

**AN ANALYSIS OF CHARLES BROCKDEN
BROWN AND RHETORIC**

THESIS

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by

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Chapter One: Brown and His Ideas

Charles Brockden Brown's stature in American literature has often been viewed as minor at best. His novels tend to lack continuity and are often flawed with errors that are indicative of works that have been hastily written and constructed. Having published eight major novels in four short years (1797-1801), the author's sheer prolific output in such a short period of time leads the critic to question Brown's own editing skills. However, despite many of the obvious flaws that abound in many of his works, the author does make several important contributions to the study of American literature.

Among these contributions is Brown's social commentary on the implications of rhetoric. Many of the characters within his novels employ rhetoric as a means of constructing reality. Their use of premeditated proofs serve to seemingly incorporate the faculties of reason into a coherent and highly persuasive depiction of what actually happened, or in some cases, what will happen. This reliance on rhetoric leaves many of the characters subject to duplicitous motives and is often bolstered by sensorial data that appears overpowering in its nature. Taken as a whole, the works of Brown offer a caveat to those who seek to solely rely upon the abilities of rhetoric to successfully reconstruct what actually was, is, or will be. This paper will attempt to analyze the various features of rhetoric employed by Brown's characters and the impact these persuasions have on three of his narratives: Wieland, Ormond, and Arthur Mervyn.

The Revolutionary Time Period

Charles Brockden Brown has traditionally been dubbed as the first successful American novelist, and for this achievement alone has earned a place in the literary canon. In his Note to the Public for Edgar Huntly, Brown calls attention to his own pioneering endeavors:

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 superstitions and exploded manners; Gothic castles and chimeras, are the material usually employed for this end. The incidents of 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.

However, to solely relegate the merits of Brown's work to the title of "first American novelist" would be to overlook other literary techniques and social commentary that would later affect such authors as Poe and Hawthorne.

Brown wrote throughout his entire life, including numerous political essays and publishing the Monthly Magazine and American Review. It must be remembered that this was a time period in which political debate often came to the forefront in general conversation. However, it is generally agreed that to read his works as political dogma is to misconstrue the purpose of his fictitious literature. When Brown wrote his novels, he sought

to deal with virtues and morals that were applicable to society as a whole.

In the advertisement for Wieland, he states:

His [Brown's] purpose is neither selfish nor temporary, but aims at the illustration of some important branches of the moral constitution of man.

Brown was seeking to extol virtues outside of the political arena and his moralistic tone resembles the rather pithy maxims that were indicative of the works of Godwin and Franklin.

During this stage of America's development, rhetoric and political commentary were prevalent throughout newspapers and various other publications. Paine, Jefferson, and Franklin were just a few of the well-known names shaping the public discourse and voicing their opinions.

Brown did not hesitate to add his own opinions to this conversation and was greatly influenced by writers such as Caleb Williams. He essentially grew up with a love for both reading and writing along with an affinity for justice.

It therefore only seemed natural that such an idealistic youth pursue a career in the field of law. However, Brown only entered the profession because he realized that he had to make a living doing something practical. His heart was never truly involved in the decision, and it was more a matter of finances.

Brown entered the profession by trying to make the best out of a bad decision. He initially fostered the enthusiasm and idealistic tendencies that are so often associated with youth and the pride of a new country. He even rose to a position of leadership within a local law society but very quickly

became dissatisfied with the monotonous and humdrum life of the lawyer (excerpt taken from a local historian after Brown's death):

Mr. Brown had received an education which qualified him for the profession which secured wealth free from the risks of commerce,—the profession from which proceeded our statesmen, legislators, and rulers;—yet he preferred the toilsome occupation of book-making, from the pure love of literature, and a benevolent desire to benefit his fellow creatures (Wiley 8).

During this time period in America, it was unheard of to make a living off of letters; therefore, some viewed Brown's decision to leave the field of law as contemptuous. It was, after all, the same profession from which our distinguished forefathers derived their incomes and fame. In the end, Brown could not compromise his desire to become a writer. In an environment that idolized the attorney, Brown nevertheless chose to forego fortune and fame in the hopes of writing the great American novel.

Literary Methodology

Brown's foremost intentions as a novelist were to instruct as well as to delight. He even went so far as to view himself as a "storytelling moralist" ("Advertisement to Skywalk"). His desire to convey the truth is readily evident from his first publications, particularly The Rhapsodist. In this series of short essays, Brown states:

It is in truth, the vague and arbitrary production of a poet's

fancy, introduced only to enliven the composition, and to throw the lustre of a well chosen simile upon the dry pages of a philosophic discourse (7).

For Brown, it was imperative that his readers gain some insight or knowledge into what truth is. He therefore sought to dress his didactic messages in the garb of the fantastic—a literary tactic that would later cause him to be labeled as Gothic.

Brown also believed that writing should overwhelm the reader. Like Godwin, he adhered to the notion that a narrative should so engross a reader that it would seemingly override his senses/reason and leave them pondering over the implications of what had just been read:

Brown said that he sought to stir the intellects and imaginations of the best minds of his generation to “enchain the attention and ravish the souls of those who study and reflect” and to arouse “the curiosity and sympathy” of “the man of soaring passions and intellectual energy” (Elliott 142).

The reader was to become part of the learning process by becoming enamored with the text and thereby forced to reflect on the overwhelming nature of the novel. This reflective period would create a window of opportunity, a point where Brown hoped his social maxims would become evident.

Brown’s use of the Gothic was a means to a two-fold end: it not only entertained but affected the passions as well. However, what has often been overlooked is that many of the surprise twists and turns that are often found in his novels are not due to the fantastic (e.g., spontaneous

combustion, ventriloquism, or sleep walking), instead, they are direct results of the rhetoric employed by the characters. The passions of the characters are more deeply affected by an “accomplished and veteran deciever” (Edgar Huntly 3) than any other unexplained scientific phenomena. This point has been overlooked by modern-day critics, who have tended to focus their attention on empiricist philosophy, religious fanaticism, and feminist issues (Ringe 26). Even in Brown’s age, readers failed to see the rhetorical implications of his work. They were primarily fascinated by Brown’s use of unnatural phenomena, and it is because of this fascination that many concluded the fantastic to be the primary plot mover in Brown’s writings. Brown even went to great lengths to try and make his commentary on rhetoric more obvious. He states the following:

- ◆ “If it be communicated to the world, it will inculcate the duty of avoiding deceit” (Wieland 5).
- ◆ “I equally dislike formal debate, where each man, however few his ideas, is subjected to the necessity of drawing them out to the length of a speech. A single proof, or question, or hint, may be all that the state of the controversy, or the reflections of the speaker, suggest: but this must be amplified and iterated, till the sense, perhaps, is lost or enfeebled” (Alcuin 6).
- ◆ “Frank’s arguments and upbraidings created in his father an unnatural awe, an apprehension and diffident in thwarting his wishes and giving advice...The youth perceived his advantages, and employed them in carrying every point on which his

inclination was set" (Jane Talbot 9-10).

◆ "He suspected that Mervyn was a wily impostor; that he had been trained in the arts of fraud, under an accomplished teacher; that the tale which he had told to me was a tissue of ingenious and plausible lies" (Arthur Mervyn 10).

◆ "It will, therefore, be my duty to relate events in no artificial or elaborate order, and without the harmonious congruity and luminous amplification which might justly be displayed in a tale flowing merely from invention" (Ormond 3).

Brown continually makes statements like these throughout his novels, and it is often the villain who relies most heavily on rhetoric. Perhaps the one element that all of his literary works share in common is that they make some form of commentary on the dangers and benefits of rhetoric and then use these comments to drive the narrative.

Brown's Rhetoric

Understanding Brown's definition of rhetoric is crucial in order to gain insight into the warnings he was trying to convey about those who would use false pretenses and language in an effort to deceive. His definition is broad in scope and was greatly influenced by his time spent being educated as a lawyer. He once wrote that the occupation was one in whose "materials" were "wrapt up in barbarous jargon, a spurious and motley compound of obsolete and obfuscating language" (Litton 23). However, Brown was also contemplating the ills of rhetoric before he ever entered the

legal profession. In the Rhapsodist, he clarifies that such a person is “one who delivers the sentiments suggested by the moment in artless and unpremeditated language” (10).

Brown’s own definition of rhetoric resembles the one set forth in George Campbell’s book, The Philosophy of Rhetoric. Campbell stated that he regarded it [rhetoric] as a universal art encompassing all forms and subject matters of communication...By these definitions, any instance of written or oral discourse which aims to inform, convince, please, arouse emotion, or persuade to action, and which has as its communicative content some passion, idea, sentiment, disposition or purpose is an instance of rhetorical exercise (Bitzer xix).

Brown did not seek to limit the functions of rhetoric to any specific field. Unlike Aristotle, he did not view it as primarily assuming a role only in the realm of politics. Rhetoric, for Brown, was a universal art that could be applied to almost any situation, be it written or oral.

Under such a definition, just about any form of communication could be viewed as rhetoric. In contrast to Campbell, Brown did not hold this opinion. The key element for rhetoric in Brown’s case was that it be some form of *premeditated* language that functioned in a *persuasive* manner. He states this opinion throughout almost all of his novels, but most particularly in The Rhapsodist, Alcuin, Wieland, Ormond, and Arthur Mervyn. For a person to employ the tactics of rhetoric, he/she must have reasoned their arguments out beforehand and have some persuasive goal in mind. This does not apply to instances such as general conversation, where people are

simply exchanging information without imploring the use of proofs, accents, and gesticulation towards some end.

