my heart; but damn it, it wasn't right to put him in his coffin before the breath was fairly gone. I thought the last look he gave me told me to stay a few minutes.'

'Pshaw! He could not live. The sooner dead the better for him; as well as for us. Did you mark how he eyed us when we carried away his wife and daughter? I never cried in my life, since I was knee-high, but curse me if I ever felt in better tune for the business than just then. Hey!' continued he, looking up, and observing me standing
a few paces distant, and listening to their discourse, 'what's wanted? Anybody dead?'

I lay upon a mattress, whose condition proved that a half-decayed corpse had recently been dragged from it. The room was large, but it was covered with beds like my own. Between each, there was scarcely the interval of three feet. Each sustained a wretch, whose groans and distortions bespoke the desperateness of his condition.

The atmosphere was loaded with mortal stenches. A vapor, suffocating and malignant, scarcely allowed me to breathe. No suitable receptacle was provided for the evacuations produced by medicine or disease. My nearest neighbor was struggling with death, and my bed casually extended, was moist with the detestable matter which poured from his stomach.

You will scarcely believe that, in this scene of horrors, the sound of laughter should be overheard. While the upper rooms of this building are filled with the sick and the dying, the lower apartments are the scene of carousals and mirth. The wretches who are hired, at enormous wages, to tend the sick and convey away the dead, neglect their duty and consume the cordials, which are provided for the patients, in debauchery and riot.

A female visage, bloated with malignity and drunkenness, occasionally looked in. Dying eyes were cast upon her, invoking the boon, perhaps, of a drop of cold water, or her assistance to change a posture which compelled him to behold the ghastly writhings or deathful smile of his neighbor.

The visitant had left the banquet for a moment, only to see who was dead. If she entered the room, blinking eyes and reeling steps showed her to be totally unqualified for ministering the aid that was needed. Presently she disappeared and others ascended the staircase, a coffin was deposited at the door, the wretch, whose heart still quivered, was seized by rude hands, and dragged along the floor into the passage.

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5 Arthur Mervyn, I, 140.
6 Ibid., p. 173.
Ormand, completed in December, 1798, while Arthur Mervyn was still in the making, had the yellow fever used as the background, but while the details are told with Brown's usual realistic portraiture, the awful pestilence is used only as a means of heightening the difficulties of Constantia Dudley and her father. Perhaps this fact accounts for Constantia's combining the qualities of a real woman with those of an ideal heroine. She is made to meet calamity with energy.

It was only natural that the Indian, who had played such a conspicuous part in the wars of the last half of the eighteenth century, should have attracted the attention of a writer with a great imagination. Others had sensed literary possibilities of the red man and had introduced him in magazine stories of that day and in historical writings of the period, but the distinction of first successfully utilizing the Indian as fiction material really belongs to Brown. In his preface to Edgar Huntly, he tells the public that he wants to profit by some of the numerous and inexhaustible sources of amusement to the fancy and instruction to the heart peculiar to America, and to exhibit a series of adventures growing out of the conditions of the new country. 7 He finds the incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the vast western wilderness far more suitable to his purposes than the Gothic castles, trivial

7Edgar Huntly, p. xix.
superstitions and terrible things usually employed for such purposes. Critics readily admit that Brown, a lover of nature and acquainted with his section of the country, was successful in depicting the Indian vividly and faithfully.

It is true that in *Edgar Huntly* Brown introduces European material, and sleepwalking is the chief source of interest, but the scene of the story is distinctively American, laid in or near the forests of Pennsylvania, then primeval. Skillfully Brown describes the wilderness of early times. The almost impenetrable forests are a fitting background for Indian depredations. There are valleys and hills in their original state, areas of solitude with their panthers; there are crevices and subterranean passages. These are typically American and far removed from the conventional backgrounds of the foreign novel.

Brown did not idealize the Indian. In *Edgar Huntly* the whole situation is one of grim reality and reflects the implacable hatred of a race driven from its hunting-grounds by the steady march of the white man. Old Deb, the Indian who instigated the depredations, is viewed in anything but a romantic light. Brown's realistic Old Deb, who lives on public bounty and fancies many grievances, is a portrayal which makes her more like a person described from actual observation than any of the other Indians.

The village inhabited by this clan was built upon the ground which now constitutes my uncle's
barn-yard and orchard. On the departure of her countrymen, this female burnt the empty wigwams and retired into the fastnesses of Norwalk. She selected a spot suitable for an Indian dwelling and a small plantation of maize, and in which she was seldom liable to interruption and intrusion.

