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The Phenomenology of Family-Killing Fatherhood: Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* and Dubious Reason in the Early American Republic

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Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.
—David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740)

Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland; or, The Transformation: An American Tale* (1798) is widely known to have been greatly inspired by, if not exclusively based on, a notoriously gruesome crime—Upstate New York farmer James Yates's atrocious murders of his own family in 1781. James Yates was universally esteemed by his neighbors as a gentle, kind, sober, and industrious man. One December evening of that year, he saw off all the neighbors who had visited his house for reading the Bible and singing psalms since it was Sunday and there was no church nearby. Later that evening, while taking his wife on his lap and reading the Bible with her by the fireplace, he suddenly saw and heard two mysterious spirits, one of which bade him "destroy all [his] idols, and begin by casting the Bible into the fire."¹ Although he was a family-caring father and affectionate husband, he immediately followed the order, brutally killing his wife and four children including a six-month-old baby, one after another with an axe or a hatchet or violently throwing them against the wall. Yates never repented for what

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he had done. "My father, thou knowest that it was in obedience to thy commands," he addressed to his God, "and for thy glory that I have done this deed" (Yates 269).

Brown came to know these "wonderfully cruel proceedings" (Yates 270) of Yates's crime through an anonymously authored article in *New-York Weekly Magazine; or Miscellaneous Repository*, published on July 20 and 27, 1796, fifteen years after the actual crime. Incorporating many facts of the murders as reported in the article into his own fictional murder plot, his story is also of a man "transforming" himself from a benevolent father to an insane murderer. "Most readers will probably recollect an authentic case," Brown wrote in his prefatory advertisement of this novel, "remarkably similar to that of Wieland" (*Wieland* 4), thus insinuating the close kinship between Theodore Wieland's fictional family killing and that of James Yates.² In recent years, critics such as Daniel William have argued that the "authentic case" Brown mentioned was not necessarily James Yates's case. There was a far more sensationally received family killing committed one year after the Yates case, that of William Beadle, a failed merchant and Deist, who also followed God's command and killed his wife and four children. Williams even considers that the anonymously authored article depicting Yates's murders was fictional and actually drew on the numerous printed accounts of the Beadle case for describing concrete details of Yates's murders.³ In any event, the image of the horrible familicide perpetrated by a fanatical father powerfully captured Brown, who intuited in the Yates family tragedy some significant truth about the moral situation of his young republic and tried as a "moral painter" to delineate it in "an American tale."⁴

Brown sent a complimentary copy of *Wieland* to Vice President Thomas Jefferson in December 1789 along with a letter that defended the significance of fiction and indicated his wish that Jefferson would enjoy the book and not find "the time employed upon it tedious or uselessly consumed."⁵ Obviously, Brown intended *Wieland* as a political work suitable for the famous statesman, not simply as a literary entertainment. Jane Tompkins had argued that for Americans in the late eighteenth century, it was not commonly accepted "that literary and political discourse normally occupy separate realms and fulfill separate functions, and that a novel that does not refer explicitly to political matters therefore has nothing to do with them."⁶ Rather, American writers of Brown's generation considered themselves as "shapers of public morality" who could "help to guide the ship of state as well."⁷ Writing about a family was often a popular means for discussing national politics. In Colonial America, where there were not many traditional

institutions like the guilds in Europe, the family was an extremely significant institution. The original Puritan settlers called the family a “little commonwealth.”⁸ The American colonists believed their society was little more than “a collection of family households, to which all isolated and helpless individuals necessarily had to be attached.” Their society was “organized in families or in those stark dependencies that resembled the relationship between parents and children.”⁹ In such a situation, the family became a microcosm of society; the two were too closely related to be separated. Particularly in the Revolutionary era, this image became still clearer. John Adams said that “the source of revolution” lay in “a systematical dissolution of the true family authority,”¹⁰ meaning that the authority within the family was essentially the same as that in society. With this in mind, we cannot overemphasize the moral and political significance of Brown choosing to write a story about a fanatical, insane father who destroys his beloved family.

Through his fictional Wieland family tragedy, Brown depicted what he saw as the actual gruesome moral landscape hidden within a rationalistic and rapidly transforming post-Revolutionary America. He also expected the story to warn Jefferson of the republic’s moral crisis, for family-killing fatherhood could be seen as a striking symbol of the whole era’s pathology. It is noteworthy that Yates’s familicide was not an exceptional case in the early American Republic. Daniel Cohen has pointed out that “a series of curiously clustered family-killings” actually occurred over the course of sixty years in the early American Republic.¹¹ Family killings were rarely seen in Colonial days, he adds, so the concentration of publicized familicides in the early republic is conspicuous. Those cases, particularly family-killing fathers, seem to tell us something crucial about the social and psychological change in the early republic. After examining seven published family killings, three of which took place between 1781 and 1784—the first of which was the James Yates’s case, Cohen attributes the mysterious concentration of family killings in the era to people being thrown into a tremendous spiritual instability caused by drastic social change. The family killers were profoundly “traumatized” by the dazzlingly new “conditions of freedom” made possible in the early republic, “particularly the new geographic mobility, economic instability, and religious liberty.”¹² Whether Cohen’s assessment is valid or not, Brown presented his own explanation of this phenomenon in *Wieland*. In the argument below, I examine what sort of moral picture Brown painted of post-Revolutionary America in his tale of Theodore Wieland and his transformation into an insane family-killing father.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE AMERICAN FAMILY'S
SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE

In order to ascertain how drastically the spiritual landscape of the American family changed during the eighteenth century, I briefly compare and contrast two families described in two literary masterpieces. One is a Colonial family in the early 1730s from Nathaniel Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineaux" (1832), and the other is Brown's *Wieland* family around the 1770s. In traditional Colonial society, the family was the model for all superior-subordinate relationships, including political and religious ones. The old Puritan family was essentially hierarchical and patriarchal; fathers were at the spiritual center and could control their family members' lives with authority, since the family was considered a worldly reflection of the divine order.¹³ In Hawthorne's tale, we find a typical family of this type. Robin, a country-bred young man, first arrives by ferry at a metropolitan city, most probably Boston; it is a typical Hawthornesque moonlit romance setting. He is a "shrewd" young man, who has left his father's home in hopes of rising in the world with the aid of his rich and supposedly influential kinsman, Major Molineaux. However, unable to find his uncle and disillusioned by the city after wandering long in its maze-like night streets, this lonely lad looks nostalgically back on his religious father's old home in the country.

Recalling his thoughts from this uncomfortable track, [Robin] sent them over forest, hill, and stream, and attempted to imagine how that evening of ambiguity and weariness, had been spent by his father's household. He pictured them assembled at the door, beneath the tree, the great old tree, which had been spared for its huge twisted trunk, and venerable shade, when a thousand leafy brethren fell. There, at the going down of the summer sun, it was his father's custom to perform domestic worship, that the neighbors might come and join with him like brothers of the family, and that the wayfaring man might pause to drink at that fountain, and keep his heart pure by freshening the memory of home. Robin distinguished the seat of every individual of the little audience; he saw the good man in the midst, holding the Scriptures in the golden light that shone from the western clouds; he beheld him close the book, and all rise up to pray. He heard the old thanksgivings for daily mercies, the old supplications for their continuance, to which he had so often listened in weariness, but which

were now among his dear remembrances.¹⁴

In this traditional Christian family, each member is not so much an independent individual as a part of one solid kin group. The family members are like “a thousand leafy brethren” of the great old tree. There is little room for personal choice or freedom, yet each member can find his own stable position and protection there. Even in this closely-knit religious family, however, a new individualistic consciousness was being born. Listening to his father’s sermon, Robin used to often feel “weary.” He already had dreams of standing on his own rather than being a part of his father’s religious universe. Now, however, far away from his father and his family, the austere yet warm family space is “among his dear remembrances.” Unlike the way he feels in this bewildering strange city, Robin feels he truly belonged there. Obviously, he misses his father-dominated family.

“The Puritans were no levelers,” according to Morgan. “Social classes and the various offices, orders, and positions of social rank existed for them as part of a divinely ordered plan.”¹⁵ The family members had to be subordinate to the authoritative father, yet they accepted it; after all, it was “a divinely ordered plan.” Furthermore, the system had a merit of its own in that not only the family members but the father himself could live in a state of emotional oneness. In exchange for being forced to be but parts of a hierarchal family structure, family members were given stability for their emotions; their strong ties provided a solid spiritual network in which each member could forget his or her individual helplessness. Barbara H. Rosenwein insists on the significance of what she calls “emotional communities” that share “systems of feeling, to establish what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them.”¹⁶ In the “emotional community,” those “systems of feeling” are internalized to form its members’ identities and strengthen their sense of unity. Robin’s family is also such an “emotional community.” “[Robin] perceived the slight inequality of his father’s voice when he came to speak of the Absent one,”¹⁷ Hawthorne writes, followed by brief descriptions of each family member’s sorrow over the loss of Robin, their beloved son and brother, who has left the family. This shows us that however far away Robin is from the family, its members are deeply connected about him and with one another. They live, as it were, one common destiny in which they experience each one’s fate as if it were their own. Today, we tend to disfavor such an old-fashioned hierarchal family structure, but as far as its members’ emotional stability was concerned, it was undoubtedly a

well-functioning system.

Already in the 1730s, people were beginning to feel the destabilizing power of the Enlightenment. Rationalism had begun to powerfully shake their universe, disintegrating the organic unity of the family, the village, and the church. Man's reason and emotions, which had been harmoniously integrated, began to be dissociated, creating the paradigm of reason's dominance over emotion. That is why there came to be a tremendous backlash against excessive rationalism in the form of the Great Awakening from the 1730s to the 1760s,¹⁸ for, more than anything else, this religious revival involved a flood of alienated emotions against reason. Emotion was, however, unable to reestablish a harmonious relationship with reason. Along with this change, relationships among family members and the status of the father were also destined to drastically transform. "Certainly by 1750, ancient patriarchal absolutism no longer had the same ideological significance," Wood has argued. "Few fathers, or at least few gentry fathers, now dared to justify controlling their household dependents in the arbitrary manner advocated a century earlier."¹⁹ With the voice of the Revolution coming near, not only monarchy but also the family was radically "republicanized." Republicanism had a tremendous effect not only on national and familial structures but also on human emotions in general, unhinging or uprooting them from their solid traditional base. This is particularly significant for understanding what was happening in the Wieland family.