In fashioning his views about premeditated language, Brown also heavily relied on Cicero. The Roman orator is mentioned in both The Rhapsodist and Wieland. Some of the characters in Wieland even seek to recreate a case that was presented by Cicero next to a bust of the orator himself. Cicero was not born into the noble class and made his way to the aristocracy through the use of his rhetoric. Cicero therefore created his identity through his adept use of language. When looked at from this vantage point, many of Brown's own characters have tried to do the same. Through the use of false language and deception, characters try and assume an identity that is not really their own in the hopes of gaining social advancement. Unlike Cicero, their intent is often spurious or even malicious. Even the case discussed in Wieland is often viewed by many to be one where Cicero "embraced a bad cause; or at least, a doubtful one" (Litton 26).

Stylistically, very little attention has been paid to Brown's literary methodology at trying to recreate rhetoric in his own writings. As was stated before, Brown wrote with a purpose in mind and often mimicked the rhetoric he was trying to criticize in his own narratives. Many of the characters he created speak in a fashion that reminds one of a courtroom, where each side presents his/her arguments in an effort to persuade the reader. While his use of rhetoric is not without flaws, it does have merit and warrants a closer look. Throughout this paper, particular attention will be paid to Brown's stylistic attempt at conveying meaning.

Brown's Impact on Other American Writers

A testament to Brown's achievements can be found in the manner he influenced two other great American authors: Poe and Hawthorne. One of the first critics to notice this influence was an 1858 reviewer:

We are disposed to think that we can trace his [Poe's] inspirations in a great measure to the writings of Godwin and Charles Brockden Brown. There is in each the same love of the morbid and improbable; the same frequent straining of the interest; the same tracing, step by step, logically as it were and elaborately, through all its complicated relations, a terrible mystery to its source (Duke 301).

These early analogies focused on the Gothic similarities between the two writers and attributed much of Poe's material and style to the works of Brown. Horace Wallace also made similar assertions in the nineteenth century:

Attention has been directed to Poe's indebtedness to Brown, whose use of unusual scientific phenomena appealed to Poe's fancy and led him, no doubt, to choose the agents of his stories from similar sources (Wiley 233).

Most of the early critics agree that Brown directly influenced the creative processes of Poe. When one reads the works of the two authors, the similarities become obvious; Brown essentially laid the Gothic foundation for Poe's literary success.

Nathaniel Hawthorne also looked to the writings of Brown for inspiration. Though Hawthorne's material is more elaborate and insightful, he nevertheless incorporated some elements from Brown:

There need be no hesitation in believing that Hawthorne was pleased with Brown's novels and was affected by them. Brown preceded Hawthorne in the study of those mental transitions which the latter afterward traced so fundamentally (Wiley 236).

David Clark expresses a similar opinion:

Hawthorne's fascination with the mysteries that lie just beyond human ken and his "solutions" of those mysteries are strong reminders of Brockden Brown (192-193).

While it is not disputed that both Poe and Hawthorne deserve the literary greatness that has been attributed to them, it is often forgotten that they owe some of this literary merit to Brown. The first successful American novelist essentially paved the way for the next generation of American writers, a contribution which should not be overlooked.

Chapter Two: Wieland

Wieland has traditionally been viewed as Brown's best work. It was published in 1798 and was one of his first attempts at a novel-length endeavor. It begins with a moral-like statement that seeks to justify what the narrative is about:

Make what use of the tale you shall think proper. If it be communicated to the world, it will inculcate the duty of avoiding deceit. It will exemplify the force of early impressions, and show the immeasurable evils that flow from an erroneous or imperfect discipline (5).

Many critics believe the "discipline" that is mentioned to be religious fervor; however, such a reading is not consistent with the text. It is specifically mentioned that the novel should "inculcate the duty of avoiding deceit" and "early impressions." These ideas are related to Brown's view of rhetoric. He states the following on the last page of the novel:

I leave you to moralize on this tale. That virtue should become the victim of treachery is, no doubt, a mournful consideration; but it will not escape your notice, that the evils of which Carwin and Maxwell were the authors, owed their existence to the errors of the sufferers....If the lady had crushed her disastrous passion in the bud, and driven the seducer from her presence, when the

tendency of his artifices was seen...or if I had been
 gifted with ordinary equanimity or foresight, the
 double-tongued deceiver would have been baffled and
 repelled (273).

Notice that Brown specifically calls attention to the rhetoric employed by Carwin, and that it is because of the other characters' lack of vigilance in such matters that Carwin is able to carry out his deception. It is the artifices of a "double-tongued deceiver" (Wieland 273) that brings about the tragic unfolding of events—not the obsession of a religious zealot. While the novel does address the issue of religion, it is not the focal point of Brown's didactic message.

The first feature of rhetoric that Brown calls attention to is the rather magical quality that a voice can obtain when properly trained in the arts of persuasion. Many of the deceivers who make their first appearances in his novels create a resounding impact by the mere melody of their voice. This gift of the silver tongue allows them to be readily believed and assume almost any persona they choose, thereby allowing them to create their own reality. A practiced rhetorician can therefore use this deception to obtain whatever ends his/her heart desires. Clara Wieland succumbs to the enchantment of Carwin's voice during their first encounter:

My brother's voice and Pleyel's were musical and energetic.

I had fondly imagined that, in this respect, they were surpassed
 by none. Now my mistake was detected. I cannot pretend to
 communicate the impression that was made upon me by these

accents, or to depict the degree in which force and sweetness were blended in them. They were articulated with a distinctness that was unexampled in my experience. But this was not all. The voice was so mellifluous and clear, but the emphasis was so just, and the modulation so impassioned, that it seemed as if a heart of stone could not fail of being moved by it. It imparted to me an emotion altogether involuntary and incontrollable (59).

Clara is immediately moved by her passions through the mere sound of Carwin's voice. She even becomes fascinated with the character and develops a kind of psychological fixation with him. Astonishingly, this entire transformation takes place through Carwin's utterance of one question: "Pry'thee, good girl, canst thou supply a thirsty man with a glass of buttermilk?" (58). As the reader later discovers, it is because Carwin has spent years training his voice that he is able to create such an emotional impact. The most powerful aspect of Carwin's rhetoric lies in his ability to affect the pathos through the mere melody of accents.

The power of Carwin's rhetoric even has the ability to transcend his vagabond-like appearance. While many of Brown's characters that use rhetoric dress in the garb of a gentleman and have similar outward dispositions, Carwin does not. He is described by Clara in the following manner:

His pace was a careless and lingering one, and had none of that gracefulness and ease which distinguish a person with

certain advantages of education from a clown. His gait was rustic and awkward. His form was ungainly and disproportioned....His garb was not ill adapted to such a figure.

A slouched hat, tarnished by the weather, a coat of thick gray cloth, cut and wrought, as it seemed, by a country tailor, blue worsted stockings, and shoes fastened by thongs, and deeply discoloured by dust, which brush had never disturbed, constituted his dress (57).

Even the features of his face are depicted as being “wide of beauty” (60).

Despite all of these negative physical traits, and keeping in mind that Clara is home alone (except for her female servant), Carwin is able to inspire nothing short of awe and pity from Clara. Better judgment would have led her to question who this person was, especially considering his rather shabby appearance; however, because of his sonorous “accents,” Carwin is able to gain entry into the lives of the Wielands.

Soon after being accepted by Clara, Carwin becomes a daily participant in the Wielands’ conversations. There are times when Clara suspects something to be amiss but readily dismisses such ideas when observing his manners and style of speech:

A suspicion was, sometimes, admitted, that his belief was counterfeited for some political purpose. The most careful observation, however, produced no discovery. His manners were, at all times, harmless and inartificial (78).

In reality, Carwin is a criminal seeking to escape his past and pry into the lives of others: “I scrutinized every thing, and pried every where” (231). He

engaged in several crimes in the United States and was forced to flee to Europe. After a short stay there, he was once again forced to flee and returned to his native soil. It is at this point in his life that he encounters the Wielands.

Carwin blames his troubles on a gift that turns out to be a curse. He was born with the power of “biloquism” (or “ventrilocution”), the ability to “mimic exactly the voice of another, and to modify the sound so that it shall appear to come from what quarter, and be uttered from what distance [he pleases]” (223). Such a gift allows Carwin to essentially accomplish whatever evil he deems proper:

For a time the possession of so potent and stupendous an endowment elated me with pride. Unfortified by principle, subjected to poverty, stimulated by headlong passions, I made this powerful engine subservient to the supply of my wants (224).

The rhetoric of this power is so overwhelming that it is the direct cause of the most shocking element in the novel: it causes a sane man to kill most of his family. Apparently, Carwin’s voice can so forcibly shake one’s passions that all reason can be thrown aside.

Carwin continually uses rhetoric to reshape reality towards ends that he deems as beneficial; he, in a sense, plays God. When Pleyel and Clara’s brother are debating on whether or not to venture to Europe, Carwin manipulates the scene by assuming Catharine’s voice and persuading the two to stay in America. Carwin goes on to use his ventriloquism on seven other different occasions, drastically altering the lives of those involved.