Her only companions were three dogs, of the Indian or wolf species. These animals differed in nothing from their kinsmen of the forest, but in their attachment and obedience to their mistress. She governed them with absolute sway. They were her servants and protectors, and attended her person or guarded her threshold, agreeable to her directions. She fed them with corn and they supplied her and themselves with meat, by hunting squirrels, raccoons, and rabbits.

The chief employment of this woman, when at home, besides plucking the weeds from among her corn, bruising the grain between two stones, and setting her snares for rabbits and possums, was to talk. Though in solitude, her tongue was never at rest but when she was asleep; but her conversation was merely addressed to her dogs. Her voice was sharp and shrill, and her gesticulations were vehement and grotesque. A hearer would naturally imagine that she was scolding; but, in truth, she was merely giving them directions. Having no other object of contemplation or subject of discourse, she always found, in their posture and looks, occasion for praise, or blame, or command. The readiness with which they understood, and the docility with which they obeyed her movements and words, were truly wonderful.

Edgar Huntly's views regarding the Indians have a clear definiteness. His opinions are identified, of course, with those of Brown. Edgar had been a grievous sufferer of their frequent and destructive inroads into the heart of the English settlement during the late war. The novel reveals that only by the intervention of a kind providence he and his two sisters had been saved when his father's house on the verge of the

wilderness was assailed by eight assassins during the dead of the night, his parents and an infant child murdered in their beds, the house pillaged and burned to the ground. Since then, even the image of a savage made him shudder. It is not surprising that Edgar speaks of the Indians as "inexorable enemies," "miscreants," "savages," and "merciless enemies of the white man."

Brown does not show Huntly's acquaintance with the natives as casual, but he puts him in personal, bloody encounters. Graphic descriptions of these encounters are given, but detailed descriptions of the natives themselves are missing.

Charles Brockden Brown has the colonists' conception of the Indian as a murderous savage, whose every action if not closely circumscribed leads to tragedy. Edgar's nearest relatives and dearest friends fall under the red man's tomahawks, and only resolute action and a kind providence save him from a similar fate. Though the treacherous native inspires him with amazement and wonder, and Indian warfare is not without its romantic aspects, the sense of terror predominates, and of idealization in the strict sense of the term there is little or nothing.\(^9\)


Brown had no power over character; he dealt only with events: that is to say, with sickness,

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and death, and peril; with hair-breadth escapes from tigers and savages; with defiles and rocks, and the boundless wilderness. The hero of his tale was merely an object set up to connect these things, or make them probable. In himself he was often little better than a phantasma or a madman. . . . His talent for stirring the expectation of the reader, and keeping his anxiety alive from first to last, throughout some hazardous encounter, or mysterious event, can scarcely be paralleled in the history of fiction. His portraits also of American life are absolutely alarming: — they are bare, comfortless, uncivilized. We see the rafters, the coarse dress, the little hoard of corn, the poor cottage built hastily of logs; and on the outside we hear the howling of wolves and panthers, the rustling of the rattle-snake, and the quiet tramp of the murderous savages going on their way to execute some hideous revenge. We look for the walls of a town, and the poor-house, as a refuge against violence and want. It is not solely, however, in woods and huts that Brown luxuriates; he takes us often into cities, and makes us amends with fevers and assassinations for the forest wonders which we have left behind.

That Brown was conscious of his native inspiration is evident. In the preface to *Edgar Huntly* he says:

> America has opened new views to the naturalist and politician, but has seldom furnished themes to the moral painter. That new springs of action, and new motives to curiosity should operate; that the field of investigation, opened to us by our own country, should differ essentially from those which exist in Europe, may be readily conceived. The sources of amusement to the fancy and instruction to the heart, that are peculiar to ourselves, are equally numerous and inexhaustible. It is the purpose of this work to profit by some of these sources; to exhibit a series of adventures, growing out of the condition of our country, and connected with one of the most common and wonderful diseases or affections of the human frame.