The Wieland family is quite a contrast to Robin's family because it is a product of the drastic religious and intellectual transformation happening on the eve of the American Revolution. Originally, they were a strictly "Puritanical" family. Theodore and Clara's father was a descendent of a noble family in Saxony and devoted to the Camissards, an apocalyptic Protestant sect active in France in the early eighteenth century. He came to America with a goal of proselytizing the American Indians. Although he had a hard time as an apprentice of a trader in London, Clara tells us that "the cheapness of the land, and the service of African slaves, which were then in general use gave him who was poor in Europe all the advantage of wealth" in America (*Wieland* 11). Pious and even fanatical, the elder Wieland built a veritable temple on a cliff commanding a view of the Schuylkill River (the sacred river also for William Penn) for giving a solitary prayer to his deity punctually twice a day.

One day, however, when Theodore was around ten and Clara six, their father suddenly died, attacked by a mysterious light in the temple. This

caused a fatal shock to his wife and left his two children as orphans. As David Brion Davis has pointed out, the Wieland family history is presented as if it were almost “an allegory of American Colonial history.”²⁰ The elder Wieland’s economic situation and religious fervor, his strict self-analysis, and his attempt to spread Christian faith among the Indians remind us of the American Puritans. There is also no denying the similarity between his temple on the cliff and the American Puritans’ well-known view of their community as “a city upon a hill.” Now, however, these “authentic” Americans, the Wieland family, have met the new era of the Revolution and the full-fledged Enlightenment.

Unlike their fanatical father, the grownup Theodore, his wife Catherine, and his sister Clara have created a family characterized by rationalistic attitudes toward life, including religion. “Our education had been modelled by no religious standard,” Clara says. “We were left to the guidance of our own understanding, and the casual impressions which society might make upon us” (*Wieland* 20). This is not to say that they do not believe in God, but their faith is a rational religion. Generally speaking, the Revolutionary era is regarded as a period of decline for American Christianity. Though the Great Awakening had fuelled a craze among Colonial people since the 1730s, they were exhausted by the religious fever and became preoccupied for the next forty years chiefly with the problems of politics.²¹ “Enthusiasm” was so widely toned down that “revivalism came to a temporary halt everywhere except in the remote parts of the South.”²² Instead, as in France, “the cult of reason” became very popular during this era, attracting people’s attention more and more toward rational religion or Deism. Needless to say, Deism was not a new phenomenon of this era, nor did it become a widely accepted religious attitude among ordinary Americans. However, we can count not a few political and intellectual leaders such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, Joel Barlow, Elihu Palmer, and, above all, Thomas Jefferson among the era’s representative Deists. Particularly, for Jeffersonian republicans, the religious idea was significant. Deism was often called the “republican religion.” Notably, as a Jeffersonian supporter, Elihu Palmer, a Congregationalist, Baptist, and then Universalist preacher, organized the Deistical Society in New York with “a group of enthusiasts for the French Revolution in 1794” with the hope that Deism could be institutionalized in some kind of traditional way.²³

When Clara says, “It must not be supposed that we were without religion, but with us it was the product of lively feelings, excited by reflection on our own happiness, and by the grandeur of external nature” (*Wieland* 20), we

can see that the Wieland family is deeply tinted by this religious atmosphere. For them, religion is more related to their worldly happiness or to nature than to mystical grace or the Bible. “We sought not a basis for our faith, in the weighing of proofs, and the dissection of creeds,” Clara continues. “Our devotion was a mixed and casual sentiment, seldom verbally expressed, or solicitously sought, or carefully retained” (*Wieland* 20). As I discuss later, Theodore’s attitude toward religion is different from that of the other members of the family, yet on the whole, what Clara says is also essentially true of him. As enlightened children of the Age of Reason, they seldom find it necessary to seriously examine their spiritual ties with God, let alone the significance of the old religious institutions. Theodore and Clara’s memories of the enigmatic death of their father are still deep in their mind. In spite of that, as Clara says, they live in a new world far away from his esoteric old world.

Their father’s temple is no longer used as a sacred place for solitary prayer; it is now a place for entertainment, where they “[sang], and talked, and read, and occasionally banqueted” in the summer evenings (*Wieland* 22). There is a harpsichord and opposite to it the statue of Cicero that Theodore bought from an Italian adventurer. We cannot emphasize the significance of Theodore’s worship of Cicero too much, for this Roman philosopher, who celebrated the murder of the dictator Julius Caesar as a crucial step toward achieving ideal republicanism, had a tremendous influence on the “republican” tradition, particularly the French and the American Revolutions. Thomas Jefferson regarded Cicero as one of his most important sources when he wrote his draft of the Declaration of Independence.²⁴ As one of the most influential journalists and pamphleteers of the French Revolution, Camille Desmoulins, said, the French Revolution was made by people who “first learned to love liberty and hate despotism by reading Cicero at school.”²⁵ Therefore, Theodore’s veneration of Cicero clearly denotes his hatred of despotism and his sympathy with Jeffersonian republicanism. “[Theodore] was never tired of conning and rehearsing [Cicero’s] productions,” Clara says. “To understand them was not sufficient. His favorite occupation consisted in embellishing his rhetoric with all the proprieties of gesticulation and utterance [of Cicero]” (*Wieland* 22). In other words, Theodore devoted himself to perfectly embodying Ciceronian ideals.