Carwin's behavior was calculated and aimed at various goals that he thought would be beneficial to either himself or those around him.

From the beginning, Carwin assumed a false guise and used the power of his voice coupled with his knowledge of rhetoric to carry out the most heinous of deeds. In a society where one is often judged by appearance and manner of speech, it was relatively easy for Carwin to succeed. Throughout the novel he deftly manipulates reality through the use of his voice. His goal is only self-indulgence and personal gain. Brown has taken his commentary on rhetoric to the supernatural level. What better way to create a villain than to not only endow him with the knowledge of rhetoric but also with the supernatural powers of bilquism.

Carwin is not the only character that is familiar with the advantages and disadvantages of rhetoric. Wieland and Pleyel are also fascinated with the occupation. Clara states that one of her brother's favorite pastimes "consisted in embellishing his rhetoric with all the proprieties of gesticulation and utterance" (27). As for these "utterances," the reader already knows that Carwin far surpasses the abilities of both Wieland and Pleyel. Wieland is said to be well-read, the chief object of his studies being Cicero: "He was never tired of conning and rehearsing his productions" (27). Pleyel and Wieland devote many hours of study to Cicero and often engage in debates concerning the orator's performance and meaning. Clara, herself, is shown to be quite knowledgeable in the area and often listens to the two and offers her own insight. It therefore only seems fitting that both the beautiful Clara and handsome Pleyel pursue a relationship that is more than friendship.

The impact that Carwin makes on Clara highly resembles Clara's first impression upon Pleyel. However, Carwin uses rhetoric to fashion a reality that is inherently deceptive while Clara does not seek to give a false picture of who she really is. Pleyel remembers his first encounter with her:

'Here, said I, is a being, after whom sages may model their transcendent intelligence, and painters, their ideal beauty....

I have questioned whether the enchantments of your voice were more conspicuous in the intricacies of melody, or the emphasis of rhetoric (138).

Ironically, Pleyel admits to these feelings when he is using rhetoric to question Clara's character. Through his use of rhetoric, Pleyel creates a false reality and wrongly accuses Clara of misdoings. This entire debate revolves around an alleged encounter that Clara had with Carwin one late night.

Pleyel's accusations concerning Clara resemble a prosecutor's opening statements. He outlines his case and supports it with sensorial data that appears overwhelming in its nature. He is essentially seeking to re-create the past and does so unsuccessfully. Pleyel accuses Clara in the following manner:

You are acquainted with the grounds of my opinion, and yet you avow yourself innocent: Why then should I rehearse these grounds? You are apprized of the character of Carwin: Why then should I enumerate the discoveries which I have made respecting him (137)?

Pleyel goes on to offer four pieces of evidence to bolster his assertions:

"Clara's portrait of Carwin, her diary, the sound of her voice and the supposed

conversation with Carwin on the previous night, and the closing and fastening of the door which Pleyel hears as Clara re-enters the house” (Litton 29). Pleyel cannot discern the truth because he is relying too heavily on the abilities of rhetoric to re-create the past. He cannot see through the overwhelming sensorial evidence and his ability to fashion this evidence into proofs.

In addressing the accusations brought forth by Pleyel, Clara chooses to forgo argument and instead assumes a more passive role. Litton believes this to be an indication that “Clara questions the power of rhetoric to reconstruct reality accurately” (30). However, this appears to be a tenuous argument. The reason why Clara says nothing is an enigma that the text sheds very little light on. Even Pleyel himself is baffled at her rather stoic disposition: “Is it shame that makes thee tongue-tied?” (152). While Clara uses less rhetoric than any of the other characters, she does not shun its persuasive abilities. When Carwin sends her a letter requesting a meeting, her first thought is to use proofs in an effort to sway him to the side of justice:

Why should I suppose him impregnable to argument? Have
I not reason on my side, and the power of imparting
conviction? Cannot he be made to see the justice of
unraveling the maze in which Pleyel is bewildered (160)?

She eventually resolves to take this course of action, placing her life in possible danger and relying on her ability to persuade to keep her from being harmed. Clara’s greatest asset throughout the novel is not her desire to shun rhetoric but rather to see the truth that lies hidden within the verbal pretenses.

This ability to discern veracity is shown to be most far-reaching when she listens to Carwin's confessions. However, Carwin is not about to reveal his entire involvement in the murders. Instead, he seeks to portray himself as an innocent victim of circumstance: "Will you not hear me? Listen to my confession, and then denounce punishment. All I ask is a patient audience (222). Clara responds just as Pleyel did when making accusations against her— she lists the evidence that she believes to be actual reality:

...was not thine the voice that commanded my brother to
 imbrue his hands in the blood of his children—to strangle
 that angel of sweetness his wife? Has he not vowed my
 death, and the death of Pleyel, at thy bidding? Hast thou
 not made him the butcher of his family (222)?

Once the charges have been set, Carwin calls upon all of his rhetorical abilities to depict a reality in which he acted only out of innocent causes. His speech goes on for the next twenty pages and ends with, "I have uttered the truth" (242). However, despite this long and elaborate narrative, Clara does not believe the villain, "...his tale is a lie, and his nature devilish" (243).

Carwin had already planned what he wanted to say and how he would say it, after all, he was the one who asked to meet with Clara in order to justify his innocence. His story centers on issues that were done to him, thereby forcing him to act the way that he did. Clara has learned from her mistakes and will not fall prey to the artifices of a practiced rhetorician.

The truth is finally voiced by Carwin, but not in the manner of rehearsed and articulate speech, but rather in the pure form of unpremeditated language. This happens when a deranged Wieland enters the scene and

shocks both Clara and Carwin. When confronted by the madman, Carwin's facade of lies tumbles:

I meant nothing—I intended no ill—if I understand—if I do
do not mistake you—it is true—I did appear—in the entry—
did speak. The contrivance was mine, but—(247).

This is the first time in the novel where Carwin is shown to speak without articulation. It is not surprising that it is also one of the only times where he is telling the truth. Most of Carwin's dialogue is highly articulate and embellished with the elements of rhetoric. However, in this instance he is taken by surprise and cannot maintain his normally calm and persuasive disposition. He admits to causing the deaths and leaves a psychotic Wieland to contemplate what he has done.

It is interesting to note that the three longest speeches in the novel take the form of a trial. In the first of these courtroom scenes, Pleyel accuses Clara of sleeping with Carwin. Pleyel assumes the role of prosecutor and concentrates his arguments on the allegedly incriminating evidence. In the second, Wieland is actually a "prisoner at the bar...and called upon for his defense" (184). Unlike Pleyel's speech, Wieland's is devoid of reasoned argument. His defense is marked by such a "significance of gesture" that "judges, advocates and auditors were panic-struck and breathless with attention" (175). Hence the two speeches differ in that one concentrates on reasoned proofs while the other focuses on articulation and gesture. The third is Carwin's narrative to Clara, whereby he seeks to justify his innocence. Carwin's peroration uses the passive voice, thereby creating the effect of things being done to him. It also incorporates reason and sensory knowledge

into a highly coherent story. It is the most elaborate of the three, and perhaps the most premeditated.

In looking at these three cases, it must be remembered that this rhetoric is being delivered in an effort to gain judgment. The defendants are being tried and their verdicts should be decided by an adjudicator. With regard to Pleyel and Clara, the former has assumed both the roles of prosecutor and judge. Hence, in Pleyel's mind, Clara was guilty from the beginning. Ironically, Clara says nothing to clear her name. In Wieland's case, there is an actual court of law, and judges are present to hand down a verdict. However, for Wieland no humanly court has any power over him because he believes his actions to have been dictated by God. Therefore, his plea of guilty matters little to him; he will be taken care of in the afterlife. The most interesting judgment is handed down to Carwin. During the aftermath, he disappears from the area and is said to be "probably engaged in the harmless pursuits of agriculture" (268). It would appear that he was found innocent of his crimes, his rhetoric perhaps allowing him to dodge one more bullet. In reality, this is not the case. Carwin's judgment, according to Wieland, will be handed to him in the ultimate court of law: "Go and learn better. I will meet thee, but it must be at the bar of thy Maker. There shall I bear witness against thee (247). Carwin's punishment has simply been delayed, and in the end, it will be the most severe.

These allusions to trials and courts of law make a statement about the implications of rhetoric, reason, and sensory knowledge. Truth, for Charles Brockden Brown, was not something that was always a derivative of reason. Indeed, all of the characters in Wieland are quite adept at fashioning logical

proofs. Many times, they are too smart for their own good. The ability to discern through logical connections can easily be muddled and distorted. Rhetoric can be a direct result of reason that has gone out of control. Reality can become a construct of the speaker's imagination, and rhetoric can be used to either bolster this reality or change it.

Even knowledge that is gained through the physical senses cannot be wholly relied upon. Many of the characters were duped by Carwin simply because they placed too much emphasis on what they heard or saw. Action was often taken without corroborating evidence. During this age of enlightenment, Brown sought to cast doubts on those who would be too quick to pass judgement simply on the basis of physical evidence. The Truth can be twisted through the use of reason, and knowledge gained through the senses can be misleading and even falsified. The rhetoric depicted in Wieland is an example of man's ability to reason him/herself out of the Truth. Caution should be displayed in its usage and society should remain vigilant against those who would use the powers of persuasion towards their own benefit.