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10 Cairns, *op. cit.*, p. 197.
One merit the writer may at least claim; that of calling forth the passions and engaging the sympathy of the reader, by means hitherto unemployed by preceding authors. Puerile superstition and exploded manners; Gothic castles and Indian hostility, and the perils of the western wilderness, are far more suitable; and, for a native of America to overlook these, would admit of no apology. These, therefore, are, in part, the ingredients of this tale, and these he has been ambitious of depicting in vivid and faithful colors. The success of his efforts must be estimated by the liberal and candid reader. 11

Although Brown discarded most of the devices used in the English Gothic in favor of incidents of Indian hostility and settings in the wilderness, there is little difference in the ruggedness of Radcliffe's Alpine scenes and that of the wild country-side along the Delaware River. Here is one of Ann Radcliffe's scenes:

The thunder sounded hollowly at a distance, and the lightning was more frequent. Sometimes it revealed the nearer recesses of the woods, or, displaying some opening in their summits, illumined the ground beneath with partial splendor, the thick foliage of the trees preserving the surrounding scene in deep shadow. . . .

She could not approach these woods without experiencing keener sense of her danger. Their deep silence, except when the wind swept among the branches, and impenetrable gloom shown partially by the sudden flash, and then by the red glare of the torch, which served only to make darkness visible, were circumstances that contributed to renew all her most terrible apprehensions. . . .

After traveling through the woods for nearly an hour, during which the elements seemed to have returned to repose, the travellers, gradually ascending from the glen, found themselves upon the open brow of a mountain, with a wide valley.

11Edgar Huntly, p. xxiii.
extending in the misty moonlight at their feet, and above, the blue sky trembling through the few thin clouds that lingered after the storm, and were sinking slowly to the verge of the horizon. 12

An American scene in a novel of Brown shows the similarity to the Alpine scene.

We at last arrived at the verge of a considerable precipice. From this height, a dreary vale was discoverable, embarrassed with the leafless stock of bushes, and encumbered with rugged and painted rocks... It was in the highest degree rugged, picturesque, and wild. This vale, though I had never viewed it by the glimpses of the moon, suggested the belief that I had visited it before. Such a one I knew belonged to this uncultivated region...

The stranger kept along the verge of the cliff, which gradually declined till it terminated in the valley. He then plunged into its deepest thickets. In a quarter of an hour he stopped under a projection of the rock which formed the opposite side of the vale. He then proceeded to remove the stalks, which as I immediately perceived, concealed the mouth of a cavern. 13

John Neal, in 1824, in Blackwood's, rated him as one of the three original writers that America had produced.

With two exceptions, or at the most three, there is no American writer who would not pass just as readily for an English writer, as for an American, whatever were the subject upon which he was writing; these three are Paulding, Neal, and Charles Brockden Brown... Brown had a sort of absolute sincerity, like that of a man, who is altogether in earnest, and believes every word of his own story... You feel, after he has described a thing — and you have just been poring over the description, not as if you had been reading about it; but, as if you yourself, had seen

12 Radcliffe, op. cit., p. 39.
13 Edgar Huntly, p. 16.
it; or at least, -- as if you had just parted with a man who had seen it -- a man whose word had never been doubted; and who had been telling you of it with his face flushed.14

This is high praise indeed from a man who almost never praised anything written by an American.

Relative to Brown's place in American Gothic literature, John Erskine said:

He is prophetic of American literature in his readiness to welcome and absorb foreign culture. . . . He is distinctly himself, as Cooper and Emerson in their separate ways are distinctly themselves, and equally American. All that he learned from other lands, he transmitted into a native product, as he transferred the Gothic romance to Philadelphia. That use of a native stage is enough to earn our gratitude. He wrote of scenes he knew, and his tales lost no power by the setting.15

Undoubtedly the Gothicism of England influenced the Gothicism of America, the latter being ascribed almost wholly to Charles Brockden Brown. It is no disparagement to say that Brown was an imitator. Even when all of the English Gothic characteristics are set aside in Brown's works, there still remains much to give him a well-deserved place in literature.

Fred Lewis Pattee said:

He had a creative imagination. He possessed the power, rare in any epoch, to originate new literary effects. In his own estimation he had but 'one merit,' -- that of calling forth the

14 John Neal, op. cit., p. 29-30.
15 Erskine, op. cit., p. 48.
passion and engaging the sympathy of the reader by means hitherto unemployed by preceding authors. 
He had, more than this, the power to project his reader into the inner life of his characters; he was able to analyze and to dissect the springs of action; he had poetic visions that turn life into images of beauty; and he had that narrative enthusiasm, rare indeed, that seizes the reader at the state and hurries him despite himself breathless to the end of the tale.  

Brown used devices, style, and moralizing in imitation of the English writers, but introduction of the American Gothic romance, his avoidance of the tepid sentiment until late in his career, his lucid pictures of the yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia, his use of the Indian and the forest in romantic fiction entitle him to be called the father of the American romantic novel.