Theodore does not incarnate patriarchal authority like Robin’s father in an earlier time but is “tenderness” itself to his children. In the Revolutionary era, even “the authority of the supreme father of all, God himself, was not immune to challenge. . . . God could not be absolute and arbitrary,” writes

Wood. For people susceptible to “the new ideas of parenthood, New Testament love replaced the earlier Puritan emphasis on the absolutism of the Old Testament’s Jehovah.”²⁶ In this way, Theodore’s family faithfully reflects the rapid disintegration of despotic fatherly authority that was underway in America during this period. Released from old religious institutions and superstitions, the Old Testament image of father, and any kind of despotism, fathers became affectionate caretakers of their children, who were now shapers of their own fates based on their own rational judgment. To a large extent, Theodore’s Jeffersonian propensities reflect those of Brown himself. Under the strong influence of the radical British couple William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, young Brown was devoted to utopianism and the improvement of women’s status in the 1790s, and he was also an earnest supporter of Jefferson. In the early 1800s, however, Brown for some reason suddenly became a caustic critic of the Jefferson administration.²⁷ We cannot tell exactly why, yet Brown most probably came to feel anxious about Jefferson’s or even his own radical republicanism. The fanatical familicide in the Wieland family faithfully mirrors this anxiety.

CRACKS IN THE WIELANDS’ RATIONALISTIC UNIVERSE

By placing Robin’s and Theodore Wieland’s families side by side we can see how drastically the spiritual landscape of the Colonial American family was transformed in the Revolutionary era. On the surface, Theodore Wieland’s family looks completely happy, as it is managed according to rationalistic and republican principles, having almost entirely forgotten their father’s mysterious, tragic death. Unfortunately, however, this family’s peaceful serenity turns out to be simply a preparation for yet another destructive family tragedy. Originally a somber, melancholy man of a religious turn, Theodore gradually comes to lose his mental balance. Then, ordered by mysterious voices, which he interprets as coming from some supernatural power, he brutally murders his beloved wife and four children. Though not clearly stated, there is obviously some “deep” problem hidden in their seemingly ideal family life. Before the murders, Theodore’s family was dearer to him than anything else. When encouraged by his friend Pleyel, his wife’s brother, to claim his right to an estate in Saxony, Theodore declined to do so. It is because, Clara says, “all the instruments of pleasure, on which his reason or imagination set any value, were within his reach.” “If he should embrace this scheme, it would lay him under the necessity of

making a voyage to Europe, and remaining for a certain period, separate from his family,” and “[he] must undergo the perils and discomforts of the ocean; he must divest himself of all domestic pleasures; he must deprive his wife of her companion, and his children of a father and instructor, and all for what?” (*Wieland* 33). Clara emphasizes that Theodore had such a great affection for his family that he could not think of leaving them even temporarily for economic gain. Then, why does he come to feel he has to destroy these “idols” of his family?

It has often been counted as a major defect of *Wieland* that the reason why Theodore deteriorates into performing these atrocities is not fully explained. Among others, Nina Baym has criticized Brown for having failed in “the handling of *Wieland* himself” as a character and in showing “how the mania will develop in him.”²⁸ We have to admit the validity of Baym’s argument, for as long as we try to follow Theodore’s development as a character, we get nowhere, since character development is lacking in this novel. In many respects, Brown’s characters are more like puppets than realistic figures. His main concern is directed at unmasking the identity of their wire-puller, the social and psychological forces behind them. Of course, at the core of Theodore’s transformation from a family-loving father to a cold-blooded murderer lie his perplexities as to the nature of the mysterious voices that have begun to beset him. After the voice, which sounds like that of his wife Catherine, speaks to him for the first time, Theodore begins to worry about what is happening to his reliable “senses” and his seemingly well-ordered life; this is the first sign of a crack in his steadfast rationalistic universe. In this respect, the following conversation between Clara and Theodore in the temple is intriguing:

One evening we chanced to be alone together in the temple. I seized that opportunity of investigating the state of his thoughts. After a pause, which he seemed in no wise inclined to interrupt, I spoke to him—“How almost palpable is this dark; yet a ray from above would dispel it.” “Ay,” said *Wieland*, with fervor, “not only the physical, but moral night would be dispelled.” “But why,” said I, “must the Divine Will address its precepts to the eye?” He smiled significantly. “True,” said he, “the understanding has other avenues.” “You have never,” said I, approaching nearer to the point—“you have never told me in what way you considered the late extraordinary incident.” “There is no determinate way in which the subject can be viewed. Here is an effect, but the cause is utterly inscrutable.” (*Wieland* 31)