Chapter Three: Ormond

Ormond was published in 1798, just one year after the release of Wieland. It primarily focuses on the struggles of Constantia Dudley, a determined woman who tries to etch out an economic niche in a highly patriarchal society. The novel is set during an outbreak of Yellow Fever, and Brown's depictions of the disease are highly detailed and sometimes graphic. Brown's account of the pestilence was based on his own experiences with the disease, having seen the devastation firsthand. However, the fear of getting sick turns out to be the least of the Dudleys' problems. Their greatest nemesis is not the viral bug, but rather invaders that are far more insidious: human impostors who act and speak in deceitful manners.

At the beginning of the novel, the Dudleys' are depicted as being financially secure. The father owns a successful shop, but like Brown and the occupation of law, he finds the trade to be rather cumbersome and boring:

The drudgery of a shop, where all the faculties were at a stand and one day was an unvaried repetition of the foregoing, was too incongenial to his disposition not to be a source of discontent (6).

Mr. Dudley essentially longs for more artistic pursuits, specifically painting. It is at this point in the narrative that Craig enters the scene, a youth requested by the elder Dudley to take over some of the more tedious aspects of the shop. In trying to discern the nature of the young man, Mr. Dudley relies on the story given by Craig: "His tale was circumstantial and consistent, and his veracity appeared liable to no doubt (7). As time goes on,

more responsibility is entrusted to Craig who seemingly bears this load with only the purest of intentions.

Those familiar with Brown's writing style can recognize the tell-tale signs of the duplicitor rather quickly. As Clara Wieland did with Carwin, Mr. Dudley seeks to discern the truth by relying on young Craig's eloquence—an action that is not corroborated by any other evidence upon their first meeting. Craig turns out to be quite versed in the arts of rhetoric, having received an education that also allowed him to read and write Latin. In order to keep up the illusion, he craftily creates forged letters from his mother and addresses them to the Dudley's. These letters were “expressed with no inconsiderable elegance” (8). Brown once again calls attention to those attempts at conveying meaning that sound too contrived and premeditated. In reality, the letters are obviously forged, but Mr. Dudley fails to notice the artifices and instead chooses to blindly entrust Craig with even more responsibility. When Craig's real mother actually sends a letter, it resembles a much more rustic form and has none of the elegance indicative of someone using proofs and rhetorical style:

Mary [Craig's mother] herself was unable to write, as she reminds her son, and had therefore procured the assistance of Mrs. Dewitt, for whose family she washed. The amanuensis was but little superior in the arts of penmanship to her principal (11).

As stated in The Rhapsodist, Brown shows truth to lie in the unpremeditated form of conversation. Just as Carwin admits to his guilt by stammering out the inarticulate lines of “I meant nothing—I intended no ill...” (247), so does Mary in her epistle to her son. Truth can often be found in the simpler styles of communication, where meaning is not purposefully

obfuscated in flowery or ornate language. In the end, Mr. Dudley believes the letter to be a mistake, an oversight which will cost him his fortune and throw his family into financial chaos.

Craig succeeds in embezzling a large portion of the company's stock and has also put up Mr. Dudley's property for collateral in several other financial ventures. The youth soon leaves town and Mr. Dudley and Constantia eventually discover the truth. All of their property will soon be foreclosed upon. After relocating to a much cheaper dwelling, Mr. Dudley assumes a minor position in the field of law, which barely pays enough to cover his meals. Indeed, Dudley condemns the profession for all its rhetoric and deceitful practices:

He was perpetually encumbered with the rubbish of law
and waded with laborious steps through its endless
tautologies, its impertinent circuities, its lying assertions
and hateful artifices (16).

Dudley is forced to work in a field that is prevalent with eloquent language and deceitful practices. This is the exact manner in which he was duped out of his own fortune. It is ironic that he should then strive to make a living by engaging in the same practices that swindled him out of his own money. However, unlike Craig, Dudley does not create a false reality for himself in the efforts of maintaining a facade. Instead, he works for other lawyers and merely does what is asked of him.

Dudley's fall can be attributed to two mistakes: his failure to gather the proper sensory knowledge in order to verify the truth and his over-reliance upon his passions. Dudley was never the type of person who could enjoy the world of business. He would much rather paint and engage in life's more artistic pursuits than run a business. This left him susceptible to Craig's

rhetoric. Dudley wanted to believe in Craig's stories so that he could extricate himself from the monotony of running a business. This mirrors Theodore Wieland's religious fervor, a mistake which left him open to the rhetoric of Carwin and led to the eventual demise of his family. Rhetoric's ability to incite the pathos is well-documented throughout Brown's work, and it is those characters who are able to question those emotions that remain most vigilant against overly-eloquent villains.

Unlike her father, Constantia Dudley often checks her passion with reasoned proofs, thereby allowing for a more unbiased judgment. The reader is first introduced to the sixteen-year-old daughter on page 17. By page 18, it is clear that she is being pursued by a suitor. However, she is not merely guided by matters of the heart, and it is because of her "arguments" that she decides to postpone any ideas concerning marriage (18). Eventually she finds out that the would-be husband was only interested in her money. After their financial ruin, the suitor disappears from the scene. Constantia is able to weather the storm of his protests for marriage because she questions the man's character and does not whole-heartedly believe his vocal promises. However, this is not to say that she is completely immune to appeals concerning the pathos:

...and yet the manner in which she was affected by this event convinced her that her heart had a larger share than her reason in dictating her expectations (19).

Constantia is a much more balanced character than her father. She does not readily believe anything that sounds too good to be true. For her, reality and truth are approached in a methodical and reasoned manner that not only incorporates the passions, but reason and sensory knowledge as well.

The young girl is shown to have deep insight when it comes to weighing the advantages and disadvantages of marriage. She often resorts to rhetoric's syllogisms to reason out her arguments. Her proofs are described in detail on Pages 68 and 69:

- She is young and has plenty of time to get married if she chooses to do so at a later time.
- She realizes that every day she enlarges her store of knowledge and rectifies "some error or confirms some truth."
- These advantages are a direct result of her being unfettered by the shackles of marriage.
- Poverty, however, limits some of her freedom and is therefore a disadvantage.
- On the other hand, riches through marriage were not without "constraint."
- Therefore, it is better to maintain the status quo for the time being and keep what freedom and happiness she has.

Constantia's reasoning highly resembles Aristotelian syllogisms in which the Truth is derived by stating the factual and making the necessary logical conclusions. This type of thinking is a direct result of her education, one which is highly radical for the time period.

Constantia's vigilant disposition is a direct result of the education her father imparted on her. In her words, women were limited to what was "sensual" and "ornamental" (27). They were generally trained for music, painting, Italian, and French (27). However, Constantia's studies had focused on Latin and English. She was "thoroughly conversant with Tacitus and Milton" (28). She also studied mathematics, science, and anatomy.

Hence, she has been prepared to take on the taxing roles that will later be assigned to her. She is a woman who has been armed with the education of a man. Therefore, she does not merely accept the reality painted for her by others but instead seeks to question what they have to say.

Constantia eventually becomes the main source of income for both the father and daughter after Mr. Dudley becomes afflicted with cataracts. M^r Crea is the landlord, an avaricious and unfeeling businessman who uses rhetoric and the law to get the rent he believes he deserves. He comes to collect the rent at the height of the plague, when most people are too sick to work and the economy is in ruins. His arguments “were abundantly fallacious” (41), and he claims that the money is needed for his aunt so that she can flee the city and hopefully avoid contracting the illness:

He was not unconscious of the inhumanity and sordidness of this proceeding, and therefore endeavored to disguise it by the usual pretenses. All his funds were exhausted (41).

M^r Crea seeks to depict a reality that even the blind Mr. Dudley can see through. M^r Crea’s attempt at rhetoric are a failure in the sense that it doesn’t create a convincing persuasion on the part of the listener.

Throughout the novel, M^r Crea seeks to persuade others of his own poverty—and since he is unskilled in the uses of rhetoric—he often has to resort to the law. This is exactly what happens when Constantia unknowingly gives him a counterfeit bank note that she received from Craig:

After M^r Crea had railed himself weary, he flung out of the house, warning them that next morning he should distrain for his rent, and, at the same time, sue them for the money that Constantia had received in exchange for the

note (85).

Law itself is portrayed in a bad light by the honest citizens of the community. It is a corrupt industry that only the wealthy have access to. When Constantia thinks about prosecuting Craig, she realizes that to try and do so would be futile:

The proper instrument of her restoration was law, but its arm was powerless, for she had not the means of bribing it into activity (76).

Law—like rhetoric—has become corrupt and its uses, while beneficial by design, have been abused by those in power.

Constantia even tries to use law as one of her arguments in a letter she sends to Craig in which she asks for financial charity. She says that she has no intention of bringing legal action into the matter, that she has, in a sense, forgiven him. The letter is carefully crafted to bring attention to the needs of her father and not center on her own plight. The letter focuses on appealing to Craig's sense of pity. She says that her father is "blind and indigent," on the verge of being "thrust into the street" (76). Craig is only asked to metaphorically "relieve a dog from such suffering" (77). In this letter, Constantia implores the use of persuasion without the need for artifice, unlike M' Crea, who openly creates a false impression of his true state of affairs. At first, it seems like Craig complies with the request by giving her a fifty dollar note, which in the end, turns out to be counterfeit. However, the letter itself is an excellent example of Constantia's use of rhetoric. She does not seek to corrupt her elegant use of proofs with false impressions. The letter fails to truly move Craig because he is beyond the point of rational thought. He cares only for himself and the money that

drives his actions. Without such driving forces, Craig could never be expected to willingly comply to any such charitable deed.