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16 Wieland, p. xiv.
CHAPTER V

BROWN'S NON-GOTHIC NOVELS

Brown's last two novels, Clara Howard and Jane Talbot, both published in 1801, do not rank with his four Gothic romances. Both are love stories written after the sentimental formula of the day. Both are made up of letters in which the characters search themselves at length, meditate upon their qualities, and moralize at tedious length. Both show what happened to Brown's fiction when he removed the unnatural incidents and villains. Although much suspense remains, by comparison with its predecessors, the novels are uninteresting. The letter device reduces the use of conversation and detailed description almost to the vanishing point.

Herbert Ross Brown's description of the sentimental formula is this:

The sentimental formula was a simple equation resting upon a belief in the spontaneous goodness and benevolence of man's original instincts. . . . It was informed throughout with a moral purpose to which all its other elements were subordinated. Into its capacious framework were poured the stock characters and situations dear to popular storytellers of every generation. The final solution was neatly reserved for the last chapter where the punishment was made to fit the crime, and the reward to equal the virtue. To achieve it, authors subjected the long arm of coincidence to the rack of expediency where it was stretched to suit every need of the plot. The reader, meanwhile, was made to cry -- and to wait. As a 'true-feeler', he was expected to
match pang for pang, and sigh for sigh with the persecuted victim; he was mercilessly roasted over the slow fires of suspense. ¹

Clara Howard distinctly marks Brown's change of ideals from Gothic to sentimental novels. The plot is orderly and, for the most part, clearly worked out. The chief interest is focused on two women, Clara Howard and Mary Wilmot, almost equally the heroines. Emphasis on character rather than psychology, and the experiences of the girls to test them morally are two typical characteristics which place the novel in the sentimental class.

The plot is simple. Edward Hartley becomes the friend of Mary Wilmot's brother, and through the friendship he becomes acquainted with his sister, who falls in love with him. Hartley feels no more than friendship for Mary, but he realized her devotion for him, and when her brother dies, he and Mary become engaged. The engagement seems to be a provision for Mary's future, for no definite plans are made. Mary lives quietly on the five thousand dollars she has discovered in her brother's possessions after his death. At the end of six months, Morton appears, claiming that he had left the money in Wilmot's care. At about the same time Mr. Howard, Hartley's benefactor, returns to this country from England, where he has married a widow, an old sweetheart of his. He wants her daughter, Clara Howard, to become Hartley's wife.

When Mary learns of this plan, she unselfishly disappears so that Hartley will be free. Hartley and Clara fall in love, but Hartley feels obligated to tell her of his engagement to Mary and his fear for her fate. Clara, also magnanimous, gives up her lover, insisting that he find Mary. The situation viewed in a summary is rather funny, as Clara, against her own wishes, drives Hartley, against his, to find and marry Mary, who has run away with another man; but the problem seems very real to the characters.

The difficulties are solved when Mary reappears and explains that she is in love with Sedley, a former lover. The four young people prepare for a double wedding.

The complication is a protracted one, before Brown brings about a happy ending, an innovation for him, by an elaborate arrangement which is none too plausible.

There is a lack of murders, ghosts, suicides, and general violence in Clara Howard, but a number of Brown's favorite elements occur. The hero goes through many mental crises before he is able to claim his bride. The character of the wealthy patron is familiar. Imposters are so familiar that no reader of Brown is surprised when Morton's claim is fraudulent. There is the usual unsuspected kinship when Mary turns out to be a second cousin of Mrs. Howard.

Letter-writing gave the sentimentalists ideal opportunities to let the characters indulge in picturing themselves in the
midst of their woes, of putting themselves into heroic attitudes, and of anticipating the effect of their dramatic predicaments upon those to whom they laid bare their inmost thoughts. An excerpt from a letter of each of these major characters will serve to clarify this statement. In a letter from Clara to Stanley are found these words:

By the calm tenor of this letter, you will hardly judge of the state of my mind before I sat down to write. To describe it would be doing wrong to myself and to you; I am not anxious to pass for better than I am, -- to hide my weakness, or to dwell upon my folly. In this letter to paint the struggles between reason and passion would be making more arduous that task which I must assign to you. . . .

My friend, the bearer of this, is your Mary. She is not happy; she is not another's! She is poor, but good, and, no doubt, as much devoted to you as ever. Need I point out to you the road which you ought to take? . . .