Clara mentions that the dark in the temple is thick enough to be palpable, implying their psychological confusion as to the nature of the mysterious voice. Yet “a ray from above would dispel it,” she adds. Unable to explain this enigmatic phenomenon by her understanding based on her senses, she turns to the supernatural power for help, moving away from her usual rationalistic attitude. “But why,” asks she, “must the Divine Will address its precepts to the eye?” Beginning to doubt the validity of her senses, she hints at another means through which God might communicate His Will. “True,” Theodore agrees with his sister, “the understanding has other avenues.” Bryan Waterman points out that theories of causation formed an important part of Enlightenment discussions of epistemology.²⁹ Theodore, as a faithful child of the Enlightenment, persists in “understanding” the cause and effect of this mysterious voice. However, his Enlightenment investigation of causation has come to a dead end, and he now begins to seek “other avenues.” This is a significant moment for him, since, by temporarily putting aside rational understanding based on his senses, he begins to imagine a direct contact with God. Within his psyche, that half-forgotten memory of his father’s mystical experience with God has gained a new meaning. It also lifts the heavy lid that has covered his dark, secret passions, which are, as we will see, deeply connected with the *Wieland* tragedy.

Theodore represents the melancholic and religiously enthusiastic strain in the *Wieland* family. Unlike Clara or his friend Pleyel, for whom religion is not so momentous a concern, he has been keenly interested in ideas about God. There is an obvious similarity between Theodore and his fanatical father, Clara says. But the mind of the son, as a child of the Enlightenment, is “enriched by science, and embellished with literature” (*Wieland* 21). In contrast to his father’s fanatic devotion to God, Theodore’s approach to God is restrained and rationalistic. That is why he is “much conversant with the history of religious opinions, and [takes] pains to ascertain their validity,” and he believes “moral necessity, and Calvinistic inspiration, [are] the props on which [it is] proper to repose” (*Wieland* 23). It is through his understanding and knowledge that he tries to approach God, which is undoubtedly a serious effort. But, in an important sense, Theodore has lost sight of the deep psychological “avenue” to God, which was known to the elder *Wieland* as well as Robin’s father. The only means he has to come near the supernatural Father is his own reason—traditional religious institutions such as the church and even his father’s enthusiasm are missing from his spiritual universe. In other words, he can never make “what faith he has” a deeply emotional experience. For him, the Enlightenment’s “science and culture

have not come to grips with the same questions as the dead [Puritan] beliefs attempted to account for,”³⁰ as Larzer Ziff has argued. The profound problems that the Puritans tried to solve are left unsolved. But “Evil will not go away merely because you refuse to recognize it,” nor will the wild passions pent up within Theodore’s psyche go away.

Further, the old Puritan God will not go away either merely because Theodore has lost sight of the “avenue” to Him. In a situation like this, the half-forgotten old God and repressed wild passions, which are waking up from their long sleep in Theodore’s unconscious, could easily join to strike an uncontrollably violent blow to his rationalistic universe in the form of religious fanaticism. Its eruptive power is greater, the stronger the reason’s repression of it. Theodore’s sudden insane fanaticism is, thus, a paradoxical product of his preceding strict rational control of life.

This strain of fanatic devotion to God in the Wieland family may be regarded as a variation of the antinomian impulse handed down from Anne Hutchinson to Emerson and to many Americans who believed in a mystic connection with God. As Shirley Samuels has argued, this may also reflect some of the emotional excesses of the Great Awakening.³¹ In any event, in the early American Republic, these impulses were silenced, as the Wieland tragedy shows, by the powerful sway of “the faith in” reason. A few years before the appearance of *Wieland*, Thomas Paine’s sensational *The Age of Reason* (1794–96) was published in installments. It advocated Deism and “free rational inquiry” into all subjects as well as criticizing institutional Christianity, the legitimacy of the Bible, and in particular the validity of revelation. To a large extent, this was the attitude shared by Jeffersonian republicans. In the case of the Wieland family, however, reliance on their own reason begins to fail as they start to doubt their own senses on which their judgments have been made. First, through Catherine’s voice, which Wieland hears on his way to the temple, and then through the voices of Clara and Carwin, which Pleyel alleges he has heard, Theodore’s rationalistic universe starts to be shaken from its very foundation. At the same time, the Wielands are forced to face their hidden passions that are now being unbound from reason’s sway. Theodore’s transformation to an insane, fanatical father has much to do with this confrontation.

FAMILICIDE AS VENGEANCE AGAINST REASON

The apparently stable Wieland family is actually a house of cards built on the cover-up of their repressed passions. Although it is not necessarily easy

to detect it, these unruly desires are at the core of Wieland's murder of his wife and children. That is to say, it is the incestuous feelings between Theodore and Clara. We have already seen that this family is, at least superficially, the very picture of happiness, rationally managed and liberated from old superstitious beliefs and the Puritan hierarchal power structure. The emotional life within the family, however, is misdirected and distorted to such an extent that the powerfully restrained incestuous drive can erupt, bare its fangs, and pounce like a wild beast anytime. Until Theodore begins to doubt his rationalistic understandings, those passions have been hidden under reason's control even from Theodore and Clara; but they throb deep in the dark corner of the family's psyche.