Craig's natural inclination toward duplicity and false motives becomes a part of himself from which he can never escape. Like an addict on drugs, he has been consumed by his own addictions:

His temptations to deceive were stronger than what are incident to most other men. Deception was so easy a task, that the difficulty lay, not in infusing false opinions respecting him, but in preventing them from being spontaneously imbibed. He contracted habits of imposture imperceptibly. In proportion as he deviated from the truth, he discerned the necessity of extending and systematizing his efforts, and of augmenting the original benignity and attractiveness of his looks by studied additions. The further he proceeded, the more difficult it was to return (82).

Craig has been using rhetoric to fabricate his own reality for such an extended period of time that he has lost track of his own true identity. He has come to believe in the very reality which began as a construct and method for achieving wealth. This places him in a precarious position in which he is unable to make amends for all the misdeeds and misfortunes that he has caused. When he involves himself with a much more psychotic and skilled duplicitor, namely Ormond, Craig will pay the ultimate price for his artifices: death.

Ormond is first introduced to Constantia by his business dealings with Craig. In looking for the young man, she finds out that he is at one of Ormond's dwellings. She then believes it her duty to perhaps warn the man about Craig's evil tendencies, but then checks herself, thinking that

perhaps Craig has reformed on his own. However, as the reader later discovers, Ormond is far more dangerous than Craig. He is not a man that is simply driven by the accumulation of wealth. Instead, he is a highly reasonable figure that bases all of actions on sensory knowledge and methodical foresight. Like Carwin, he has refined his rhetoric and ability to assume disguises to a near perfect art form. He often assumes facades in order to gain the necessary information about certain families. His “metamorphosis” is described in detail:

There was a method of gaining access to families, and marking them in their unguarded attitudes, more easy and ineffectual than any other: it required least preparation and cost least pains; the disguise, also, was of the most impenetrable kind. He had served a sort of occasional apprenticeship to the art, and executed its function with perfect ease. It was the most entire and grotesque metamorphosis imaginable. It was stepping from the highest to the lowest rank in society, and shifting himself into a form as remote from his own as those recorded in Ovid. In a word, it was sometimes his practice to exchange his complexion and habiliments for those of a negro and chimney sweep, and to call at certain doors for employment (110).

Ormond's guise is made complete with the rhetoric and gestures associated with the persona he wishes to exemplify. He is far more elaborate than Craig in his creation of fictitious characters and uses them in a much more subtle manner. In other words, he does not simply extort money from a family openly but uses a disguise to get the information he needs to legally

make acquisitions. He is also not led blindly by his greed, but seeks to take advantage of specific opportunities as they present themselves.

Ormond's use of artifices can be traced back to one instance in his life when he was taken advantage of by a wily impostor. In order to correct the error, he decided to use "his talents at imitation" (95). The excursion turns out to be successful, and like Craig, he comes to rely on his crafty rhetoric and knack for disguise to make his own way in the world. Indeed, he believes society to be so corrupt that one must resort to deception in order to obtain one's desires. For him, society has left no other alternative:

It [his disguise] served to recommend this method of encountering deceit, and informed him of the extent of those powers which are so liable to be abused. A subtlety much inferior to Ormond's would suffice to recommend this mode of action. It was defensible on no other principle than necessity. The treachery of mankind compelled him to resort to it. If they should deal in a manner as upright and explicit as himself, it would be superfluous. But since they were in the perpetual use of stratagems and artifices, it was allowable, he thought, to wield the same arms (95).

This power enables Ormond to invade the privacy of others and create a reality which would be beneficial for his own ends. This is a direct parallel of Carwin's thinking in Wieland. Indeed, Ormond soon begins playing God just as Carwin did with the Wielands:

He was delighted with the power it conferred. It enabled him to gain access, as if by supernatural means, to the privacy of others, and baffle their profoundest contrivances to hide themselves from his view. It flattered him with the possession

of something like omniscience (96).

Ormond gains satisfaction by being in control of situations. His life is dedicated to creating a predictable environment around himself. In this manner, he is most able to influence those around him.

Ormond's disguises would not be complete without the proper knowledge of rhetoric to give his characters real impact and persuasion. Brown metaphorically speaks of Ormond's command of language as poetry:

He blended in his own person with the functions of poet and actor, and his dramas were not fictitious but real. The end that he proposed was not the amusement of a playhouse mob. His were scenes in which hope and fear exercised a genuine influence, and in which was maintained that resemblance to truth so audaciously and grossly violated on the stage (96).

In this passage, the reader once again comes across Brown's definition of rhetoric. Ormond's use of gestures and accents are woven into an elegant mastery of words that are well thought-out and aimed at achieving some persuasive goal. In the process, the truth is twisted and cast aside in favor of creating a more advantageous depiction of reality.

When Ormond and Constantia finally meet, Ormond is not hesitant to use his rhetoric to gain the upper hand. The two begin by discussing Craig and the possible deception that he might be currently carrying out. In the beginning, Ormond believes Craig's tale and reiterates it to Constantia: "In saying this, Ormond intended that his looks and emphasis should convey full meaning" (122). As Ormond continues with what he believes to be the truthful story, Constantia does not interrupt because:

...if the countenance of this man had not been characterized

by the keenest intelligence, and a sort of careless and overflowing good will, this speech might have produced different effects (123).

In the end, Constantia convinces Ormond that he has been duped and that she is the one telling the truth. The language that Constantia uses is conversational and clear to the point. She does not worry about the manner in which she delivers the truth, only that it be spoken and the meaning conveyed. Ormond had no choice but to believe the girl, and does so quite willingly.

Soon the conversation shifts to the real reason for Constantia's visit. She wishes to persuade Ormond to marry his mistress Helena. Ormond, like the brother in Jane Talbot, then asks Constantia to plead her case with the best of her rhetoric:

Come, proceed in your exhortations. Argue with the utmost clearness and cogency. Arm yourself with all the irresistables of eloquence. Yet you are building nothing. You are only demolishing. Your argument is one thing. Its tendency is another, and is the reverse of all you expect and desire" (127-128).

For Constantia, Ormond's reply is a "riddle" (128). She does not understand why she is creating the "reverse" effect. However, the reader soon learns that it is because Ormond is beginning to fall in love with her instead of Helena. As the conversation continues, Ormond uses his rhetoric to confuse Constantia, thereby allowing himself to feel in control of the situation:

"Well, words are made to carry meaning. You shall have them in abundance. Your house is your citadel. I will not enter it without leave. Permit me to visit you when I please...."

"I [Constantia] cannot answer when I do not understand.

You clothe your thoughts in a garb so uncouth, that I know
not in what light they are to be viewed" (128).

Ormond intentionally uses rhetoric to create an air of superiority about himself. Constantia is left unable to discern the true message of his verbal quibble and ends up being quite disoriented. Eventually, Ormond dispenses with the rhetoric and tells her that he only wishes to be able to visit her at home. Constantia replies that all her friends are welcome, and that if Ormond sees himself as her friend, then he too is welcome.

Ormond soon begins to make frequent visits at Constantia's house and their conversations become much more prolific. Eventually, Ormond's sexist view of women is drastically altered by Constantia's rhetoric. He begins to view her as someone with intelligence and commitment. However, to say he views her as an equal would be a mistake:

Her reasonings might be fallacious or valid, but they were
so composed, arranged, and delivered, were drawn from
such sources, and accompanied with such illustrations,
as plainly testified a manlike energy in the reasoner. In this
indirect and circuitous way, her point was unalterably
established (131).

Ormond desires to possess Constantia just as he possessed Helena. In the end, Ormond wants Constantia for his new mistress, but, if need be, he will even resort to marriage.

However, Constantia has no desire to wed a man that she hardly knows. Unlike her father, she is ever-vigilant against those who might be pretending to be something they are not:

Ormond was imperfectly known. What knowledge she had
gained flowed chiefly from his lips, and was therefore

unattended with certainty. What portion of deceit and disguise was mixed with his conversation could be known only by witnessing his actions with her own eyes, and comparing his testimony with that of others (150).

Even with Ormond's skill at rhetoric and mimicry, he is unable to completely sway the opinions of this particular girl. She is defiantly reliant upon her sensory knowledge and reasoning to discover the truth. Her heart, at times, does have a say in matters, but it never overrides her reason. Constantia is not led by passion, but rather discretion.

In reality, Ormond is an extremely radical and psychotic individual. He is a member of a sect whose goal it is to acquire foreign lands for enigmatic "moral or political maxims" (209). He brings about "positions pregnant with destruction and ignominy" (209). When Constantia refuses to marry him, he has Craig kill her father in an effort to keep her from leaving the country. He then kills Craig to wrap up any loose strings; he doesn't want anyone but himself to know the truth of who really murdered Constantia's father. In the final confrontation between Constantia and Ormond, the latter reveals the truth of what actually transpired. He admits to having Craig kill her father and reveals Craig's "lifeless" body to Constantia (229). Ormond resorts to the truth in one last attempt at trying to persuade Constantia from leaving the country with Sophia.