Accuse me not of fickleness; acquit me of mean and ungenerous behavior. Dream not that reasoning or entreaty will effect any change in my present sentiments. I love you, Philip, as I ought not to love you; I love your happiness, your virtue. I resign you to this good girl, as to one who deserves you more than I; whose happiness is more dependent on the affections of another than mine is. What passion is now wanting in you, time will shortly supply. . . .

The last obstacle it will be my province to remove; I will write to her, and convince her that by rejecting you on my account she does me injury and not benefit, and is an enemy to your happiness; for while Mary lives, and is not bound to another, I will never be anything to you but

Your friend,
CLARA HOWARD

A good parallel to this lengthy epistle is Stanley's answer, also quoted only in part.

I do not mean to reason with you. When I tell you that you are wrong, I am far from excepting your assent to my assertion. I say it not in a tone of bitterness or depreciation; I am calm, in this respect, as yourself; there is nothing to ruffle my calm. We fluctuate and are impatient only when doubtful of the future. Our fate being sealed, and an end put to suspense and to doubt, the passions are still; sedateness and tranquillity at least are ours.

You are wrong, Clara; you study, it seems, the good of others; you desire the benefit of this girl, and, since her happiness lies in being united to me, and in possessing my affections, you wish to write us, and to transfer to her my love.

It cannot be done. Marry her I may, but I shall not love her, -- I cannot love her. . . . I cannot love her, because my affections are already devoted to one more attractive and more excellent than she.

She has my reverence; if wedlock unites us, my fidelity will never be broken. I will watch over her safety with unfailing solicitude; she shall share every feeling and thought; the ties of the tenderest friendship shall be hers, but nothing more. . . . You and yours I shall strive to forget; justice to my wife and to myself will require this at my hand.

Adieu.

PHILIP STANLEY

Mary's letter to Philip, only partially quoted, when he runs away to avoid seeing her, further enlightens the reader of the qualities of these characters of a sentimental novel.

Yes, my friend, the place that you once possessed in my affections is now occupied by another, -- by him of whose claims I know you have always been the secret advocate, -- by that good, wise, and generous man who I always admitted to be second to yourself, but for whom my heart now acknowledges a preference. . . .

3Ibid., pp. 377-381.
Dear Philip, come back. All the addition of which my present happiness is capable must come from you. The heartfelt approbation, the sweet, ineffable complacency with which my present feelings are attended, want nothing to merit the name of perfect happiness, but to be witnessed and applauded by you.

Your Clara -- that noblest of women -- joins me in recalling you, and is as eager to do justice to your passion as I am to recompense the merits of Sedley; therefore, my friend, if you value my happiness or Clara's come back. Will you not obey the well-known voice, calling you to virtue and felicity, of Your sister,

MARY WILMOT

Letter-writing was an excellent device in which to incorporate all the elements of a sentimental novel. Instead of the letters being simple and natural, most of the writers used a diction rarely read or heard anywhere else. They were not an ordinary medium for the exchange of commonplace news, but were filled with refined phrases employed to reveal a plot, certainly, but to smother it with "a sigh-by-sigh, tear-by-tear account" of the writer's tempestuous life. This enchanting language was not confined to letters written by women. Sentimental heroes wrote them not only to their lovers but to each other. Novelists went to some trouble to explain the initiative to produce the frequent and voluminous letters used to carry forward their plots. Clara Howard gave her friend due warning at the beginning of a letter of approximately thirteen thousand words, "I am, indeed, in a mood, just now, extremely favorable to the telling of a long story."

4Ibid., p. 405-406.  
5H. R. Brown, op. cit., p. 57.  
6Clara Howard, p. 314.
The novelists were forced to assume that the recipients of letters were never satisfied. Jane Talbot's powers were a source of amazement even to her lover Colden.

How you have made yourself so absolute a mistress of the goose-quill I can't imagine. How you can maintain the writing posture, and pursue the writing movement for ten hours together, without benumbed brain, or aching fingers, is beyond my comprehension.7

Letters enjoyed a sacred position in sentimental fiction. Except when the plot demanded it, they were never misplaced or lost. Copies were circulated within the privileged circle of friends. Often the writer of a letter wanted to have it carefully handled and returned to him. The hero in Clara Howard sent directions for the prompt return of his letters.