At the beginning of chapter 4, Clara describes their family as follows:

Six years of uninterrupted happiness had rolled away, since my brother's marriage. The sound of war had been heard, but it was at such a distance as to enhance our enjoyment by affording objects of comparison. The Indians were repulsed on the one side, and Canada was conquered on the other. Revolutions and battles, however calamitous to those who occupied the scene, contributed in some sort to our happiness, by agitating our minds with curiosity, and furnishing causes of patriotic exultation. Four children, three of whom were of an age to compensate, by their personal and mental progress, the cares of which they had been, at a more helpless age, the objects, exercised my brother's tenderness. (*Wieland* 23)

Clara emphasizes the family's genuine happiness at being away from "revolutions and battles." Her repeated reference to the family's "happiness" reminds us of the famous "pursuit of happiness," one of the "unalienable" human rights in the Declaration of Independence that Thomas Jefferson wrote. Noting that Jefferson preferred the "pursuit of happiness" to "property" in John Locke's trinity of "life, liberty, and property," we are reminded that Theodore also prefers "enjoying" the family "happiness" to exercising his right to the property in Saxony. Again, this hints that the Wielands are faithful to Jeffersonian ideals. Yet Clara adds that revolutions and wars, "however calamitous to those who occupied the scene, contributed in some sort to our happiness, by agitating our minds with curiosity, and furnishing causes of patriotic exultation." Reading this passage, we cannot but be disagreeably surprised at her cold aloofness to her fellow patriots' deadly struggles. There is, however, more to it than that. The six years since

her brother's marriage have been happy ones for their family. Why is this? Of course, the marriage realized a happy "home," but did it not also help to direct Theodore's passion to his wife Catherine, at least temporarily, and away from his sister? Clara talks about revolutions and battles outside their lives, yet they are actually being fought just beneath the surface as metaphors of Wieland and Clara's secret incestuous passion. And only when away from those revolutionary passions and "battles" is the Wielands' "happiness" guaranteed.

Clara says that Theodore is an affectionate father and husband, but in spite of this, his wife Catherine and four children are seldom fully described in Clara's narration. They are substantively missing from the family picture, though Clara says that she and Catherine are indispensable close friends. Symbolically enough, when Theodore hears the mysterious voice like that of Catherine on his way to the temple, he at first believes his senses, which tell him she is close behind him, while Catherine is actually far away at home. Of course, this is due to the ventriloquial mischief of Francis Carwin, a mysterious stranger who has a powerful influence on the Wieland family, but this also suggests that Wieland's impression of his wife from the beginning has been made only through his senses rather than through his cordial acceptance of her real person. Only when he perceives her through his senses is he sure of her existence. Catherine is, otherwise, a kind of bodiless idea of a lovely wife to him. This is because she does not actually have an indisputable status in his emotional realm. What Carwin's mischief has done is to reveal this hidden emotional distance that Theodore has from his wife.

We can see how Theodore feels about Catherine more clearly when he actually kills her. Theodore states at his trial, "This was a moment of triumph. Thus had I successfully subdued the stubbornness of human passions: the victim which had been demanded was given" (*Wieland* 129). He is filled with wild joy for having achieved his sacred duty of murdering Catherine for God. He had overcome, he says, his human passions. Of course, Theodore is completely insane here. As far as his emotional integrity is concerned, however, he is very *sane*. He says that Catherine is the dearest object of his human passions, which he has just successfully subdued. She is "the woman who had lodged for years in my heart; who had slept, nightly, in my bosom, who had borne in her womb, who had fostered at her breast, the beings who called me father" (*Wieland* 130). Yet we have to note that he lifts Catherine's corpse with his arms and lays it on his sister's bed. This may not seem strange, because it is in Clara's bedroom that he has murdered

Catherine. From a deep psychological perspective, however, something extraordinary is happening here, for Clara's bed is used as a kind of altar on which Theodore is making an offering of Catherine's dead body, not only to his God but to his sister as a sign of his devotion to her. Catherine, his spouse, is a cover for his distorted passion for his sister. It would not be too much to say that in the name of God's decree, Theodore has actually fulfilled his secret inhibited desire to destroy the obstacle to winning his own sister.

As for the incestuous "dangerous liaison" between Theodore and Clara, some critics have already discussed it with persuasive proofs. Clara is also unconsciously yet powerfully attracted to her brother. Davis has pointed this out when Clara, in chapter 2, talks about her strange dream.³² In the evening twilight, she is walking on a path, heading for her brother's house. Though there is a pit dug in the path, she is not aware of it. She sees her brother standing at some distance before her, "beckoning and calling [her] to make haste." Clara adjusts her pace, and "one step more," she says, "would have plunged [her] into this abyss" if someone had not caught her arm from behind, exclaiming, "Hold! Hold" (*Wieland* 51). Clara knows that she wants to go meet her brother immediately. At the same time, however, she knows that it would be very dangerous to do so. The abysmal pit into which she almost plunges is none other than an abhorrent incestuous sin she might have committed with her brother. Whose voice was it that saved her? We are not told whose it was, yet waking up from her dream, she hears another mysterious voice talking to her. She thinks that the voice is the same as the one she heard coming from the closet in her room before. So, the readers can tell that this is Carwin's voice. As Donald A. Ringe has argued, Clara's house, particularly this closet, is obviously used as a symbol of her mind,³³ so this is also the voice deeply hidden in her psyche's "closet," her unconscious.