However, unlike Carwin in Wieland, Ormond never loses control of his rhetoric. He does not stammer out the truth in unpremeditated language, but rather still tries to paint a picture where he only acted in the best of intentions. It must be remembered, he says, that he only pried into her life out of love. Therefore, it was understandable that he went to such extremes to spy on her (230). As for Craig, was he not the one who brought about her

financial downfall? He merely acted to instill justice where the law had failed to be administered (230). As for killing her father, it must also be remembered that it was he who restored his sight and made his last moments in life more enjoyable. Besides, he says, the man was old and bound to die soon anyway (232)! Ormond is the consummate orator down to the very end. He never stops trying to construct reality with his own words. He concludes his speech by saying that he will restore Constantia's "liberty" once she has professed her love for him (233). However, Constantia does not believe his rhetoric:

These words were accomplished by looks that rendered all explanation of their meaning useless. The evil reserved for her, hitherto obscured by half-disclosed and contradictory attributes, was now sufficiently apparent. The truth in this respect unveiled itself with the rapidity and brightness of an electrical flash (233).

The confrontation comes to an end when she stabs Ormond with a knife that she had in her possession, thereby forever ending his days of duplicity and deceit. Constantia is then found by Sophia and the two leave the scene and depart for England.

In the end, it was Ormond's passions that led to his eventual demise. It is ironic that a man who viewed women as property could eventually become enslaved by his own desire for one woman. A man who did not believe in the sanctity of marriage or the value of women is eventually destroyed by his own insatiable appetite. He could not control the situation and predict its outcome with any kind of certainty. For Ormond, this was a new experience and therefore forced him to use more extreme measures (i.e., murder). The rhetoric and duplicity employed by Ormond did not succeed because

Constantia was vigilant against such tactics. Sophia expresses the same viewpoint when she reflectively states:

We cannot hide our actions and thoughts from one of powerful sagacity, whom the detection sufficiently interests to make him use all the methods of detection in his power. The study of concealment is, in all cases, fruitless or hurtful. All that duty enjoins is to design and execute nothing which may not be approved by a divine and omniscient Observer (217).

This moralizing statement serves to properly end the tale of Ormond and cautions readers not to be too entrusting to anyone. A person can not be judged merely by their words or appearance, just as a book cannot be judged by its cover.

Chapter Four: Arthur Mervyn

Arthur Mervyn was originally published in two parts, the first coming in February of 1799 and the second in the summer of 1800. Many critics have focused their discussion only on the first part of the novel (Ringe 65), believing it to be far more effective than the second. However, as Ringe has stated, in order to properly weigh the merit of the novel, the work should be looked at in its entirety (65-66). Arthur Mervyn is the most developed of Brown's characters, and in order to fully understand the driving forces behind his actions, it is necessary to follow him through his entire journey. Brown presents a protagonist that is, for the first time, not the consummate do-gooder. He is much more well-rounded than any other of Brown's literary figures, and therefore, more human.

The first time Arthur's credibility is called into question occurs when Wortley confronts Doctor Stevens about the youth's background. Wortley is concerned about Arthur's dealings with Welbeck, a known fraud and profligate:

He suspected that Mervyn was a wily impostor; that he had been trained in the arts of fraud, under an accomplished teacher; that the tale he told to me was a tissue of ingenious and plausible lies; that the mere assertions, however plausible and solemn, of one like him, whose conduct had incurred such strong suspicions, were unworthy of the

least credit (10).

Wortley tries to convince Stevens that Arthur is only trying to con the doctor out of his money. Notice that Wortley tries to create a reality in which Arthur is the villain; however, his words do not convince the good doctor:

“The proof that you mention,” said I, “will only enhance his credibility. All the facts which you have stated have been admitted by him. They constitute an essential portion of his narrative” (10).

Doctor Stevens has been trained by his profession to rely upon observed sensorial data, and it is through this avenue that he bases his decision.

While the rhetoric of Wortley is merited by his vigilance, the doctor believes that it is unnecessary in this scenario. Hence, the rhetoric of Arthur stands as the truth, and in the end, the youth is sincere and honest in his dealings with the doctor.

Doctor Stevens believes that Arthur will have to rely on his rhetoric in order to extricate himself from any alleged wrong doings. Arthur’s ability to persuade and present the truth will be put to the test during his “tribunal,” a sort of rite of passage that Arthur undergoes throughout the novel:

Nothing but his own narrative, repeated with that simple but nervous eloquence which we had witnessed, could rescue him from the most heinous charges. Was there any tribunal that would not acquit him on merely hearing his defence (13)?

From the very beginning of the narrative, Brown calls attention to the importance of rhetoric in disclosing the truth and its ability to disguise one's ulterior intentions. It is often difficult to assess who is to be believed and who is merely presenting false pretenses. Doctor Stevens expresses his concerns most poignantly when he states:

Nature has set no limits on the combinations of fancy. A smooth exterior, a show of virtue, and a specious tale, are, a thousand times, exhibited in human intercourse by craft and subtlety (13).

Stevens is aware of the danger that exists in society, but he also knows that there are those who live their lives honestly, and he believes Arthur to be such a person.

Wortley, however, finds new evidence that seemingly corroborates his original allegations and once again tries to sway the doctor's opinion. It appears that he has proof of Mervyn engaging in a scheme with Welbeck to rob a wealthy woman of her fortune. Welbeck wanted Arthur to tell the lady that her nephew—who was to inherit her fortune—was dead. Welbeck then had a girl whom he had molded to his own purposes ready to take the young man's place. These allegations are presented by Wortley as facts, and before he gets to them he begins his peroration by cautioning the good doctor about the evils of rhetoric:

“It was time,” replied my friend, “that your confidence in smooth features and fluent accents should have ended long ago. Till I gained from my present profession some knowledge of the world,

a knowledge which was not gained in a moment, and had not cost a trifle, I was equally wise in my own conceit; and, in order to decide upon the truth of any one's pretensions, needed only a clear view of his face and a distinct hearing of his words. My folly, in that respect, was only to be cured, however, by my own experience, and I suppose your credulity will yield to no other remedy" (33).

The image that Wortley paints is quite convincing and causes doctor Stevens to seek his wife's council in order to judge the veracity of the youth's tale. The sensorial data seems quite overpowering to the doctor, and he needs time to mull over what he has heard. While Arthur did engage in various ventures with Welbeck, he never sought to trick this woman out of her money. Wortley tries to recreate the past based on "facts" that he has accumulated. However, rhetoric is not always a fool-proof method for constructing an accurate image of what actually transpired. Wortley's information is flawed, and therefore, so are his conclusions.

When Doctor Stevens finally meets Welbeck, he begins to understand why the man would try and live a life based on deceit. Just as important as being verbally gifted is the necessity of having a countenance that that is highly affecting. Welbeck is in jail and is described as being "pallid" and "emaciated" (41). Nonetheless, his ability to leave an impression even surpasses his predicament and surroundings:

Welbeck, when once seen or described, was easily distinguished from the rest of mankind. He had stronger motives than other

men for abstaining from guilt, the difficulty of concealment or disguise being tenfold greater in him than in others, by reason of the indelible and eye-attracting marks which nature had set upon him (41).

The prisoner wants nothing to do with the doctor or Mervyn and belligerently asks them to leave. Arthur reveals that he has told all to the physician and that the truth is now in the open. This news is so devastating to Welbeck that he feels “shocked” and “overpowered” (43). Welbeck has assumed so many identities that he can only face the truth with dismay; no rhetoric can save himself from his own conscience. Therefore, he asks to be left alone in order to “prepare [his] neck for the halter” (43).

Arthur resembles Welbeck in the way that he constantly assumes various roles in order to achieve the best possible gains for himself. When he first meets Welbeck, he is destitute and has no where to turn. Therefore, he willingly becomes Welbeck’s assistant, thereby tarnishing his character from the very beginning. He then meets doctor Stevens, and the need to maintain the role of Welbeck’s assistant is soon eliminated. He simply exchanges one occupation for another. He then contemplates marriage to Eliza Hadwin, but soon discards this idea once he realizes that her uncle will be in control of her fortune. He eventually ends up marrying Achsa Fielding, a rich and somewhat older woman, despite the rather optimistic image that is painted in Eliza. Emory Elliott, in addressing this issue, contends that “the moral resolution of the novel does not depend entirely upon a verdict of Arthur’s guilt or innocence” (143-144). Instead, it “is an anatomy of social and psychological survival which demands from the reader a systematic

character analysis” (160). For the reader, there exists enough evidence to argue for either side of Arthur’s innocence or guilt. Elliott contends that what makes it so hard to discern the true nature of Arthur’s character is the “skillful manipulation of his ‘rhetoric’” (144).

One example of Arthur’s rhetoric can be found at the beginning of chapter 39. At this point in the narrative, Mervyn seeks to enlighten readers as to what kind of person he actually is:

If men be chiefly distinguished from each other by the modes in which attention is employed, either on external and sensible objects, or merely on abstract ideas and the creatures of reflection, I may justly claim to be enrolled in the second class. My existence is a series of thought rather than of motions.... Sensations do not precede and suggest, but follow and are secondary to, the acts of my mind (49).