The packet is a precious one: you will find in it a more lively and exact picture of life than it is possible, by any other means, to communicate. Preserve it, therefore, with care, and return it safely and entire as soon as you have read it.8

Letters were a convenient device for the teaching of lessons of life. Among the amorous phrases of love letters are found such teachings as these from Clara Howard:

How inconsistent and capricious is man!9 The happiness received is always proportioned to that conferred.10 Ingeniously to supply the place or gracefully to endure the want of riches is the privilege of great minds.11 We fluctuate and are impatient only when doubtful of the future.12

7Jane Talbot, p. 148. 8Clara Howard, p. 268. 9Ibid., p. 303. 10Ibid., p. 304. 11Ibid., p. 36. 12Ibid., p. 377.
Jane Talbot, the last novel of Brown's and a sentimental romance written in letters, is a more highly emotional story than Clara Howard, although the pattern is very much the same. Jane Talbot is the story of Henry Golden, who falls in love with Mrs. Jane Talbot, an adopted daughter, whose foster mother, Mrs. Fielder, refuses to allow their marriage. She claims that his character is tarnished and that he seduced Jane one stormy night when her husband, who later died, was absent from home. She also is disdainful of his religious and social life. She brings about the separation of the two lovers; a neighbor, Polly Jessup, confesses that she invented the story of seduction; Henry disappears, and during a four-year trip to the Orient recovers faith in Christian fundamentals; Mrs. Fielder asks forgiveness and dies regretting her severe attitudes. When Golden returns to the United States, he and Jane, with untypical promptness, prepare for their wedding.

The letters comprising the novel are analyses of the hearts of the characters. There is much self-searching by them, and, as one would expect, a great deal of moralizing. The story begins with this intriguing sentence: "I am very far from being a wise girl." The situations are quickly narrated in letters from Jane to Golden; much of her family history is revealed.

13Jane Talbot, p. 3.
As previously suggested, Brown adhered to the formula for a sentimental novel, employing all the devices. Regarding the minute analysis of the heart, the heroine made this confession:

I have always found an unaccountable pleasure in dissecting, as it were, my heart; uncovering one by one its many folds, and laying it before you, as a country is shewn in a map. . . . What volumes I have talked to you on that bewitching theme. . . .

The heroine was not unaware of the dramatic possibilities in letters written nervously during a distressing situation.

Jane Talbot wrote to Golden:

What a wretch am I! Why, why was I born, or why received I breath in a world and at a period, with whose inhabitants I have no sympathy, whose notions of rectitude and decency find no answer chord in my heart.

Again, as in Clara Howard, the industry necessary to produce the long and frequent letters is noted. "My desk is, of late, always open; my paper spread; my pen moist," wrote Jane, who must have felt that some comment was needed to explain how she could write seven letters totaling more than twenty-one thousand words in four days.

Death by suicide seemed to be a luxury of the sentimentalists, and although it claimed many victims in American fiction, Brown's characters in Clara Howard and Jane Talbot only threatened

14 Ibid., p. 191.
15 Ibid., p. 178.
16 H. B. Brown, op. cit., p. 69.
to leave this cruel world. "Often have I wished to slide
obscurely and quietly into the grave. Never have I felt so
enamored of that which seems to be the cure-all." 17

Some of the life lessons interspersed in Jane Talbot
comparable to those in Clara Howard are these:

What a strange diversity there is among human
characters! 18
Experience, however, is the antidote of wonder. 19
Fortune's goods ought not to be so highly as
the reason of many prizes them. 20
Calumny and misapprehension have no bounds as to
their rage and their activity. 21

The "spontaneous goodness and benevolence of man's original
instinct" is unmistakably demonstrated in the wisdom with which
Jane deals with Colden's radical religious and social opinions.
She is eventually rewarded for such wisdom, while no happiness
comes to Mrs. Fielder who is outraged at Colden's views. Jane
and Colden make use the necessity for a harmony of intellectually
achieved religious beliefs which made their marriage socially
acceptable and, presumably, a happy one. Jane Talbot may
have grown out of Brown's association with the Reverend John
Blair Linn, pastor of a church in Philadelphia and brother
to his wife. The adjustment he had to make to enter this family
may have entered into his late fiction.

17Jane Talbot, p. 206. 18Ibid., p. 97.
21Ibid., p. 142.
After the many complications are solved, the happy ending is quickly given in the last chapter. Virtuous characters are rewarded and despicable characters are punished, in two cases with death.