Francis Carwin is a dangerous villain outside the family, but he is also the shadow of reason, an incarnation of alienated irrational emotions, or even of dark sexual drives within this family. It is striking that after first meeting Carwin, Clara eagerly attempts to sketch his face in detail in the hope of remembering it correctly. She says she hates this mysterious stranger, yet her eager sketching shows that she is powerfully and sexually attracted to him. Her sexual drives have been unconsciously directed toward her brother, yet Clara now begins to redirect these repressed sexual drives toward this morally questionable man. This is because Carwin represents the explosive emotional gunpowder deeply hidden in this republican family. As mentioned, Pleyel, Wieland's close friend and Catharine's brother, is the very incarnation

of reason itself, which represents the most significant feature of this family. In his younger days, Pleyel lived in Europe, where he fell in love with an aristocratic lady and also met Carwin. Pleyel and Carwin's old acquaintance is worthy of note because this suggests that as embodiments of reason and rebellious emotions, respectively, they were once "friends," not enemies. As Foucault has argued, until the late seventeenth century, these two human psychical functions had been on friendly terms, yet in the late seventeenth century, something decisive happened: "Reason reigned in the pure state, in a triumph arranged for it in advance over a frenzied unreason," and unreason was "sequestered and, in the fortress of confinement, bound to Reason, to the rules of morality and to their monotonous nights."³⁴ Carwin is said to have escaped from the Dublin prison where he was confined like a madman (a man of unreason) in seventeenth-century Europe. This prison is a punitive as well as reformatory institution, but psychologically considered, it is none other than the dominating reason's regime imprisoning the dark, irrational emotions. Notably, Carwin broke out of his confinement and found himself back in his original homeland of America.

Carwin may also be interpreted as an incarnation of an alien political threat to the early American republic. As the Wieland family as a microcosm of the society represents, Jeffersonian republicans believed in the power of reason to such an extent that they considered they did not need any absolute authority outside reason, whether it was political or religious. However, that was exactly the heel of Achilles the antisocial forces could take advantage of. In "The Duty of Americans at the Present Crisis," a sermon preached on July 4, 1798, the year when *Wieland* was published, Timothy Dwight warned Americans against the dangerously rationalistic sects represented by the Bavarian Illuminati, an Enlightenment-era secret society whose aims were "the overthrow of religion, government, and human society civil and domestic"³⁵ for the establishment of a new world order. The Federalists, or antirepublican conservatives, also believed that without appropriate leadership or ruling institutions, America could disintegrate at any time because man's reason is fallible and needs to be corrected and kept in check by traditional wisdom and authority. In 1793, five years before the publication of *Wieland*, the Reign of Terror was begun by Robespierre in France, with the moderate antimonarchist Girondins executed as "enemies of the revolution." In the following year, after persecuting Christians and destroying the Catholic Church in France, Robespierre made Reason the new holy writ, celebrated in what he called the Festival of the Supreme Being. We know how dreadful and chaotic a reign Robespierre brought to

France. For the Americans of Brown's day, this was exactly the nightmare they feared their own young country might face unless their affairs of state were properly and carefully handled. They were particularly afraid of these French influences. As some critics have argued, Brown undoubtedly intended Carwin to represent, at least partially, these chaotic and anarchic French influences as well as those of dangerous sects such as the Illuminati.³⁶

Even though such outside Carwinian influences are part of the Wieland tragedy, this family would no doubt have broken up from internal pressures. In other words, Carwin is merely a catalyst. Theodore Wieland is destined to go mad and kill his beloved family not because he is fundamentally fanatical like his father but because he does not know how to confront his God and his wild passions except through his reason: he has lost sight of the traditional "avenue" to God and even to his deep emotions. The real problem is that under the surface of their rationally ordered life, the brother and sister's passions are left unattended to as if they did not exist or were negligible things. Yet when the sway of reason has collapsed, those wild passions take over everything. Disguising themselves as a fanatic devotion to God, those passions make Theodore shatter his rationalistic universe and his family. Alan Axelrod has argued that James Yates, Wieland, and their ancient Biblical prototype, Abraham, who tried to kill his son Isaac on God's order, are all captured by religious fanaticism because such fanaticism is often the product of life in the wilderness "isolated from the emotionally and intellectually tempting influence of city civilization and organized religion."³⁷ In that sense, Yates and the Wielands were experiencing fanatic impulses found in "the American situation."³⁸ But it would be more exact to say that Theodore Wieland lived not only in a physical wilderness but, in Hawthorne's terms, a "moral wilderness" where there is no solid time-proven code of conduct except a person's own reason, because the Revolution has destroyed all standards. Thus, just as Carwin symbolizes, unbound passions roam the war-damaged "moral wilderness" of the early American Republic, stalking their prey. In this respect, Theodore is exactly like the early American Republic itself, which, in spite of its rationalistic appearance, was defenseless against its unbound passions that could perhaps suddenly appear in the guise of radical democracy, Jacobin radicalism, or the Illuminati conspiracies.