What Mervyn states to be true and what the text actually bears out are two different stories. Indeed, if Arthur has any one dominant flaw that constantly gets him into trouble, it is his passion—something which often leads him to act rashly. For instance, he forcibly breaks into the Villars’ house without seriously weighing the consequences, stating that his behavior was “ambiguous and hazardous” (145). He also becomes a known associate of a master duplicator (Welbeck), despite the fact that this will greatly tarnish his reputation in the future. He is also bouncing from one love interest to another, the dominant persuasive factor seeming to be money as opposed to love. Finally, he almost gets shot when he forcibly breaks into a house and refuses to leave until he has spoken with Welbeck’s

mistress. All of these factors hardly add up to one who is premeditated in disposition and always striving to think before acting. Mervyn's rhetoric is not simply limited to impacting the characters within the work, but the reader as well. It is often hard to decide whether the youth is actually telling the truth, or disguising it in a blanket of obscure "ratiocination" and duplicitous logic (49).

The ambiguous nature of Mervyn's character seems to come to its height when he contemplates his own gracious deeds in the name of Eliza Hadwin. He states:

...sweet artless, and simple girl! How wouldst thou have fared,
if Heaven had not sent me to thy succour? There are beings in
the world who would make a selfish use of thy confidence; who
would beguile thee at once of innocence and property (68).

Ironically, it would appear that Arthur is just such a seamy character. While he espouses noble intentions to the reader, his ulterior motives seem to be far from philanthropic. Arthur loses interest in the girl just as soon as he finds out that it is her uncle who will inherit the property. Is the reader to believe the actions of Mervyn, or the rhetoric that flows from his tongue? The choice is a hard one to make and illuminates the very question of veracity that many of Brown's characters are striving to deal with.

However, the seductions of Eliza are not without their own rhetoric. In an effort to persuade Mervyn to marry her, Eliza engages in appeals to the young man's pathos. She employs all of her feminine charm to its utmost capacity:

In saying this, her earnestness gave new pathos to her voice. Insensibly she put her face close to mine, and, transported beyond the usual bounds of reserve by the charms of that picture which her fancy created...and repeated, in a melting accent, "Will you let me?"

You, my friends, who have not seen Eliza Hadwin, cannot conceive what effect this entreaty was adapted to produce in me. She surely has the sweetest voice...(82).

Her rhetoric is powerful enough to persuade Arthur to allow her to move closer to him in the city. The banter that takes place between these two tends to be highly structured arguments instead of conversational small talk. Each tries to persuade the other to his/her point of view. However, the deciding factor does not ultimately rest upon the logical syllogisms or appeals to emotions. Instead, Mervyn settles the matter because of Eliza's financial situation.

Mervyn uses his rhetoric most adeptly when he confronts Eliza's uncle about the inheritance of her property. Philip Hadwin is a very direct man who behaves rather belligerently towards Arthur in an effort to give himself the advantage. After three words of introduction, Philip begins cursing with phrases like "god damn it!" (87). His use of profanity is omitted from the rest of the text out of respect for the reader. Philip believes Mervyn to be the root of all his evils in regard to the will that was supposed to be in Eliza's possession. Mervyn realizes that to physically confront such a man would be foolish. Instead, he decides to rely on his words. Arthur begins by stating the facts, recreating the past for Mr. Hadwin to judge (90). This serves to

calm the uncle somewhat. Mervyn even goes so far as to congratulate him on his new inheritance, if it is actually held up in court (91). Next, Arthur asks to be treated to dinner since he is at an inn (91). Philip becomes irate at this request at first, but Mervyn eventually convinces him by admitting that he is no threat to the man and only wishes to leave on good terms.

After Arthur leaves, Philip is left thinking that the youth is “a queer sort of chap” (94). The power of Arthur’s words allows him to escape a most hostile situation. He adeptly manipulates Mr. Hadwin, an individual who is used to gaining “submission” from men far more “brawny and robust” than Mervyn (91). However, Philip has never encountered anyone as adept as Mervyn in his use of rhetoric. By skillfully re-creating the past and diagnosing the current situation, Mervyn is able to mold Mr. Hadwin towards refraining from blows.

From this point in the narrative, Mervyn goes on to behave in a most precipitous fashion. This is, once again, in direct contrast to the statements he makes towards readers concerning his own disposition. Arthur states that his “purposes were honest and steadfast” (96). He goes on to say that:

Every sense was the inlet of pleasure, because it was the
avenue of knowledge; and my soul brooded over the
world to ideas, and glowed with exultation at the grandeur
and beauty of its own creations (96).

However, very seldomly does he ever take his environment into account. Instead, he tends to rush into situations without thinking about the consequences of his actions. This is in direct contrast to his use of rhetoric, where he carefully plans out what he has to say and considers all of the

possible variables and outcomes. When it comes to action, he shows none of the premeditated thought that goes into his speech. When looking for Clemenza Lodi, he forcibly enters a house, pondering if he acted “illegally in passing from one story and room to another” (106). In reality, he gives very little thought to his criminal behavior. Often times, he simply acts without thinking.

He eventually pays for his brash behavior by getting shot. When he realizes that he is actually in jeopardy, he falls back on his rhetoric:

“Perhaps,” said I, in a sedate tone, “I have injured you;
I have mistaken your character. You shall not find me less
ready to repair, than to perpetrate, this injury. My error
was without malice, and—” (113).

The sentence ends with a gunshot, and Mervyn luckily escapes with only a superficial wound. However, these incidents serve to illuminate the nature of Mervyn’s character. He is often getting into trouble because he acts without thinking; therefore, to explicate himself from these awkward situations, he falls back on his verbal eloquence. In this situation, it is too late and he nearly pays for his brashness with his life. For Mervyn, rhetoric becomes the tool which he uses to make amends for his seemingly criminal behavior.

It is not surprising that Mervyn also rushes into a marriage proposal with Achsa Fielding. Their relationship doesn’t have much time to run its course before Arthur asks her to marry him. However, unlike Eliza Hadwin, Achsa is a much more mature woman and Arthur’s rhetoric is somewhat limited in its persuasive power. Their forms of communication resemble

conversation more than rhetoric. Achsa is actually the only person whom Arthur engages in conversation throughout the entire novel. The rest of his verbal escapades are simply rhetoric that is devised to bring about some desired outcome. The entirety of chapter 45 is simply a conversation that takes place between these two. However, this is not to say that it is completely devoid of persuasive arguments, but rather that it is the closest form of communication that resembles general conversation in the entire novel. It is also not by accident that Arthur behaves most genuinely in this chapter. The truth seems to come out during his conversations with Achsa. Arthur finds a role where he can be more of himself than at any other point in the novel. It is obvious that he never had any true intentions of staying on as Welbeck's assistant or becoming a doctor. These vocations did not suit his own character, and it was only by force of will that he was able to maintain these pursuits for as long as he did. In the end, the resolution of the novel leaves much to be desired. Eliza is discarded as a love interest and the reader doubts whether or not Arthur has actually undergone any kind of rite of passage. The core of his character remains unchanged, and it doesn't appear as if Mervyn has learned any lifelong lessons. However, in terms of characterization, Brown presents his best work in the creation of Arthur himself.

Arthur Mervyn, while essentially mirroring Wieland and Ormond in content, differs greatly from the latter two in that it does not rely solely on rhetoric to drive the narrative. Arthur's own actions are what moves the story forward, and it is his reliance on rhetoric that allows him to make up for bad decisions. More often than not, Arthur relies on rhetoric to get him

out of trouble that his own precipitous behavior has gotten him into. This is not the case in Wieland and Ormond, where rhetoric is often the cause of ills. Arthur shows that rhetoric, when used properly and without duplicitous motives, can be a powerful ally of truth. The hardest obstacle for all of Brown's characters to overcome is to simply realize when someone is actually telling the truth. In no other Brown novel is it harder to discern whether or not the so-called protagonist is actually behaving honestly. Therefore, by reading Arthur Mervyn, Brown places his readers in the same situation as many of his characters. As for the matter of Arthur's guilt or innocence, critics would agree that the jury is still debating the matter.

Chapter Five: Truth and Rhetoric

Brown's goal as a writer was to disclose the truth of reality and present it in a form that would be entertaining to the reader. Many times in his novels, rhetoric is used to cover up the truth or distort it in such a way as to be advantageous for the many duplicitors who are pervasive throughout his novels. However, rhetoric's ability to reconstruct reality can also be used to garner new viewpoints and allow others to see situations from differing perspectives. Almost all of his works are narrated by an individual that also plays a role in the narrative. Because of this literary feature, many of the stories begin by calling attention to the veracity of the tale that is about to be told. Otherwise, readers might doubt the narrator's character and merely read the tale as a form of rhetoric that digresses from the truth.

The advertisement for Wieland seeks to justify the strange occurrences in the story by urging the reader to verify the gothic phenomena in medical texts. When something seems too impossible to believe, Brown also adds a footnote where one can go and look up the scientific explanation. To add even more veracity to his tale, Brown asks the reader to recall a similar, "authentic" event that was recently published in newspapers around the country (2). Similarly, Ormond also begins with the customary defense of a truthful tale. Brown supposes that his readers "are desirous of hearing an authentic, and not a fictitious, tale" (3). In light of this, the narrator has chosen to:

relate events in no artificial or elaborate order, and without

that harmonious amplification which might justly be displayed in a tale flowing merely from invention (3).