If only these two novels were considered, Brown would be classed as a sentimentalist. Clara Howard and Jane Talbot have every quality to make them typical sentimental novels. There is a flowery, affected language, ludicrous to the modern reader. There are tears and sighs on practically every page—flowing tears and prodigious sighs. The theme of suicide is exploited if only by threats. Sententiousness abounds in the copious letters, more or less subordinating every other element. The reader waits until the last chapter, or letter, for the final outcome, the final letter in each case being one written by the heroine. There are no ghosts, dungeons, caves, ventriloquists, sleepwalkers, spontaneous combustion of human beings, or epidemic disease, but there is suspense. Despite the absence of conversation and description detail, the plot is carried forward with letters which adequately replace the conversation and description in Brown's earlier novels. Fevered emotionalism, exaggerated altruism, slight plots, stock characters, and artificial diction do not make good reading in this day of realism where sentimentality is ridiculed.
CHAPTER VI

BROWN'S CONTRIBUTION TO AMERICAN GOTHIC FICTION

"Brown was a star of greater magnitude whose light, though dim, still shines."¹ His immediate influence upon America was not marked, but ultimately he made a distinctive contribution to American literature in the ugly realism of many of his powerful themes, in speculation on diseases, in pictures of Indian life, and in analyses of the motives that stir the lives of men and women. Furthermore, he almost created the short story, likely suggesting the scope and method of that type of writing to Poe and Hawthorne.

Poe's indebtedness to Brown seems not to have been merely general. An interesting parallel is found in the similarity between "The Pit and the Pendulum" and the fifteenth chapter of Edgar Huntly. Huntly comes to life after he falls into the pit in much the same way as the sufferer in Poe's story, and he believes he is the victim of a tyrant who has confined him in a dungeon. When he becomes very hungry, he considers killing himself with a tomahawk, an obvious resemblance to the blade of the large pendulum. The thirst which torments him after he kills and eats the panther possibly gave rise to the

¹Edgar Huntly, p. xx.
effect the highly seasoned meat had on the narrator in Poe's story. A striking similarity is the method both writers used to produce terror in both victims; their attempts to escape are blocked by darkness and the strangeness of their surroundings.

The subject matter and the dramatic situation in Poe's Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque bear unmistakable identity to Wieland. The description of Wieland's final attack on his wife, previously quoted in this study, is an example.

The macabre love-in-death themes, especially in "Ligeia" and "Morella," that intrigued Poe are foreshadowed in Wieland. After Wieland murders Catherine, he experiences a kind of rapture very similar to that of Poe's pathological characters. Wieland exclaimed, "I lifted the corpse in my arms and laid it on the bed. Such was the elation of my thoughts that I broke into laughter."² "Poe was able to inject into equally diabolic action a quality of cold deliberation and to surround it with an aura of distorted moral earnestness quite beyond Brown's reach; but the germ evidently is here."³

Poe developed an obsession for unity and brevity in fiction. "Berenice" comes closer to his utilization of both to a maximum degree than any of his preceding stories.

He was developing and polishing here the materials of Brockden Brown, tightening the joints

²Wieland, p. 194.
³Snell, op. cit., p. 39.
and adding a superstructure. Gruesome details, lavished on similar themes by Brown, began to have a coldly logical look that heightened their horror. Like Brown, Poe was interested in medical science and had made a study of the same books that fascinated the older writer. Anatomical details, especially those of a moribund nature, bodily decomposition, the charnel house, all exerted a profound impression on his mind and of course figure prominently in most of his stories.4

Brown, when he wrote Wieland, dealt with similar themes, but a comparison of their artistic depth is sufficient to show that Poe had definitely pushed back the frontiers of American fiction. Brown had dealt with the horror theme by allowing disembodied voices bid Wieland to murder his wife. Poe's dead and dying heroines were the center of action.

Although Brown never came to any conclusion about the existence of mystic connections between human beings, the idea had been used in Edgar Huntly in the love of Weymouth for Waldegrave. Weymouth says, "With his life, my own existence and property were, I have reason to think, inseparably united."5 Poe develops this idea in "The Fall of the House of Usher," when Roderick Usher and his twin sister die at the same moment.

The following comment was written about Brown, but it might well have been written with Poe in mind:

His great object seems to be exhibit the soul in scenes of extraordinary interest. For this purpose striking and perilous situations are devised.