Through telling a story of a family-killing father, Brown warns about the immense difficulties of creating a spiritually steadfast society in the rational Jeffersonian Republic. To James Yates, there appeared two spirits. One spirit commanded him to "destroy all [his] idols," while the other one

“dissuaded” him (Yates 267). He was also apparently torn between his supernatural God and his worldly “pursuit of happiness.” In the 1796 article, there is no reference to Yates’s “passions,” yet there is the possibility that his God was also his disguised wild passions. Yates also lived in the age when it was extremely difficult to confront God in a proper way or establish fatherly authority in the domestic sphere. Why James Yates felt he had to murder his family is not an easy question to answer, yet Brown showed through *Wieland* that, as David Hume said in his 1740 *Treatise on Human Nature*, “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.”³⁹ Brown’s “American tale” thus demonstrated that to have too much trust in reason can lead, in a mysterious way, to an entirely opposite outcome: irrational chaos and horrible destruction, which is a lesson still valid for people like us who are supposed to live in a much more “enlightened” age.

NOTES

¹ Anonymous, “An Account of a Murder Committed by Mr. J—Y—, upon His Family, in December, A.D. 1781,” *New York Weekly Magazine; or Miscellaneous Repository*, July 20 and 27, 1796, in Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland and Memoirs of Carwin, the Biloquist*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Bryan Waterman (New York: Norton, 2011), 267. Further references to this article will be cited parenthetically as Yates.

² Alan Axelrod, *Charles Brockden Brown: An American Tale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 54.

³ Daniel E. Williams, “Writing under the Influence: An Examination of *Wieland*’s ‘Well Authenticated Facts’ and the Deception of Murderous Fathers in Post-Revolutionary Print Culture,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 15, no.3–4(2003): 650.

⁴ Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland and Memoirs of Carwin, the Biloquist*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Bryan Waterman (New York: Norton, 2011), 4. Further references to this book will be cited parenthetically as *Wieland*.

⁵ Charles Brockden Brown, “Letter to Thomas Jefferson, December 15, 1798,” in *Wieland and Memoirs of Carwin, the Biloquist*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Bryan Waterman (New York: Norton, 2011), 313.

⁶ Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Design: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 44.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁸ Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1991), 44.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁰ Ibid., 147.

¹¹ Daniel A. Cohen, "Homicidal Compulsion and the Conditions of Freedom: The Social and Psychological Origins of Familicide in America's Early Republic," *Journal of Social History* 28, no.4 (1995): 725.

¹² Ibid., 726.

¹³ Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper and Row, 1944), 18.

¹⁴ Nathaniel Hawthorne, "My Kinsman, Major Molineaux," in *The Snow-Image and Uncollected Tales*, vol. 11 of *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. William Charvat et al. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1974), 222–23.

¹⁵ Morgan, *Puritan Family*, 18.

¹⁶ Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions," *Passions in Context: Journal of the History and Philosophy of the Emotions* 1, no.1 (2010): 11, <http://www.passionsincontext.de/>.

¹⁷ Hawthorne, "My Kinsman," 223.

¹⁸ Beth Norton et al., *A People and a Nation: A History of the United States* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 118.

¹⁹ Wood, *Radicalism*, 147.

²⁰ David Brion Davis, *Homicide in American Fiction, 1798–1860: A Study of Social Values* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957), 89.

²¹ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), 365.

²² Ibid., 366.

²³ Ibid., 367.

²⁴ Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to Henry Lee, May 8, 1825," *American History: From Revolution to Reconstruction and Beyond*, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/thomas-jefferson/letters-of-thomas-jefferson/jefl282.php>.

²⁵ Mortimer Newlin Stead Sellers, "Classical Influences on the Law and Politics of the French Revolution," in *The Classical Tradition*, ed. Anthony Grafton, Glenn Most, and Salvatore Settis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1437165>.

²⁶ Wood, *Radicalism*, 158.

²⁷ Charles C. Cole, Jr., "Brockden Brown and the Jefferson Administration," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 72 (July 1948): 254.

²⁸ Nina Baym, "A Minority Reading of Wieland," in *Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown*, ed. Bernard Rosenthal (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1981), 91.

²⁹ Waterman, ed., *Wieland and Memoirs of Carwin*, 31nl.

³⁰ Larzer Ziff, "A Reading of Wieland," *PMLA* 77, no. 1 (March 1962): 56.

³¹ Shirley Samuels, "Wieland: Alien and Infidel," *Early American Literature* 25, no. 1

(1990): 54.

³² Davis, *Homicide*, 90.

³³ Donald A. Ringe, "Charles Brockden Brown," in *Major Writers of Early American Literature*, ed. Everett Emerson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972), 285.

³⁴ Michal Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Routledge, 1961), 60.

³⁵ Timothy Dwight, "The Duty of Americans, at the Present Crisis," in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era*, vol. 2, 1789–1805, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), 1372.

³⁶ See, e.g., Charles C. Bradshaw, "The New England Illuminati: Conspiracy and Causality in Charles Brockden Brown's 'Wieland'," *New England Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2003): 356–77.

³⁷ Axelrod, *Charles Brockden Brown*, 57.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 266.