Finally, Arthur Mervyn begins with the completion of Mervyn's tale to Doctor Stevens. In considering what he has just heard, the physician can only come to the conclusion that the details of his story "served no end, but as vouchers for the truth of the tale (3). All of these tactics serve to establish the narrator's credibility with the reader. In order to avoid being stereotyped as another form of written rhetoric that seeks to mislead the reader, Brown has gone out of his way to make his tales seem more than the mere invention of fancy.

However, to say that imagination has no place in the writings of Brown would also be folly. Alcuin is a novel in which the narrator favors creating fictitious worlds and imaginary friends as a means of discovering truth. While at the beginning of the novel, Alcuin clearly states that he deplores both books and speakers who use rhetoric (5-6), the novel itself eventually moves away from the conversational and embraces the highly structured arguments that are found in many of Brown's other works. Alcuin creates a utopian society in which women are treated as equally as men. His vision is founded upon three basic tenets: everyone dresses the same because gender is not a factor for attire; both males and females receive equal treatment in all areas of education, work, and recreation; marriage is an institution which does not exist. These arguments are meant to sway the attitudes of Mrs. Carter, the person whom Alcuin has chosen to engage in political conversation. However, Mrs. Carter finds Alcuin's arguments concerning marriage to be offensive. She cannot shed her upbringing that

causes her to regard premarital sex as a sin. For her, marriage is a holy institution that helps both men and women.

Mrs. Carter accuses Alcuin of using the very proofs that he criticizes others for using at the beginning of the novel. He has essentially resorted to using rhetoric instead of conversation. It is also interesting to note that in Alcuin's utopian society, "rhetoric" is still being used in stately affairs and hallowed halls (48). In reaction to Alcuin's comments about there being no need for marriage, Mrs. Carter accuses Alcuin of using sophistry:

Yet sophistry implies implies not merely fallacious reasoning,
but a fallaciousness of which the reasoner himself is apprised.
If so, few charges ought to be made with more caution. But
nothing can exceed the weaknesses that prevents [sic] us from
attending to what is going to be urged against our opinions,
merely from the persuasion that what is adverse to our
preconceptions must be false (67).

Alcuin, relentless in his pursuit to convince the woman of his arguments, continues to try and persuade her to see the situation from his vantage point. The entire vision is created in order to allow Mrs. Carter to view a new perspective on what reality could become. Alcuin's rhetoric is a failed attempt at trying to create a different reality for Mrs. Carter, one in which marriage is not an acceptable form of union between a man and a woman.

While Brown presents imagination, truth, and misrepresentation in rhetoric, it often leads the reader to question if there is any sure way of discerning reality from facade. Many of the characters he creates are watchful and educated, yet they still have the problem of differentiating the

truth from deceit. Clara Wieland, Jane Talbot, Constantia Dudley, Edgar Huntly, and Alcuin all fall prey to the schemes of a wily rhetorician. Even the villains themselves have trouble remembering who they actually are due to the fact that they have been assuming disguises for so long.

However, while Brown does not offer any easy solutions to this problem, he does offer some advice when it comes to judging the veracity of someone's rhetoric.

The first of his principles is simply to gain as much sensory knowledge as possible. In other words, one should try and physically observe phenomena that would either help to support or tumble someone's story. Edgar Huntly is the consummate detective who ventures into the wilderness to solve the mysterious murder of his friend. He constantly accumulates observable data and begins to recreate the past by adding the logic of rhetoric to what his senses have observed. The truth, for Edgar, is something that is finally discovered through much labor and observation. He is constantly interviewing people and comparing stories in an effort to find any loopholes or inconsistencies. He then verifies these stories by not simply taking the speaker at his/her word, but by going to actual locations and talking with others in order to corroborate his original findings. Had Mr. Dudley taken such precautions in Ormond, he would not have been reduced to a state of poverty by Craig.

However, simple observations can also lead one awry. Pleyel, in Wieland, thinks that he hears voices in Clara's bedroom late one night and then observes Carwin leaving the premises. He then erringly assumes that Clara is having an affair with the man. This is also supported by evidence

that he reads in her diary where she confesses to being infatuated with the looks and voice of Carwin, not to mention the painting she made of him. Where Pleyel goes wrong is not in his accumulation of sensory knowledge, but rather in the reasoning he uses to join these facts together. Using rhetoric, he re-creates the past but fails to allow for other possible interpretations. He brings his charges forth, and unknowingly accuses Clara of doing something that she did not. This brings up Brown's second principle for discerning the truth: the proper use of reason.

Brown wrote during the Age of Reason and faith in one's ability to discern the truth through reason was being touted by many of the age's great thinkers (e.g., Benjamin Franklin). Brown's contribution to this commentary can be found in his warnings about over-relying upon the faculties of the mind. While he is a stout proponent for using logic in the creation of arguments and reality, he does caution his readers about the pitfalls of those who solely rely upon their mental prowess. For Brown, reasoning was an art that required serious deliberation and time. It was not a hasty process where one simply accepted the first logical explanation that he/she came up with. Pleyel makes this mistake and seemingly ruins his relationship with Clara Wieland. Jane Talbot echoes these thoughts when she states:

I have long since abjured the vanity of disputation. There is no road to truth but by meditation,—sever, intense, candid, and dispassionate. What others say on doubtful subjects, I shall henceforth lay up as materials for meditation (203).

When listening to rhetoric, time must be allotted to consider all of the logical alternatives along with the sensory knowledge that has been accumulated. One must not be too hasty to come to a judgment. The passions must be checked and serious thought must be given to the conclusion that is derived. Only when deliberation has taken place can there be any hope of discovering the truth.

The third and final principle is that of passionate behavior. Arthur Mervyn, Jane Talbot, and Wieland are all figures of passion. Many times they act not out of reasonable conclusions, but rather passionate fits. They are guided towards precipitate behavior due to an over-reliance upon their emotions. Rhetoric can often incite these passions and cause one to overlook better judgment. Carwin is a man that is solely guided by his desires and ends up destroying the entire Wieland family. Ormond becomes obsessed with Constantia Dudley, thereby warping his sense of reality and leading him down a path that ends in murder. Too often, characters let their emotions get the better of their judgment, and because they want to believe in the rhetoric so badly, they are often led down a trail of deceit. Mr. Dudley wanted to believe in Craig, so he never bothered to check the youth's story. Clara Wieland is fixated on Carwin's looks and rhetoric, so she accepts him into her family and circle of friends. The predominant character flaw in all of these individuals is their passion. They tend to throw reason aside in favor of their emotions—a decision which costs many of them dearly.

In the end, truth can only be discovered by taking all of these three factors into account. One must first accumulate all of the information that is available, combine this with reason, and check one's emotions before a

rational interpretation of the truth can be made. Brown summarizes these three principles in the idea of being “vigilant.” If one is to protect him/herself from the dangers of rhetoric, then a state of constant vigilance must be assumed. Without such caution, one is susceptible to the charms of rhetoric. All of the characters that succumb to duplicitors are deficient in one or more of these areas.

Up to this point, the side of rhetoric that has been discussed has mostly been negative. Rhetoric has often been depicted as a device in which to disguise the truth; however, Brown does not condemn all of rhetoric’s uses. He admires its properties when used without the intent of harm or duplicity. After all, one of his greatness idols is Cicero, a man who made his living off of argumentation. Also, he idolized its use in stately affairs and especially in the utopian world he creates in Alcuin. In addition, Edgar Huntly uses rhetoric to discover the truth about a murder and the consequences it will eventually have upon himself. It is only because Brown lived in a society where word of mouth was often the only way to gain knowledge that he preaches vigilance as necessity. For Brown, rhetoric was the double-edged sword that could either be the proponent for truth or the cause of its destruction.

Brown, like his characters, sought to embrace the truth of reality. While many times it might not have been presented in the most elegant of forms or presented for the most noble of purposes, he nevertheless strived to see through the manner of delivery and concentrated on the message itself.

How bewildered is that man who never thinks for himself!

who rejects a principle merely because the arguments brought in support of it are insufficient. I must not reject the truth because another has unjustifiably adopted it (Wiley 303).

This quote from Brown serves to illuminate many of the points he discusses about discovering the truth in his novels. Often times, reality is revealed in the most artless forms of language. This does not belittle its value, and only those who are naive would believe that the truth is only presented in the most fluent of forms.

In the end, to read Brown is to journey into a world filled with gothic imagination and seemingly impossible occurrences. However, Brown tried to base all of his material on observed phenomena. All of his fanciful inventions had a scientific basis at the time and were accepted forms of study. While today many of the fantastic elements seem ludicrous, in Brown's time they were still mysteries that were being explored. However, the gothic is not what is at the heart of his novels. Instead, Brown sought to deal with issues that were much more commonplace and affected everyone. His narratives can be read like moral tales and the axioms are numerous. Deceit must be guarded against and rhetoric is something that should be watched. One hundred years later rhetoric still has its role in the propaganda of politics, and while Brown's readers lived in a different age than we do today, his message can still be applied to a society that is about to engage the new millennium.

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