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4Ibid., p. 53.
5Edgar Huntly, p. 146.
or circumstances of strong moral excitement, a troubled conscience, partial gleams of insanity, or bodings of imaginary evil which haunt the soul, and force it into all the agonies of terror. . . . We are constantly struck with the strange contrast of over-passion and over-reasoning. 6

Brown's work anticipated Poe's and Hawthorne's in subject, style, mood, and intellectual elevation; these later masters referred in friendly terms to the pioneer's work. As late as 1845 in 'P's Correspondence', Hawthorne stated that 'no American writer enjoys a more classic reputation.' 7

Brown anticipated Hawthorne in using multiple explanation of what seem to be supernatural events. In Wieland he unfolds the mystery of the voice from three angles. Clara narrates the events, Theodore Wieland makes his confession in court, and finally Carwin explains the mystery. This trick of multiple explanations reappears in several of Hawthorne's novels and stories, some of which are The House of Seven Gables, The Ambitious Guest, The Great Carbuncle, and David Swan.

Even though Brown took his incidents and persons from books as well as life, his emphasis on psychopathic traits adds to some of his characters who show little action in the physical world. Not until the advent of Hawthorne and Poe does another writer of fiction create characters tormented by brooding minds as is Theodore in Wieland.

The success of Edgar Huntly undoubtedly gave the idea for the setting of many American novels and lent impetus to the

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7Warfel, op. cit., p. 4.
repeated use of native scenery and native characters. Brown had used three romantic themes of the American frontier for the first time: the rugged wilderness, native wild animals, and savage Indians. Cooper sneered at Brown's cave scene containing "an American, a savage, a wild cat, and a tomahawk, in a conjunction that never did, nor ever will occur." Several scenes, however, in the *Leatherstocking Tales* are reminiscent of Brown's scene and some of them are even less plausible.

William Gilmore Simms seems to have read Brown, for his first novel, *Martin Fafer*, has some resemblances to *Wieland* and *Edgar Huntly*. It is a romance of crime, self-analysis, seduction, and solitary walks. Other novels which may have been influenced by Brown were *Confession; or, The Blind Heart*, a novel of domestic self-analysis and crime, and *Castle Dismal; or, The Bachelor's Christmas, A Domestic Legend*, a powerful story of the effect of crime combined with the use of the supernatural.9

It is difficult to evaluate precisely a person's contribution to any field, but evaluating literary contributions seems especially difficult. Specific examples of a writer's influence may be pointed out; still there is no way to conceive of how many readers as well as writers may have profited in

8Warfel, *op. cit.* , p. 155.

9Quinn, *op. cit.* , p. 114.
one way or another from one's works. Brown's place in American literature is minor, but it is a secure one. He created no school, but it is apparent that his influence was pervasive abroad as well as in America. He worked hard for literary independence in his own country and was very successful.

He wrote from an American point of view, and his writings gave promise that Americans could compete with foreign novelists. He modified the contemporary English patterns to fit his theory of fiction, using the Gothic formula to a certain extent to achieve horror, but replacing English castles with ordinary houses in American settings.

Brown's faults are numerous, but his merits as a novelist are substantial. He was eager, but seems to have been too excitable to work out his problems thoroughly. He said himself that his work was "written in an hasty and inaccurate way."\(^{10}\) He explained the supernatural in his Gothic stories, but he left many ordinary matters in doubt. To offset his faults, however, there are several merits. He succeeded by intensity, eloquence, imagination. His seriousness is felt even in his most improbable stories. Above all, he succeeded best as a writer by virtue of his emotional power. In language he rose to heights seldom reached in early American diction. Despite his eloquent language, an electric quality runs through his prose which compels attention.

\(^{10}\text{Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel, p. 102.}\)
The odds were great against Brown's becoming a popular writer. America was still a frontier country. Times were not favorable, for only textbooks and handbooks could successfully compete with books imported from England. It was hard to win attention from a nation still so attached to its mother country and whose chief reading matter was the newspaper.

His abundant energy, emotional intensity, his command of certain effects of terror, and his devotion to an aim -- to give Americans a literary status equal to that of England -- compensate for his lack of literary training, his utter lack of humor, and his inability to portray ordinary human experiences. His best works were his Gothic novels, filled with terror, melodrama, and abnormality, but he insisted on the use of local material in the development of American literature. His influence was good. He made Americans see the need for adequate national self-expression. Likely he did as much as any man could have done.

Even if he does not shine brightly now, the patterns he gave to future generations of writers, whose use of them there is no way to measure, and his successful insistence upon American self-reliance give him an enviable place in the history of American literature.
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